

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

North Trafford College

April 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.*

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 33/95

NORTH TRAFFORD COLLEGE
NORTH WEST REGION
Inspected October - December 1994

Summary

North Trafford College is one of two general further education colleges in the borough of Trafford near Manchester. It operates in a competitive environment, with five grammar schools in the borough and eight other colleges within easy travelling distance. The college is mindful of this context when planning its provision. Its responsiveness to the needs of employers is excellent and there are effective links with partner schools and the wider community. The college offers a wide range of vocational courses, including highly-specialised work for the gas and chemical industries. Over one-third of its courses are in the faculty of technology, and it has a high proportion of mature students. Systems for admissions, guidance and counselling are efficient and help students to make informed choices. The curriculum is generally well managed on a day-to-day basis but corporate targets and priorities should be made more explicit. Contingency planning is inadequate, and financial management should be strengthened. Members of the board are committed to promoting the development of the college although the basis on which they monitor its performance requires further development. Extensive effort has gone into the development of quality procedures but the standard of course reviews varies across the college. Students achieve good results in some vocational examinations and mature students do well at GCE A level. The college should improve retention rates and examination results on courses where these fall below national averages; address poor levels of attendance in some areas of work; and continue to improve its accommodation. Library facilities are inadequate.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision	Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision	2
Governance and management	4
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	3
accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Computing	2	Business and secretarial	3
Building services	2	Health and social care	3
Mechanical and motor vehicle engineering	2	Languages and teacher training	3
Electrical and electronic engineering	1	Basic education	3

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INTRODUCTION

1 North Trafford College was inspected during the period 31 October to 9 December 1994, its recruitment and induction procedures having been inspected during August and September. The team of 17 full-time and part-time inspectors spent a total of 70 days in the college. They inspected courses in engineering and building services, process plant operation in the chemical industry, computing, business studies, health and social care, teacher training, English and communications, modern languages, psychology, history, law and economics and adult basic education. The college's provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD) was also inspected. Inspectors visited 146 classes, saw some 1,453 students and inspected a broad range of students' work. They held meetings with college managers, staff, students, governors, industrialists, the staff of local schools, the careers service and the Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Inspectors also had access to extensive documentation relating to the college and its courses.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 North Trafford College is a medium-sized further education college serving the borough of Trafford in Greater Manchester and surrounding areas. It was established in 1974 as one of two further education colleges in Trafford. The main site at Talbot Road was built in 1939 as a technical institute and junior school. Its other major site at Moss Road, previously that of an industrial apprentice school, is on the edge of Trafford Park industrial estate. There are two smaller sites in Old Trafford and Urmston.

3 The curriculum rationalisation undertaken by the local authority prior to incorporation resulted in the college concentrating on technology, although it has subsequently taken opportunities to develop its curriculum in other areas. Courses are delivered through three faculties, each responsible for six or seven subject areas. The faculties are technology, science and health care and business and general education. Their work is supported by cross-college directorates. Adult education courses are provided mainly at the Old Trafford and Urmston centres and the college also operates a youth training managing agency in motor vehicle and general engineering. At the time of inspection the college had 8,741 enrolments, of which 690 were full time. Approximately 80 per cent of the students were over 19. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2, and enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area in figure 3. One hundred and seventy-eight full-time equivalent teaching staff and 123 full-time equivalent support staff are employed by the college. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

4 The college's main recruitment area is the borough of Trafford. Other students come from Salford and Manchester. Engineering courses attract students from throughout Greater Manchester and the college is a major

regional provider in the specialist areas of gas engineering and chemical plant operation.

5 The college operates in a competitive environment. Secondary education in Trafford is selective. There are five 11-18 grammar schools and eleven 11-16 schools. Four of the 11-16 schools are grant maintained and three of these are hoping to open sixth forms. There are also four further education colleges and four sixth form colleges within a five-mile radius of North Trafford. The neighbouring authority of Manchester runs a substantial adult education service, and there are numerous private training providers.

6 Trafford brings together two strongly contrasting areas: the prosperous south of the borough and the more disadvantaged north which the college serves. Old Trafford, located in the north of the borough, is culturally diverse: 43 per cent of the area's population are of Asian or Caribbean origin. The unemployment rate in Old Trafford is over 21 per cent which contrasts with an average rate of 8 per cent for the borough as a whole. More than 40 per cent of those unemployed in the Clifford ward have been unemployed for more than a year.

7 Although the proportion of jobs in the manufacturing sector is still higher than the national average, manufacturing employment has been in steady decline. The services sector now employs a significantly higher proportion of the working population.

8 The stated mission of the college is to enable individuals to develop to their full potential and thus aid the regrowth of industry and the community at large. The college recognises its responsibility to provide a safe and welcoming environment and to foster a culture that values excellence and respects a variety of social traditions.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 North Trafford college is highly responsive to the needs of employers and the wider community. Its strategy for course development builds on its strengths and takes realistic account of the wide range of other providers in the area. A high proportion of the courses it offers are part time and approximately one-third of its work is in the area of technology. The college offers a wide range of vocational qualifications including National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). It has also started to introduce General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). Links with higher education include a franchise arrangement with a local university to help students progress to degree courses in science, engineering or computing technology. Following an analysis of the local context and an examination of enrolment numbers, the college has decided not to offer a full-time General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) programme in the future. It will continue to offer these courses on a part-time basis to enhance the curriculum for its GNVQ students and to ensure provision for adult

returners. It currently offers 19 GCE A level subjects, three advanced supplementary (AS) subjects and 16 GCSE subjects. In addition, the college provides a range of leisure and recreation courses funded by the local authority.

10 The college offered GNVQ qualifications for the first time this September. It enrolled 94 students in engineering, business, art and design, leisure and tourism and health and care courses, mainly at intermediate level. The college is now well placed to extend its GNVQ programme in 1995, as indicated in its strategic plan, to add advanced level courses in existing areas of work and to introduce GNVQs in science, information technology and the built environment.

