

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**Queen Elizabeth
Sixth Form
College**

August 1994

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

The Further Education Funding Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there are satisfactory arrangements to assess the quality of provision in the further education sector in England. It discharges the duty in part through its inspectorate, which inspects and reports on each college in the sector every four years. The Council's inspectorate also assesses and reports on a national basis on specific curriculum areas and advises the Council's quality assessment committee.

College inspections involve both full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have specialist knowledge and experience in the areas they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member from outside the world of education and a nominated member of staff from the college being inspected.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are described in the Council Circular 93/28. In the course of inspecting colleges, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also summarise their judgements on the balance between strengths and weaknesses using a five-point scale. 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 65/94

QUEEN ELIZABETH SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

NORTHERN REGION

Inspected February – April 1994

Summary

Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College is the only sixth form college in County Durham. It provides an extensive range of GCE advanced level and advanced supplementary courses as well as one-year GCSE courses. It has run a foundation course in art for several years and has recently expanded its provision to include some vocational courses for school leavers and an access course for adults. The college has grown considerably over the last three years. It is highly regarded in its community for the quality of its academic provision and its guidance and support for students. It is not yet able to deliver its stated commitment to open access although a positive start has been made in widening the range of vocational opportunities. Students achieve high standards, including good results in external examinations and a high rate of progression to higher education. College management is clear and consistent at all levels. Senior managers and governors provide open, confident leadership, and make themselves approachable to staff. Communications across the college are well developed and effective. The college is committed to developing its quality assurance procedures, but the framework is not yet fully established. It should also strengthen its mechanism for identifying, monitoring and assisting students who require additional learning support.

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 | 1 |
| Students' recruitment, guidance and support | 1 |
| Quality assurance | 2 |
| Resources: staffing | 1 |
| equipment/learning resources | 2 |
| accommodation | 2 |

| Curriculum area | Grade | Curriculum area | Grade |
|--------------------------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| Science | 1 | Art & design | 2 |
| Maths & information technology | 2 | | |
| Business | 2 | English | 1 |
| | | Modern languages | 2 |
| Leisure & tourism | 2 | Social sciences | 2 |

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INTRODUCTION

1 Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College was inspected during the period February to April 1994. In all, 14 inspectors spent a total of 54 inspector days in the college. They also drew on specialist subject inspections carried out over the preceding five months. They visited 90 classes, examined samples of students' work, and held discussions with governors, college managers, teaching staff, students, local employers, representatives of local schools, County Durham Training and Enterprise Council, (TEC) community representatives and parents/carers.

2 The inspection was carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. The framework describes a four-year inspection cycle. When this cycle becomes fully established, colleges will have the opportunity to respond to the findings of earlier inspection visits before their quadrennial inspection and the subsequent published report. As the inspection of Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College occurred early in the cycle, the opportunity for such a response was not available.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, County Durham, was established in 1970 on the site of the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School whose charter was first granted in the sixteenth century. The college is close to the centre of Darlington and next to the Borough arts centre. Darlington College of Technology is nearby. The main college building dates from 1878 and is of some local architectural interest. Although it is not a listed building it is within a conservation area. A fire in 1987 destroyed nearly one third of the college buildings and considerable refurbishment and renovation were subsequently undertaken. The college's creative and performing arts departments are currently housed in an annexe, the Claremont building, which is a large converted house 150 metres away.

4 Darlington and its surrounding area has a total population of over 100,000. The town is completing the transition from a heavy engineering and railway centre to one with a range of light engineering and service businesses. The area around the town is semi-rural, whilst Darlington itself still retains the atmosphere of a market town. The unemployment rate in the town is 9.9 per cent compared with an average for County Durham of 12.3 per cent.

5 The other main providers of post-16 education in Darlington are the college of technology, an 11-19 Roman Catholic school and a 5-19 independent school. There is also a school dedicated to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college has six 11-16 year old partner schools within Darlington. In 1993, 53 per cent of the college's intake came from these schools, some 29 per cent of all school leavers in Darlington. Three south Durham 11-16 partner schools outside the town's boundary provide an additional 13 per cent of the college's intake. The

remaining 28 per cent come from other schools outside the town and also from the independent sector. The college is the only sixth form college in County Durham. Fifty-three per cent of young people stayed in education after the age of 16. Nearly 30 per cent of school leavers went into youth training.