11 Not all students join the college at a level that suits their ability. Opportunities to take foundation courses in some curriculum areas are limited and the learning support service that helps students with their basic English and mathematics is not yet fully developed.

12 The college has excellent links with industry. Employers praise the way in which it is able to tailor provision to meet their specific needs. A large chemical process company has contracted with the college for the delivery of multi-skills training. Courses in process plant operation are provided on the premises of local and regional chemical and pharmaceutical companies. The college has now contracted with one of these companies to provide mathematics tuition for its employees. The content and timing of these courses take full account of employers' needs, and they run throughout the year, catering for students with a variety of industrial shift patterns.

13 Almost all sections of the college provide courses for employers. The technology faculty offers an extensive range of college and workplace-based provision to many organisations locally, regionally and nationally. The college serves as a regional training centre for the gas industry, and runs courses for the fire service. A multinational food-processing company contracts with the college for courses in engineering, food hygiene, first aid, modern languages and preparation for retirement. A wide variety of modern language provision is successfully marketed to industry and commerce.

14 Staff in the health and care section respond positively to local professional and market needs. They offer an appropriate range of provision and cater effectively for the needs of adult returners. The college was instrumental in forming a consortium of Trafford Owners of Registered Care Homes to develop NVQ assessment of employees for those working in care homes. The business studies section provides specialist courses for the transport industry and a full range of Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications. Students are able to progress within the college to higher national certificate level. The computing section has grown substantially in recent years and provides a range of courses, especially at BTEC national diploma level. Internationally, the

college is working on a number of European projects to share ideas for curriculum development.

15 Manchester TEC has found the college responsive in terms of its training programmes for young people and the adult unemployed. The college has also participated in a number of TEC-funded projects.

16 Links with schools are well established and are constantly being extended. The technology faculty, for example, has extensive provision designed to enable school students to sample engineering courses. Over the past three years, the college has also developed its relationship with local primary schools to provide locally-based courses for parents and to raise awareness of what the college can offer.

17 The college is represented on a number of local community organisations. It is attempting to increase the number of students it recruits from those who would not normally come to study in further education. Staff have tried to attract women to courses in subjects such as engineering and computing, which have traditionally been dominated by men. However, little has been done to encourage men to enrol on health and care courses. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is roughly the same as the proportion in the local population. The college is keen to improve further its service to minority ethnic communities and a useful project to address this issue has recently been completed. A good range of classes in English for speakers of other languages is available to adults.

18 Courses designed specifically to attract unemployed adults are offered in some curriculum areas. Basic education classes are run at a number of venues, though evening provision is limited. A successful access course has been developed which offers adults an alternative route into higher education. A portfolio of courses is provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities which includes youth training and non-vocational courses. There is also a newly-introduced vocational access certificate, although the target group for this course has not yet been sufficiently well defined.

19 The marketing unit of the college uses a range of media to promote its courses. It also carries out research, including investigations of students' and employers' perceptions of the college. The senior management team, as part of its strategic function, has the responsibility for assessing local needs for education and training. At present, the analysis of needs is underdeveloped.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 The governing body has the maximum number of members to allow for adequate representation of employment and community interests. There are 10 members from major employers in the area, one of whom is nominated by the Manchester TEC. The wider community is well served by members from the local authority, schools and the voluntary sector.

Membership includes the principal and representatives of college staff and students. Governors have relevant expertise in legal matters, personnel and estates and appropriate committees have been set up to advise the board. The governing body is beginning to take a more active role in the strategic development of the college, and there is an appropriate balance between the functions of governors and managers. The basis on which the governors monitor the performance of the college should be set out more clearly.

21 Strategic planning and day-to-day management are effective in many, but not all, areas of the college's operation. In order to encourage the growth of a corporate identity, the principal has replaced the departmental system he inherited five years ago with a faculty structure. Lines of accountability for the delivery of courses are clear. Responsibility for courses rests with section leaders who report to the three faculty directors. Non-faculty units such as marketing and admissions have been created where the need for these has been identified. They are now brought together within the client services section under the direction of the vice-principal.

22 The senior management team comprises the principal, vice-principal, directors of faculties and the directors of finance, resources and development. Within this structure, there is some overlap of responsibility, and the principal is aware of the continuing need to clarify and define roles. Initiatives introduced by individual members of the senior management team are appropriately piloted but the subsequent college-wide implementation of policies is not always consistent. The same process of strategic planning has been introduced at faculty and section levels. How priorities will be decided on a corporate basis, and linked to the college's risk analysis, is less clear. Documentation to support contingency planning is inadequate.

23 The technology faculty is thorough in its management of the curriculum. There are regular, well-documented meetings leading to appropriate action; responsibilities are written down and clearly understood; resources are managed efficiently and staff at all levels contribute to forward planning. Staff also take part in a number of college-wide activities. Management of the other two faculties is less coherent partly because of the wider range of subjects they contain. Nevertheless there are further examples of sound management within sections, for example in the computing section.

24 Most section leaders are aware of their responsibilities and the lines of communication are generally clear. Where this is not the case, the college has shown itself to be aware of the situation and prepared to take appropriate action. The appointment of new staff to lead the business studies and languages sections has led to improvements in those areas. The languages section is now developing sound management systems. It should review and extend its documentation as there are currently few

agreed written policies. The business section is beginning to achieve better links with the work of the rest of the college.

25 Section leaders in humanities and health and care are responsible for a very wide range of courses and the monitoring of performance in those areas has been limited. In health and care there is clear planning and regular meetings but insufficient attention has been given to quality assurance. Some courses are being transferred to another section in an attempt to redistribute the workload. There is thorough and effective management of English courses. Generally, however, there is little sharing of good practice between humanities and social sciences, and courses in these areas are insufficiently involved in the college's planning process and quality assurance procedures. The management of basic education is too fragmented.

26 The setting of targets and performance indicators is relatively new to the college but good progress is being made in most curriculum areas. Where measurable targets are set, staff are not always clear what action will follow if targets are not met. The college is moving towards a budgeting process where resources are allocated on the basis of student numbers rather than historical factors. Work towards this is being carried out systematically and within a realistic timescale. Targets for the cross-college services are not well developed and monitoring systems generally lack rigour.

27 The college has improved its management information systems in recent years and now has systems relating to student records, attendance monitoring and finance. Staff at all levels of the organisation make use of the reports produced, although direct access to the existing systems is restricted. Some systems, including those handling data relating to examinations, require further development.

28 The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is £16.15 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £18.17. Summaries of the college's estimated income and expenditure for 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. There is a substantial difference between estimated income and expenditure which the college needs to address.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

29 The college has developed effective arrangements for admissions, guidance and counselling of students within the client services section. There are clear policies for enrolment, particularly in relation to groups who have not previously been attracted to further education. Arrangements for enrolments are co-ordinated centrally, but staff from the faculties are fully involved. For example each of the three faculties provides the admissions unit with named tutors responsible for particular courses, so that students can be referred to them for subject-specific guidance where this is required.

30 General guidance to students is provided by well-trained staff in the college's educational guidance unit. During the enrolment period, all full-time GCSE applicants are referred to the unit thus ensuring that these students think carefully about the range of alternative courses available. The college introduced this stage in the process to address the previously poor completion and success rates on many of the GCSE courses.

31 There is a good level of communication between client services and staff in the faculties. Many of the arrangements for application and enrolment have benefited from the impact of the college's quality assurance procedures; for example in the handling of enquiries, central clearing of applications and the tracking of enrolments. The college is currently analysing the reasons why a few of its courses did not recruit as well as anticipated in September 1994. The client services team work effectively to deliver a range of services: schools liaison, the management of admissions, education guidance and personal counselling. However, the team is primarily based at the Talbot Road site and a strategy to ensure that students at other sites receive the same level of support is not yet fully in place.

32 The college runs an active schools-liaison programme and prospective students have a number of opportunities for finding out about the college prior to entry. Information on the college and its courses is provided to a large number of local schools. Staff also visit schools in Manchester, Salford and parts of Cheshire. The college works with headteachers to help them broaden pupils' experience at school. It also encourages young people to attend taster courses to help them make choices when they leave school. As yet, the college does not monitor or evaluate the influence which taster courses and link courses have on its enrolments.

33 Most students are given adequate opportunities to find out more about the college and their course during induction. An attempt to specify common features, to be included in the induction programme for all students, was only partially successful. However, the majority of students settle easily into college within the first few weeks.

34 Where NVQs have been introduced, in business administration, mechanical manufacturing and motor vehicle studies, mature students can gain accreditation for skills and knowledge they already have when they enrol. The accreditation of prior learning is well organised by subject specialists, vocational assessors and a qualified accreditation of prior learning adviser based in the education guidance unit. A major motor vehicle distribution company has chosen North Trafford college to help its employees make use of their previous experience in working towards NVQ qualifications.

35 There is a friendly atmosphere in the college and staff/student relations are good. Appropriate time is given to tutorial support for full-time students, although some tutors use this time more effectively than others. The college has attempted to make tutorial practice more consistent

by developing a handbook for pastoral tutors. This is a high-quality publication with sections on induction, study skills and how to monitor students' progress. It is being piloted in the faculty of science and health care, and tutors across the college are being trained to use it in future.

36 The system of tutorial support for part-time students is less formal. Teachers make themselves available to help informally. Strong backup is provided by the education guidance unit and the personal counselling provided by client services, particularly at the Talbot Road site. The college has made a commitment to strengthen the formal support available to part-time students.

37 Extra help with basic English and numeracy is available to those students who need it to succeed on their course. All new students on full-time courses have been given appropriate tests to identify those who need additional support. The majority of learning support is provided at the Talbot Road site through workshops for mathematics, English, English for speakers of other languages and information technology. At Moss Road there are also workshops in numeracy and communications, but opening times are restricted and currently the level of support is insufficient.

38 Student attendance is monitored closely. Levels of attendance have been improved since the computerisation of register returns and the production of weekly printouts, enabling staff to track students systematically. However, some courses continue to have high rates of absenteeism, because the close monitoring is not always matched by sufficiently rigorous action on the part of tutors.

39 Careers education and guidance, for 16-19 year olds and mature students, is undertaken mainly by the local careers service. On some full-time courses, careers education is successfully built into the tutorial curriculum. Recent developments have included successful seminars on higher education provided by the careers service and aimed largely at students on GCE A level and BTEC courses. Specialist careers education support is offered to part-time mature students at the Urmston centre, but there has been a low take-up. The college should explore ways of encouraging students to make fuller use of the expertise and guidance provided. There is no careers library to support the service at the Urmston site.

40 The updating of the records of achievement which students bring from schools are largely seen as being their own responsibility. On some courses, students are encouraged to maintain their records of achievements but practice across the college is too variable. The pilot tutorial programme in the faculty of science and health care is trying to ensure more systematic updating of students' records of achievement.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

41 In 63 per cent of the 146 lessons inspected the strengths clearly outweighed the weaknesses. The weaknesses of the work outweighed the strengths in eight lessons. The following table summarises the grades awarded during the inspection.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		1	4	4	0	0	9
GCSE		0	1	4	1	1	7
GNVQ		2	6	11	1	0	20
NVQ		5	9	5	0	2	21
Basic education/SLDD		5	10	4	0	0	19
Other		23	26	18	3	0	70
Total		36	56	46	5	3	146

42 The majority of lessons are well planned. Teachers have sound knowledge of their subjects and try to relate students' own experiences to what they are learning. In the better lessons they also use examples from industry and commerce. Relationships between staff and students are positive. Much of the teaching in the college is effective in challenging and extending students' skills, knowledge and understanding, and in encouraging their personal development.