6 The college is organised into 12 departments: biology, business studies, chemistry, creative arts, earth sciences, English, history, languages, mathematics, physics, social studies and sport studies. Senior management consists of the principal and two vice-principals, one responsible for curriculum and one for students. They are supported by a finance manager and four directors of study. In September 1993, the college had a full-time equivalent staff of 70.3 teachers and 15.3 support staff. A profile of the staff, expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 1.

7 The college has grown steadily over the last three years from 751 enrolments in 1990, to 935 in 1993. This represents a 20 per cent growth overall and an 11 per cent increase over the previous year. Percentage enrolments by age, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 2 and 3, respectively. Of the students enrolled at the time of the inspection, 98 per cent were full-time. Adults joined the college for the first time in 1992. There were 32 adults enrolled in September 1993, a few of whom were on full-time courses. A further expansion in student numbers is planned with the expectation of achieving at least a 25 per cent growth in full-time equivalent numbers between September 1993 and 1996. A wide range of courses, mainly General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) courses is provided. Percentage enrolments by level of course are shown in figure 4. The college works with the college of technology to provide the full range of academic and vocational courses for the local community.

8 In its vision statement the college asserts that its purpose is to unlock the potential of its students by offering first class learning opportunities in a supportive environment. The college has high expectations of its students and aims to provide them with experiences which are participative, rigorous and challenging. The vision statement also commits the college to generating a stimulating working atmosphere for staff in which opportunities will arise for those who have a pioneering nature, the urge to be creative and the desire to seek excellence.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 The college has a long tradition of providing GCE A level and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses for the 16-19 age group in Darlington, the wider area of South Durham and parts of North Yorkshire. It is responsive to the academic needs of this age group, providing 31 subject choices at GCE A level, some with more than one syllabus, 12 advanced supplementary (AS) subject choices and over 27 subject choices at GCSE. There is a growing commitment to vocational education.

10 Since incorporation, the college has actively built upon its formal and informal links within the town to develop courses for adults and the community. An access course designed to help adults enter to higher education has been developed with Northumbria University. The college plans a modest growth in adult recruitment, to reach 10 per cent of its total student intake by 1997. The stated aim of the college is to promote open access for all post-16 students but its present range of provision and its admissions policy make this aim unrealistic.

11 Vocational provision in the college is in the early stages of development. Four intermediate General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) were introduced in 1993 and the strategic plan identifies further expansion at advanced level for September 1994. The GNVQ courses are operating satisfactorily for the most part, although some difficulties are being encountered in art and design. The college has run an art foundation course for over six years and this has recently been accredited by Teesside University.

12 The college consults weekly with local schools, institutions of higher education, County Durham TEC, the local authority, the careers' service and other groups such as the Durham Business and Enterprise group and South Durham employers. As a result, courses are now available in new areas, and in part-time modes of attendance, such as evening classes for adults, leisure classes and a commercially-costed course in musical keyboarding for 8-12 year olds. The college intends to increase further the number of students it recruits from the wider community: already about a third of its students come from schools outside the immediate Darlington area. Enrolments at the college grew by 11 per cent in 1993-94 at a time when the area's 16 year old population was estimated to have reached its lowest ebb. There has been a modest growth in the number of adult students on access and leisure programmes. A small number of adults have joined the existing 16-19 year old classes.

13 The senior managers of the college are aware of the government's aims and policies for further education, the National Targets for Education and Training and the requirements of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). These aims are acknowledged in the strategic plan and used by college managers to plan the provision. There is no evidence that heads of department consciously use the national targets in their planning or review processes.

14 The college has developed a comprehensive marketing strategy for its main student cohort, based on its existing strong contacts with local schools. It is keen to offer guidance to all pupils in their final year of compulsory schooling. Statistical analysis helps the college to gain a clear picture of which students from each school in the area are potential GCE A level students. A small market research survey into the needs of local businesses has also been undertaken. A professionally-produced prospectus is easy to read and contains useful illustrations of students' achievements. There is also a booklet describing the courses offered by

the college. A college newsletter is produced four times a year, using students' expertise, and sent to all parents/carers, local schools and organisations. The marketing of the college to adults is treated separately and this part of the strategy requires clearer co-ordination.

15 An act of collective worship, open to all students and staff, takes place once a week at a nearby church; there is a small, but growing attendance. Three religious services are held to commemorate harvest festival, Christmas and Easter each year. There are close links with the local church and the vicar visits the college regularly, both informally and to provide an input into the GCE A level, GCSE and core-study courses in religious studies.