43 In some subjects, students are encouraged to learn at their own pace and adults find this particularly helpful. Students in engineering and building services are able to organise much of their own work because the year's work has been broken down into 25 to 30 tasks, each with its own workbook. The teacher decides what the students need to learn for each task, gives them relevant exercises and practical activities and encourages them to experiment and investigate. Students use computers to analyse their results and carry out calculations.

44 Tasks given to engineering and building services students are well related to the needs of industry. A variety of methods is used to help develop students' understanding, including the use of handouts, videos, questionnaires and short tests. Teachers give help to individual students, and mark and return work immediately it has been completed. Some classes are too long, and mixed ability groups in building services do not always work well. Motor vehicle engineering students experience too narrow a range of teaching methods.

45 Students on computing courses are highly motivated. Some of the teaching is of a high standard. Lessons are well organised to help students make progress in small groups or on their own. In other vocational courses, including business studies, secretarial and health and caring, much of the work is of a good standard, but some lessons suffer from poor planning

and delivery. Teachers generally understand their subject well, are up to date and attempt to vary the work to keep up interest and motivation. The best practice in business studies is on the higher level courses. In health and care classes, some teachers enliven lessons with real examples from the world of work.

46 Secretarial studies are organised with the needs of adults, particularly women returners, in mind. Students are able to work at their own pace at a time convenient to each individual, yet teachers do not lose opportunities to draw groups together when they all need to listen to an explanation.

47 Not all business studies lessons start on time and, in a few lessons, students achieve little. In one GNVQ intermediate class, there was a wide spread of ability and motivation and students were learning little in the group work observed. In one secretarial lesson, the teacher was using language the class did not understand. Some health and care lessons are too long for students to maintain concentration.

48 In a number of curriculum areas, the experience of mature students is used effectively to make the work more relevant. Teacher-training courses and access to higher education classes are well organised; teachers use examples students can identify with to help them learn. Teachers working in adult basic education go to great lengths to find materials for lessons which will interest individual students from fields as diverse as hotel management, horticulture and marathon running. Students on a course for unemployed adults are given opportunities to develop their written, oral, numeracy and job-search skills. They are encouraged to bring in forms they have to fill in at home, to help develop their comprehension and writing skills.

49 Humanities teachers have good knowledge of their subjects, value students' views and try to use a variety of learning activities. However, GCE A level and GCSE humanities lessons vary in their effectiveness. Language teachers have good linguistic skills and relate lessons to the business context where appropriate but do not use audio-visual aids sufficiently. Some students do not fully understand the work covered in lessons.

50 English teachers have clear lesson plans but schemes of work in other humanities subjects are insufficiently detailed. This leads to lost opportunities, for example to share ideas and make links between subjects. In too many sessions, there is insufficient checking on student learning and some of the work is not challenging enough for students. In mixed-ability classes, teachers assume too high a level of knowledge for the group and occasionally individual students are allowed to dominate the class.

51 Teachers are aware of the need to adapt lessons to suit the needs of individual students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A physically disabled person and a student with dyslexia are effectively integrated with other students in computing classes. In GCE A level

psychology, a visually-impaired student works with specialised equipment. Courses designed for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities relate learning to students' lives. In a numeracy session, for example, students had made 12 and 24 hour clocks and were using them to demonstrate an understanding of time.

52 Assessing students' work and recording their progress has benefited from a college-wide system, though practice still ranges from good to less than satisfactory. In electrical engineering, students' progress is regularly discussed with them. They are also assessed more formally and the marks awarded form part of the assessment for their final qualifications. Mechanical engineering students who fail to reach the required standard in assessments are interviewed so that the tutor can explain weaknesses and plan extra help. Occasionally, however, students have to queue for the teacher's attention. Building services teachers keep detailed notes of the results students achieve in tasks performed in college and in their homework. Care staff hand back work promptly and the comments made are helpful in showing students how they can improve their work. Languages staff have no written schemes of assessment and marking criteria to ensure that the standards of assessment are consistent. In GCE A level and GCSE humanities subjects, the assessment methods to be used during the course are not always made clear to students.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

53 Most students enjoy their studies, are well motivated and speak about their work with enthusiasm. Many express their thoughts clearly and unambiguously. Mature students show high levels of commitment to their studies and many of them achieve good results in assessments and examinations. Adults on the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) process plant operators course have not been in formal education for many years and they place particular value on their achievements. English for speakers of other languages students are also positive about the progress they have made since joining the college.

54 Most students develop appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding. Practical work in engineering and building services is of a high standard; links between theoretical and practical activities are clearly made. Students work competently and operate health and safety regulations efficiently. Levels of knowledge are high on advanced courses in computing and business studies and on teacher training courses. Students on GCE A level psychology courses demonstrate a sound grasp of specialised terminology. History students use information from a range of sources to construct their own ideas.

55 Problem solving and communication skills are well developed for most students on health and care courses, although some students on the GNVQ intermediate course have made less progress. In electrical engineering, computing, languages, psychology and communications, students have good opportunities to work individually and in groups. In

business studies, tasks for group work are not always clearly prioritised and students' learning is more limited.

56 Students' skill development is linked effectively to the world of work. In a communications class on a computing course, day-release students were able to apply their experience at work to information given to them on the Data Protection Act. They worked in pairs to summarise issues concerning procedures and passwords to protect sensitive information and then reported back to their colleagues. Project work in engineering is linked to real projects at the students' sponsoring companies. The work helps to develop written skills in addition to the ability to use engineering judgment and to make financial decisions. Many of the projects are of considerable value to the employers concerned and recommendations are often implemented.

57 All students are encouraged to improve their written skills, but the development of information technology skills is much less consistent across the college. In electronics courses, students have access to personal computers and a range of software within their normal course working areas. In other aspects of engineering, however, students are not given sufficient information technology experience. In building services there are no examples of information technology integrated with other elements of work on electrical installation courses.

58 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enjoy attending college and speak with enthusiasm of the support they receive from staff. However, some of them have attended college for over four years with little noticeable progression. Their achievement is limited and their studies offer few opportunities to help them move to other courses.

59 Examination results on vocational courses vary from good to unsatisfactory. Low completion rates are a problem on some courses. Information provided by the college shows that on many vocational courses over 80 per cent of students completing the course achieve their target qualification. The pass rates for students on BTEC national diploma in information technology applications and on many short courses in gas service engineering approach 100 per cent. There is clear evidence of student progression and good examination pass rates on many, but not all, science courses. Students on the college's NVQ programmes show high levels of achievement. For example, all students on NVQ level 2 engineering craft training and NVQ level 2 provision in business and administration were successful in gaining an award.

60 Students achieve good results on computing courses and progress to degrees or relevant employment. In the technology faculty, there are high pass rates for those entered for examination on many courses. However, not all students take the examinations. There are poor retention rates on some electrical installation and motor vehicle engineering courses. The main reasons given for this are that some students obtain employment and others leave because of financial pressures.

61 Examination results in business studies are generally consistent with national averages. Students on a specialist transport course achieve significantly better results but results for business students on the BTEC first diploma course are well below the national average. Retention rates are poor on some two-year courses, and some health and care courses, including the BTEC first diploma, have both poor retention and success rates. Across the whole college 77 per cent of the 158 students aged 16-18 in the final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education's 1994 performance tables were successful. This places the college among the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure.

62 Students aged 16-18 years entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1993-94 scored, on average, 1.8 points per entry. This places the college among the bottom 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. However, the college entered only 22 students aged 16-18 years for GCE A level examinations in 1993-94. In total, 290 students were entered for this examination and the great majority of these, 86 per cent, were older students attending college on a part-time basis, some for only one subject. There is a comparatively wide range of individual subjects but with a small number of students taking each one. The college's information shows that in 1993-94 students achieved pass rate for all subjects of 74 per cent, which represents an improvement on the previous year's figure of 70 per cent.

63 The achievement of part-time students aged 19 and above taking GCE A level subjects in the college is above the national average in some subjects. In 1993-94, for example, 84 per cent of art students and 90 per cent of English students passed with 72 per cent of the English candidates gaining grades A-C. Overall, one-third of the college's students gained a pass at grade A. In modern languages, examination results are good at GCE A level and on some GCSE courses, but the results from students taking examinations of the Institute of Linguists are poor.

64 College records show that 76 of the 109 students who applied for admission to higher education institutions in 1994 were successful in gaining places. These students came from a range of courses in the college including the BTEC national diploma in computing/information technology, the BTEC national diploma in business and finance, GCE A level and the access to higher education course.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

65 The college has a clear commitment to quality improvement and this is expressed in the policy statement within the college's quality manual. A significant achievement has been the attainment of accredited status for ISO 9002 which it gained in June 1994. This was initially piloted in the faculty of technology but has now been more widely adopted to include the majority of college functions.

66 Good progress has been made in developing quality procedures. Staff across the college have been involved in their introduction and in deciding which procedures were to be covered by the quality assurance system. Thirty-five members of staff have now been trained as internal auditors. However, the framework of responsibilities for quality, although broadly defined in the quality manual, does not provide a clear link between the management of quality at the operational level and the overall monitoring of quality at the corporate level.

67 There are good instances of course review procedures in each of the faculties. For example, in business studies a well-structured course review form has been introduced that traces quality issues through the main stages of students' college experiences. Actions identified as a result of reviews are built into a plan which includes named responsibilities and target dates for changes to be made. There is significant variation, however, in the approach adopted across different courses both within and across faculties. Course reviews do not conform to a general format and as a result a college-wide overview of quality issues is difficult to obtain. Many of the procedural elements of course review have been significantly tightened by the adoption of ISO 9002, but in a number of cases it is not clear how important issues, such as the appropriateness of the curriculum and the suitability of teaching and learning, are being evaluated.

68 The college monitors enrolment, attendance, retention and examination outcomes but it does not routinely set standards against which performance can be monitored. Systematic review of qualitative and quantitative data at faculty and college level is underdeveloped and this is recognised by the college. The academic board has recently been reconstituted and through it the college is currently addressing the development of appropriate performance indicators and benchmarks.

69 There is an annual college-wide survey of students' opinions of their courses. The survey is useful in determining crude levels of student satisfaction but follow-up action on course reviews is patchy. An employers' survey is also undertaken and the college draws on its links with a number of employers in engineering and health care, to help with course review.

70 The college has produced a self-assessment report. The report follows the format of the broad cross-college areas identified in the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. It was drafted in advance of recent FEFC guidelines and is primarily the principal's perceptions of the college's strengths and weaknesses. The report is a candid analysis of college developments and represents a valuable starting point for subsequent annual updating and refinement. The senior management team will need to integrate the process with the college's overall quality monitoring and review arrangements so that clear links are established with the strategic plan.

71 Staff-development activities are adequately funded and the range and scope of training undertaken appropriately match the institution's strategic priorities. The college has placed a strong emphasis on assessor training. Over 100 staff have been involved, of whom more than 60 have completed the nationally-recognised awards. The principal retains a central role in co-ordinating and controlling staff-development policy and its implementation. There is no staff-development committee. The quality procedures operating under ISO 9002 place a major responsibility on line managers to identify training needs. Faculty directors have an overview of such needs in their areas of work but there is no college-wide mechanism for drawing this together. The course review process does not automatically prompt the identification of relevant staff development in a systematic way.

72 The personnel section oversees a well-structured and supportive induction programme for all new staff. An appraisal scheme is being introduced by stages. To date this has included the principal, the senior management team and middle managers. All staff have received two days of training and the response to the process has been positive. In seeking greater consistency in the management of human resources, the college has prepared an action plan as part of securing Investors in People status.