16 The college is justifiably proud of its links with schools in the area. Senior staff have strong, regular and productive contacts with staff in partner schools. The heads and principals meet regularly and enjoy good working relations. The college has been an active partner in the local training and vocational educational initiative consortium which intends to continue to meet after the current project comes to an end. However, curricular links with schools are not numerous. Supportive curriculum partnerships exist with Teesside and Northumbria universities and connections with other universities, such as the University College of Ripon and York St John, are being developed.

17 Relations between the college and the local careers service are positive and close. Members of the careers service are invited into the college weekly to offer impartial advice to students.

18 The college is developing effective links with the TEC and has responded positively to initiatives. For example, it is a partner in the Durham further education strategy for Europe; it is contributing to a week of activities organised to publicise national activities for adult learners; and it is taking part in the learning for work initiative. TEC funding is used to support the college's GNVQ programme. The college's GNVQ management committee contains representatives from local industry and commerce; it offers advice on curriculum content and identifies local employer requirements.

19 The management of the college is strongly committed to ensuring that staff and students are aware of equal opportunity issues. The college has a comprehensive policy, developed and extended from the local authority policy. Students were fully involved at all stages of its development. The corporation board members have discussed gender issues in examination performance. The policy aims to avoid discriminatory practices in college literature, teaching and assessment, although the prescribed format for course descriptions does not include a reference to equal opportunities. Departments can extend the college equal opportunities policy to reflect their particular situations, and all have a named person to monitor and liaise on equal opportunity issues. Departments review these issues annually but there are no procedures for identifying and setting targets and for monitoring progress.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 The staff, managers and board of the college share a strong commitment to maintain its traditions of academic excellence while continuing to grow and develop. This year's growth targets have been comfortably met; the strategic plan commits the college to a target of 25 per cent growth by 1996. The college is well managed and has a clear sense of direction and corporate identity. Staff, students, and board members all speak positively of the college.

21 The college's corporation is highly capable and experienced. It has 18 members including members with backgrounds in finance, industry, commerce, local government, information technology and architecture. More than half the board members are parents of present or former students and three are themselves former students of the college. The chairman of the TEC is a member. In addition to the standard committees, the board has a curriculum committee which receives and monitors information about the changing nature of the college's provision. There are no student members on the board; however, students are represented on another committee of the board which advises on student matters. Board meetings are held regularly and are well attended. A regular item at each meeting is a presentation by relevant college staff on aspects of the college's activities; recent topics have been marketing, examination performance and the FEFC inspection process. Staff feel informed about the board and its workings. Good relations exist between the chair and the principal. Board members willingly assist the college. For example, one board member provided timber for an art project. Others are regular attenders at college football matches and concerts. As yet, the board has no systematic approach to monitoring its own performance.

22 The college has an effective management structure which was created in 1992. The traditional departmental structure has recently been strengthened by the creation of four director of study posts to deliver the newly emerging cross-college functions of community education, quality assurance, personnel and student services. The structure is clearly understood by staff and they appreciate the improved dissemination of information which has resulted from its creation.

23 There is a consistent management approach throughout the college which is perceived by staff as open, responsive and consultative. A strong sense of corporate identity, direction and purpose exists. The shared values are made explicit in the college's comprehensive vision statement which provides a lucid framework for the college to deliver its commitment to its staff, students and the community. Staff speak positively and with confidence of their managers. Key issues are thoroughly explored in consultation with staff and, where appropriate, with students. Decisions and changes are clearly understood and effectively implemented.

24 Open communication is a priority for the principal and vice-principals. Staff value this highly. Channels of communication within the college are strong and operate in a variety of ways. There is a daily

briefing for staff, which is minuted; the minutes are posted in the staff room within an hour for those unable to be present. There are other regular meetings and additional special meetings are called as necessary. Parents receive a termly newsletter and students have a daily bulletin and meet the principal in termly assemblies. Written information about college and external issues is readily available in staff rooms and on regularly maintained notice boards throughout the building. College documentation is attractively produced.

25 Both teaching and support staff played a full part in the professional development day which generated the college's vision statement, for which they clearly feel a strong sense of ownership. Staff are less familiar with the strategic plan which was produced by senior management within the overall framework set by the vision statement. The operating plan does not give specific criteria for measuring progress and requires clearer links with the strategic plan. Each department produces its own plans; there is considerable diversity in approaches and this makes overall monitoring difficult.