73 The college charter, developed by the senior management team, was published in November 1994 and widely distributed. The document lacks a sense of challenge and reads as a general summarising statement. There is, for example, no explanation of how the college performance on charter standards will be measured and monitored and there are very few clear targets. The college recognises that a full understanding of its charter will require the reader to have a detailed knowledge of ISO 9002 quality procedures and is seeking ways to make it a more comprehensive and explicit document.

RESOURCES

Staffing

74 Lecturers show high levels of commitment to the college. Their subject qualifications are well matched to the courses they teach. Eighty-five per cent of full-time teachers have a recognised teaching qualification. Part-time teaching staff account for almost a third of taught hours. Many have recent, relevant industrial experience, and 43 per cent have a teaching qualification. The higher than average proportion of part-time staff, while allowing flexibility in curriculum delivery, has led to some course management problems particularly in adult basic education, languages and health care. This problem is being addressed by making time available for part-time staff to attend course meetings. Engineering and computing staff, in particular, are making good use of this opportunity.

75 Non-teaching staff account for 40 per cent of all staff. In general, the level of technical and administrative support is good but support for computing is stretched.

76 Seventy-six per cent of full-time lecturers are men reflecting the college's commitment to technology and the traditional gender bias that exists in this area of work. Efforts are being made to create a more appropriate balance. Thirty-one per cent of middle managers and 25 per cent of the senior management team are women. The college has also made some progress in ensuring that staffing reflects the ethnic diversity of its local communities.

Equipment/learning resources

77 There is an adequate range of equipment, teaching materials and consumables for most subject areas. The workshops in engineering are particularly well equipped with machine tools including milling machines, a capstan lathe and a large industrial computer numerical control lathe. There is also a computer-aided design centre with up-to-date software available on a variety of networked personal computers.

78 In science, the college has created a high-quality learning environment that is well furnished and equipped. Resources include an 11-metre high industry-specific pilot plant. There are also rigs and models covering the range of operations found within the chemical and process industries.

79 Overall, the college has an adequate supply of computers to support the courses on offer. However, in some areas the computers are not fully utilised, whilst in others, such as engineering and adult basic education, students have to share equipment. The opportunity for students to work on computers outside lesson time is also restricted and there are not enough computers in the library and other open-access areas.

80 The library facilities at Talbot Road have to provide for all four sites and are barely adequate for the courses on offer. There are examples of insufficient and out-of-date textbooks in English, business studies and health care. Whilst there are no proper library facilities at the other three sites there have been attempts to overcome the problem by providing resources in some of the classrooms. There are occasions when the student learning experience is adversely affected, for example in history and on access to higher education courses. There is a compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database facility for student use but the range of software is limited.

Accommodation

81 The quality of accommodation across the four college locations is variable. At Talbot Road some refurbished classrooms used for mathematics, computing and business studies provide good learning environments. The science and electrical laboratories are of a particularly

high standard. In business studies realistic working environments allow the students to gain appropriate experience. However, there are classrooms which have not been refurbished and the student common rooms are particularly poor. The accommodation is clean and tidy but despite the relatively attractive facade, the interior of the buildings is drab and there is little display of students' work or other relevant learning material on the walls.

82 The workshops in the Moss Road building, which is predominantly used for technology, are adequate though small for the number of students who use them. The quality of classroom accommodation is satisfactory. Separate assessment areas are being developed in building services, but a co-ordinated approach might deliver a more realistic working environment for students to gain multi-skills training. Some refurbishment has taken place at the Old Trafford site but much remains to be done to bring all the teaching rooms up to the required standard. The Urmston centre is in reasonable condition.

83 The Talbot Road building is fully accessible to people with physical disabilities, but access to all floors at the other three sites is an unresolved issue. There are creches at both the Talbot Road and Urmston centres, the former providing full nursery facilities.

84 The accommodation strategy and the 10-year planned maintenance programme address the poor repair of some of the buildings. Implementation of the strategy should be more clearly linked to the college's financial plans. The strategy has enabled the college to rationalise its accommodation needs by relinquishing its lease on an industrial building close to the Moss Road building and by the proposed sale of a centre at Victoria Road, no longer used for classes.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

85 North Trafford college is working towards the aims expressed in its mission statement. The strengths of the college are:

- the high level of response to the needs of employers
- good links with numerous organisations in the wider community
- clear structure and lines of communication for delivering the curriculum through sections and faculties
- effective day-to-day management in most areas
- well-developed systems for admissions, guidance and counselling
- a strong framework for quality procedures
- above average results in some vocational examinations and for mature students taking GCE A level subjects
- well-qualified and committed teachers
- good levels of support staff in most areas
- the high standard of equipment in science and engineering.

86 In order to make further progress the college should:

- develop provision to meet the needs of students not yet ready for intermediate level courses
- improve retention rates and examination results on courses where they fall below the national average
- strengthen the strategic and financial planning processes and set a range of corporate targets
- strengthen financial management
- ensure the consistent quality of course review
- ensure that student absences are followed up more rigorously
- improve library facilities
- continue to improve accommodation.

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)

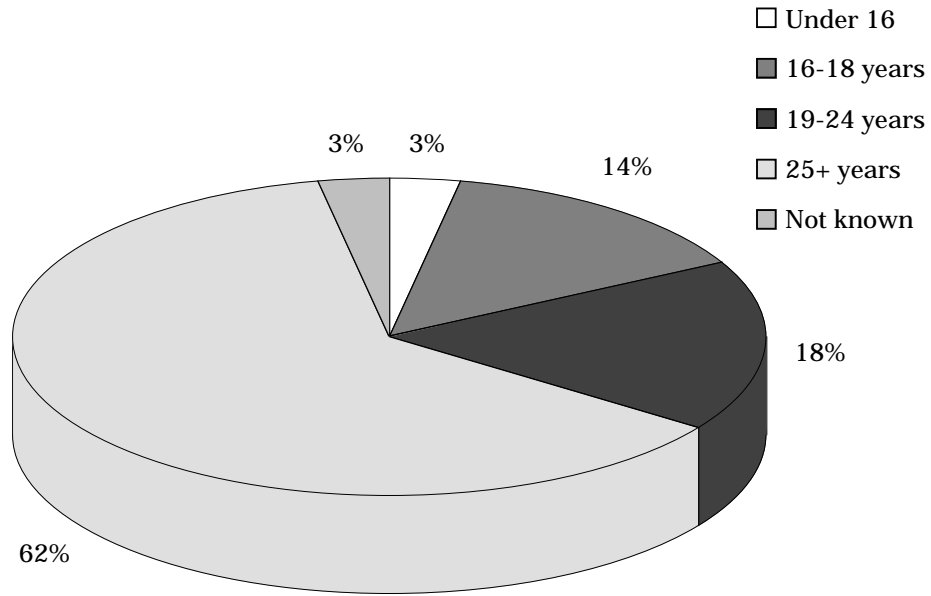
 - 5 Estimated income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

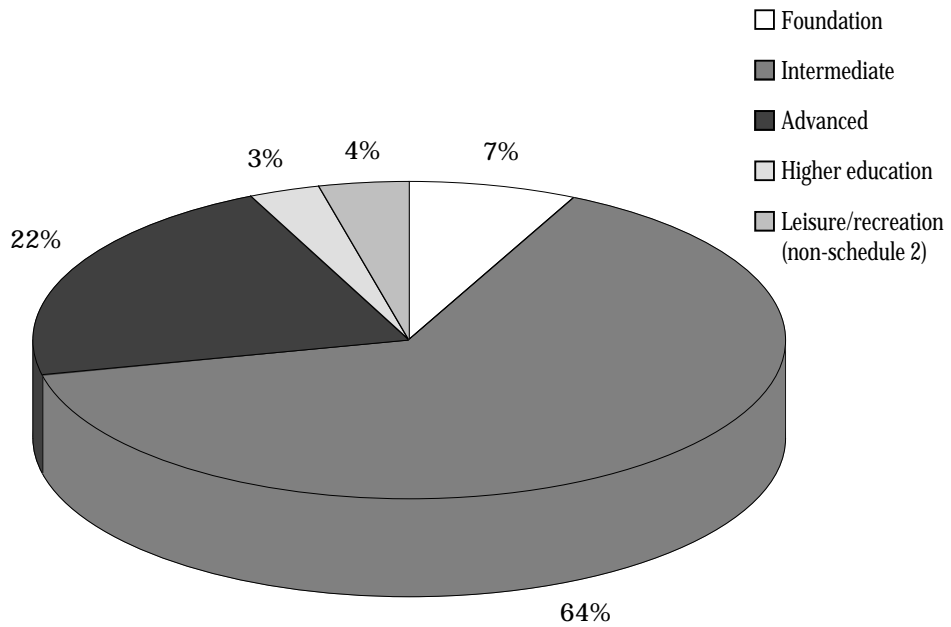
North Trafford College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 8,741

Figure 2

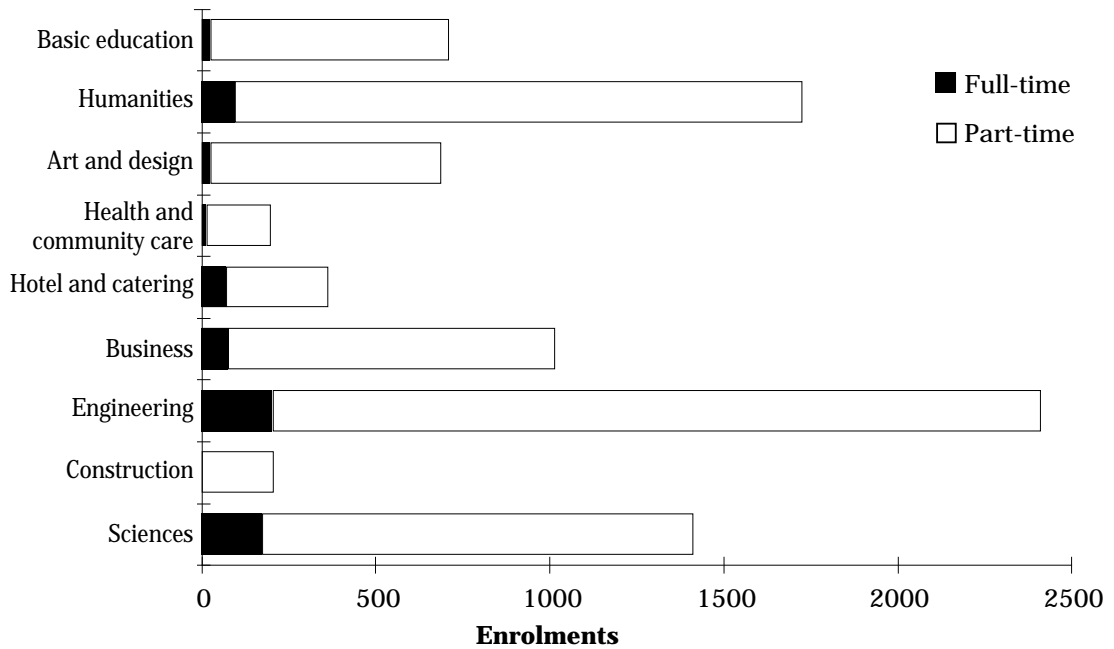
North Trafford College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 8,741