26 The recently-produced portfolios of policies are models of concise and accessible policy statements. They are grouped to reflect the college's vision statement and they either reflect existing good practice or deal with new issues. Policies are interpreted and implemented by the departments and pastoral teams who make any necessary additions to reflect specific needs. For example, the sociology team has added to the college policy statement on student research a section covering the ethics and safety aspects of research. This strategy ensures that staff accept and implement policies, but the variations in emphasis require formal systems to monitor for compliance and to check overall effectiveness.

27 The unit of funding for 1992-93 was £2,792. The median for sixth form colleges was £2,647. Summaries of income and expenditure for 1993-94 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Financial allocations are clearly understood and staff are supportive of the efficiency measures which the college is taking to support growth. The budgets for equipment needs are allocated to teaching and cross-college areas using a formula based on student numbers. Additional allocations are made to meet particular situations. Reports are made termly to departments and additionally as required. The financial management of the college is characterised by prudence; as yet there is no historical database to inform its financial decisions.

28 The college has a policy for a fully-integrated, modern and secure system for managing information. Information needs are met effectively through the use of a number of different computerised management modules, including the schools information and management system which is commonly used by sixth form colleges. This holds information on student and staff records, finance, timetabling, examinations and resources. Some information is fed back to staff in formats which they find accessible and easy to use. Other formats, however, are less helpful. Data on retention

rates and examination performance are collected and used for monitoring and review. Performance indicators are not used in the setting of targets.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

29 The college has a well-deserved reputation for providing high-quality support for its students. Students are well prepared to attend the college. Priority is given to providing impartial advice and guidance, induction to the college and pastoral support. There is effective liaison with local schools and clear information is available. Tutors play a significant role within the college, overseeing the whole of the pastoral and academic support given to students. More support is required for students in developing literacy and numeracy skills.

30 Guidance and tutorial staff are allocated to each partner school and offer a coherently organised programme of visits, talks and open evenings to prospective students and their parents. Consistency is assured through well-documented guidelines and regular meetings with liaison staff. Pupils in the penultimate year of compulsory schooling are invited into the college for half a day to sample college life. This includes attending typical lessons. After the GCSE examinations, prospective students are brought into college for a week's bridging programme. This is highly thought of by students and there are many examples of those who were helped to make informed subject decisions as a result of this experience. Last year approximately 500 students attended the bridging programme, most of whom subsequently enrolled at the college.

31 Admission to the college takes place after a carefully-planned series of interviews with students in schools. Most students are interviewed twice. Admission to the GCE A level programme is based largely on successful performance at GCSE. Schools are not asked to supply written references, but discussions take place with school staff about each individual applicant. Clear guidelines exist for liaison staff. School records follow the students to college once they are enrolled. There are no arrangements for recognising, and giving credit for students' prior learning and experience.

32 Students speak positively about their early experiences in college, expressing appreciation of the aims and purposes of the induction programme. There is a well-planned four-day induction for new entrants at the beginning of September. It is used to introduce them to the college and to their tutors, and to give them experience of group work. Those students embarking on one-year courses or taking two GCE A level courses are introduced to the new GNVQ provision as a possible complement to their studies. Induction for the few adult students is less well defined; they are interviewed and given the opportunity to discuss the courses they have chosen and the possible routes for subsequent progression.

33 The tutorial programme operates within a clearly-defined framework which has been reviewed within the last two years. The review is continuing and further changes are under consideration for next year.

Tutors are co-ordinated by principal tutors and receive guidance through a well-documented scheme which details their roles and tasks. An early tutorial session is used by tutors and students to review the school record of achievement and to begin the process of developing a new one for their career in college. A clear cycle for developing these records is set out within the tutorial programme. For students in their first year, self assessment is built into the structure. In the second year, the focus and direction of records of achievement is somewhat diluted by the demands of completing personal statements for university applications. Students are also encouraged to develop individual plans of action which involve them in setting their own targets for learning. Nevertheless, some students feel that their targets are set for them by the staff.

34 Attendance is thoroughly monitored; absenteeism of more than three days results in parents/carers being notified. Students are aware of the strict guidelines on attendance and other college regulations, and take them seriously.