Figure 3

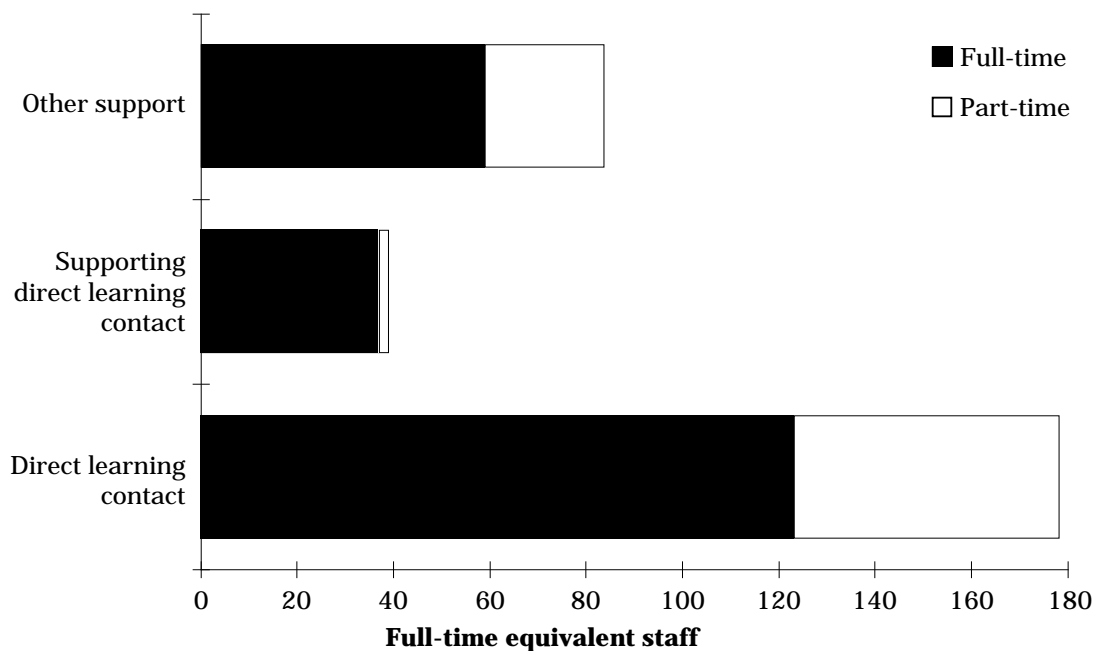
North Trafford College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 8,741

Figure 4

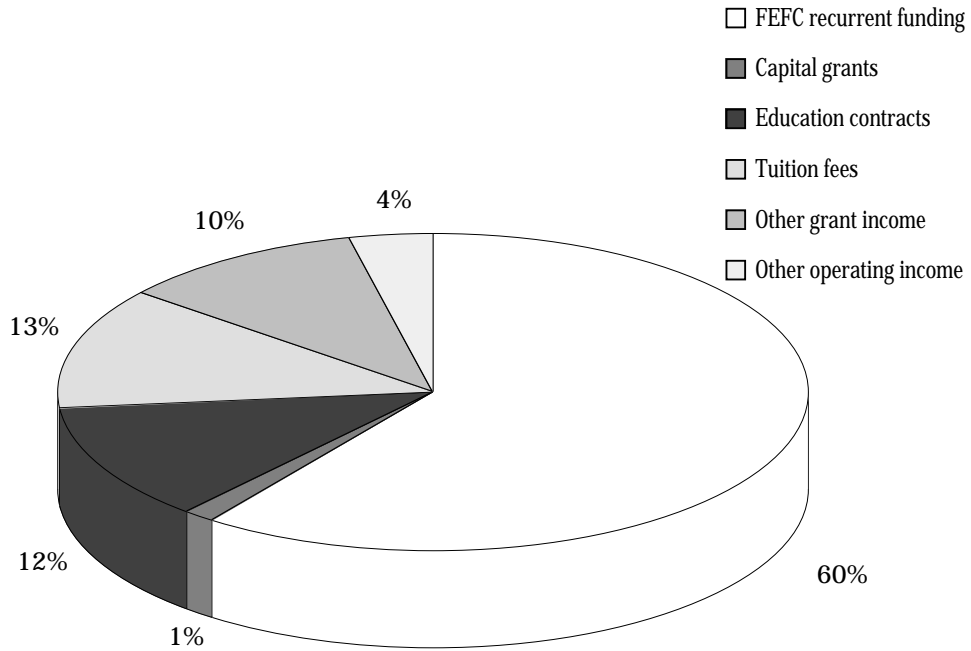
North Trafford College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 301

Figure 5

North Trafford College: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1995)

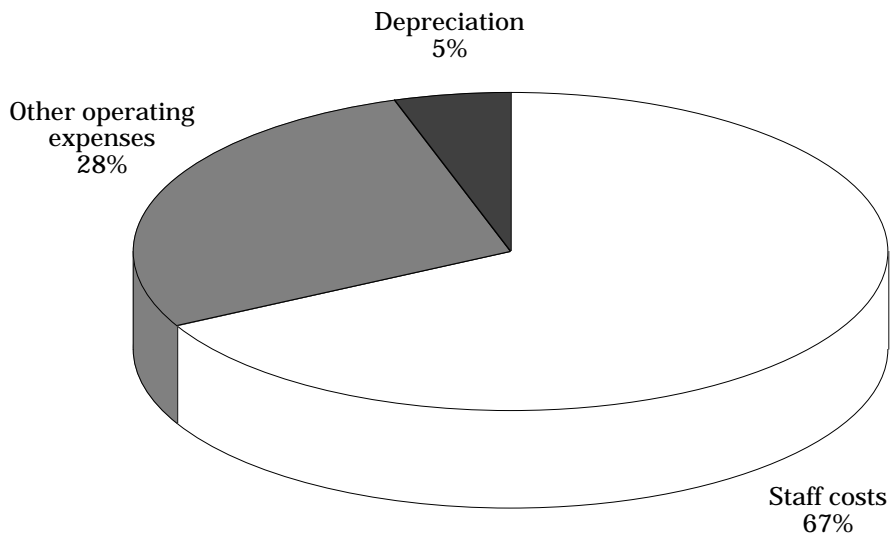


Estimated income: £7,258,000

Note: this chart excludes £33,000 other income-generating activities.

Figure 6

North Trafford College: estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Estimated expenditure: £7,506,000

Note: year ending July 1994 showed a £662,000 deficit.

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