35 High priority is given to the provision of impartial advice to support students' decisions on progress to other courses or to employment. Tutors also use the tutorial programme to offer careers advice. A comprehensive programme of careers activities starts with a full day's event called 'Jobwatch' which involves many outside speakers, including representatives from business and industry. The local careers officer visits the college each week and, over a period of time, interviews the majority of students. A member of the college staff takes responsibility for guidance relating to applications to higher education institutions. A careers library is maintained by the director of studies (student services) and CD-ROM facilities are available. Work experience is available to students on one-year courses.

36 The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at the college is small. There is no separate provision for them. College staff have successfully helped those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on an individual basis, mainly through using the tutorial programme to review students' progress and to offer extra personal support. Ten of the 14 students on college programmes, who have identified themselves as needing learning support, require assistance for dyslexia and this need is met primarily by lending them lap-top computers. There is little attempt to assess students for literacy and numeracy when they enter the college and the college does not have a co-ordinated system of learning support or central resources to support such activity.

37 The student council plays an active part in the life of the college. It is supported by a member of the college staff, and takes responsibility for social events and maintaining the student common room. Student participation in council meetings is high and attendance is monitored by the students themselves. Students are encouraged to present their views on a variety of issues to college management. The council provides grants to assist students travelling to interviews.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

38 In most of the classes the teaching was of a high standard. Seventy-one per cent of the 90 teaching sessions inspected had strengths that clearly outweighed the weaknesses and in a further 25 per cent the strengths and weaknesses were balanced. Twenty-three per cent had no significant weaknesses. The grades awarded to teaching sessions are summarised below.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

| Programmes | Grade | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Totals |
|----------------|-------|----|----|----|---|---|--------|
| GCE A/AS level | | 12 | 27 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 50 |
| GCSE | | 2 | 5 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| GNVQ | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 6 |
| Other | | 6 | 10 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| Totals | | 21 | 43 | 23 | 3 | 0 | 90 |

39 Relationships between staff and students are generally excellent. The rapport and mutual confidence enhance the success of the teaching methods used. In general students work conscientiously and are anxious to learn. A minority adopt a passive role, content to be carried along by their teachers' enthusiasm and hard work. Staff in most subjects are knowledgeable and well informed. Teachers use a wide range of methods and are successful in maintaining students' interest. For example, video was used to good effect in a mathematics session to pose a problem and stimulate productive discussion and understanding. Other approaches include teacher exposition, group work and students working individually on presentations and projects. Students are given opportunities to work productively in pairs and in small groups. Team teaching is creatively used in English and students present their own ideas in different formats. Outcomes of brainstorming activities and group presentations are often displayed on classroom walls. History students, in their classroom exercises, are encouraged to share ideas and pool knowledge.

40 The college has developed a policy on teaching and learning styles which stresses the partnership of teacher and student in promoting active learning. All departments are asked to examine the ways in which teaching and learning styles can be developed and extended. The intention is to deliver to each student their entitlement to a programme of study which is rigorous, sets high standards and meets their expectations. Staff have found that working with records of achievement has produced a further positive stimulus for change.

41 A lack of learning materials limits teachers' ability to meet the full range of individual needs. The commitment to support students with diverse abilities is not always fully implemented. Some modern language students experience difficulties with their subject because of their weakness in literacy skills. Although most students make good use of basic computer

facilities in their work, often wordprocessing their assignments, the more imaginative uses of information technology have yet to be extended to all subjects.

42 The new vocational courses have required a different approach to the curriculum and its teaching. Most are developing well. However, the curriculum content of the vocational provision in art and design provision is unbalanced and lacks breadth and depth. The aims and objectives of this new vocational course are not generally understood. Both staff and students are unclear about the standards required. The issue is being addressed by managers.

43 Course aims and objectives are clearly stated. Teachers cover them thoroughly and communicate them to their students. In most classrooms, a copy of the relevant examination syllabus is displayed on the wall. Teachers keep schemes of work and the course content is well structured and related to the requirements of the syllabus. Regular interviews take place with students to record and review their progress and to allow them to recognise their achievements. The content and balance of learning activities are suitable to the course requirements and to the abilities of most of the students. Careful thought goes into making subjects accessible and digestible for students; this is particularly the case with difficult concepts in sociology and psychology. Teaching staff do not always adapt their teaching and learning activities to make full use of the session time available.

44 Students are set testing assignments which relate to the level and content of their study. The work is accurately assessed and promptly returned. Effective systems are in place to ensure teachers' assessments are consistent and fair. For example, each member of staff marks a range of examination scripts across the whole department within which they are set. Individual departments have assessment policies; as yet these have not been drawn together into an overall college assessment policy.

45 The college offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including theatre trips, and there are English and physics societies which meet weekly within the college. In mathematics, the students participate in local and national competitions and in the neighbourhood engineer scheme. Law students have successfully competed in mock trials held in the national mooting competition.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

46 Students clearly enjoy their studies and like being at the college. They respond to their work positively and are able to talk about it clearly and with enthusiasm. They are developing the required levels of knowledge and understanding. Students' confidence is demonstrated particularly in language work where they can adapt the language they are learning to the situation and modify their speech. There are a few adult students who have recently joined the college: they are mostly to be found within the art

and access areas. They appear to have integrated well and express satisfaction with their experiences at college.

47 Students achieve standards in their written work which match the level of work they are undertaking. Project work is particularly stimulating in sociology and geography. Good portfolios and course work are produced by students of art and mathematics.

48 Students are encouraged to use wordprocessing facilities for their assignments. In many of the practical sessions in science, information technology is employed by students to analyse their results. Other core skills of literacy and numeracy are developed on an individual basis. The tutorial programme is successful in developing students' general study skills.

49 Students work with staff in identifying the skills they will be developing through their academic programme in a process called 'curriculum mapping'. Subsequently, they select activities from the wide variety of additional activities available in the college's core programme, to supplement the skills gained in their academic studies, enabling them to achieve a broader and more balanced programme. The programme includes sporting and musical activities as well as short courses in areas such as current affairs, language development and first aid. The college will offer internal credits for the completion of these courses for the first time in September 1994. Many of the activities offer external accreditation, for example the sports' leaders award and the bronze medallion in life saving. They also offer support for the college's GCE A level course in general studies which is the largest single subject taken by students, accounting for 15 per cent of the total GCE A level entries. Fifty-four per cent of students achieve a pass in this subject at grades A-C, compared with an average of 34 per cent for sixth form colleges nationally. Students would like more responsibility for selecting the actual core programme they follow and this is being considered by the college.

50 Examination results are closely monitored and analysed. Over the last three years the percentage of passes at GCE A level, grades A-E, has remained consistently high, exceeding the average for sixth form colleges nationally. In 1993, the college achieved an 85 per cent pass rate in all its GCE A level subjects compared with a pass rate of 82 per cent for all sixth form colleges. The college success rate at grades A-C was 49 per cent, compared with the national average of 46 per cent for sixth form colleges. All students passed in German, sport studies, music and home economics. Other good results were achieved in business studies and art and design. Achievements are uneven in respect of higher grade levels; for example the pass rate in English at grade A was 17.8 per cent compared with a national rate of 12.9 per cent. In mathematics the pass rate at grade A was 37 per cent compared with a national rate of 24.4 per cent. The average points score for students taking two or more GCE A levels was 15 (where A = 10, E = 2), which places the college in the top 10 per cent of institutions within the further education sector and in second place for the

northern region. The college recognises that its results are better for those students with a higher level of ability and they are investigating ways of ensuring improved success rates for the whole ability range.

51 The college carefully monitors the success rates of students in terms of their examination achievement at GCE A level when compared with their GCSE results at entry. The statistics are used to measure the quality of the provision and are collated at senior management level. Action is agreed with each head of department in the light of departmental achievements. The college reports that, over the last five years, 75 per cent of results have exceeded expectations based on GCSE results at entry.

52 Advanced supplementary level results in the college over the past three years have been above the national average. In 1993, the college achieved a success rate, grades A-E, of 85 per cent for its entry of 59 students. The average pass rate for sixth form colleges nationally was 72 per cent.

53 GCSE pass rates are also good. In 1993, 60 per cent achieved grades A-C out of a total of 492 student entries. This represents an improvement over the previous two years and compares with the national average of 50 per cent for all sixth form colleges. The best results were achieved in art and design, drama and English literature. Results in mathematics were especially good in view of the college's willingness to offer all students the opportunity to take this subject. Thirty-one per cent of the entries for mathematics and English were students who were sitting these subjects for a second time: 78 per cent of the students taking mathematics and English improved their performance by one or two grades. The achievements in the new GNVQ business and leisure courses are so far satisfactory; business studies is recording 92 per cent pass rates on its unit tests.

54 Retention rates and students' destinations are carefully analysed and used to inform management decisions. The college retention rate of 94 per cent overall is good and compares favourably to the national average of 88 per cent given in *Unfinished Business*, published by the Audit Commission and the Office for Standards in Education, 1993. Retention in English is especially good at 99.7 per cent. However, the GNVQ in art and design has not been successful in retaining students; only eight students of the 21 originally recruited now remain.

55 Eighty per cent of leavers from the college apply to institutions of higher education and an increasing number of advanced level students over the past three years have successfully gained university places. In 1993, 68 per cent of all students leaving the college were offered places in higher education institutions. Schools are kept informed of the progression of their former students.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

56 There is a strong commitment to quality throughout the college. A college policy has been agreed which identifies a process and structure for

assuring quality. Staff are fully aware of the policy and are supportive of the approach being adopted. Procedures are being developed and some monitoring is already taking place to ensure progress in implementation. The policy meets the needs of the institution and conforms to the requirements of the examining and validating bodies. However, not all staff are familiar with the details of implementation and the wider implications of quality assurance.

57 The college approach to quality is to operate through a system of standards which the departments are expected to achieve: it developed out of the long-standing commitment of the college to the local authority guidelines for student entitlement. This has recently been adapted to address the reporting areas presented in *Assessing Achievement*, Council Circular 93/28. Progress has been made through six quality assurance groups which are working to establish standards for different areas of the college and its work. Consultation with staff and governors has taken place and the development of the policy is clearly outlined in the college strategic plan and the staff handbook.

58 At curriculum level, the quality process involves standards developed by the quality assurance group and then issued to departments for translation into departmental procedures. Similar procedures are followed in the cross-college areas. The process is co-ordinated by a senior manager who works with the senior curriculum group. Quality issues are discussed monthly. Students attend regular liaison and consultative meetings at departmental level where they participate in evaluating the provision. Student evaluation questionnaires are distributed annually and the responses are considered, but there is no formal link to the quality assurance group.

59 Comprehensive information is collected to measure enrolment, retention and examination performance. Examination results for GCE A level courses are considered in terms of the value added to students' qualifications when comparing their achievements on entry with their final achievements at college. Discussions are held with heads of departments to review results and to consider the changes to be made to examination syllabuses and teaching and learning activities. However, no specific centrally-agreed performance targets are set.

60 Departments vary in their interpretation of the college's aims and policies for quality assurance and in the terminology and procedures which they use. If the standards are to be fully operational, ways of auditing effectiveness need to be established across the college.

61 The college has made an early start in producing a college charter in line with the Charter for Further Education. Consultation took place with staff, governors, students and representatives from a wide range of outside bodies, including parents/carers. The final version of the college charter was prepared after taking all views into account. The charter addresses the required issues; in addition commitments to reflect the college's own aims and policies have been added. For example reference is made to what

parents may reasonably expect from the college. The final version has already been given to students and copies are freely available in classrooms and elsewhere. It is not yet clear how the charter will be monitored.

62 Teaching staff discuss their training and development needs with their heads of department. Individual, team, cross-college and curricular needs are identified, and agreement is reached on priorities which clearly link to the college's strategic plan. Staff development needs are met through a balance of internal and external provision. Senior staff keep in touch with new developments through attendance at meetings with the local TEC, employers, heads of local schools and college principals. The college offers training seminars to staff, for example to explain new methods of funding courses. Staff feel reasonably well informed of developments in further education through the college's briefing systems. Strategies for identifying and monitoring the development requirements of support staff are not as clearly developed.

63 The helpful induction programme for new teaching staff concentrates on raising awareness of the policies, strategy and ethos of the college. Staff are also introduced to the pastoral programme and to their responsibilities as tutors. The programme is monitored by senior management through individual review interviews. Progress towards achieving assessors' qualifications for those staff involved in delivering vocational education is slow.

64 Policies and procedures for the appraisal of teaching staff are established and there is general support for the process across the college. All staff have attended development sessions involving external speakers. The principal has been appraised by the chair of the corporation. There has been a conscious decision to defer full implementation of the appraisal programme.

RESOURCES

Staffing

65 Staff are highly motivated, dedicated and enthusiastic. They are hard working and appreciative of the contribution of colleagues. Staff are well qualified in terms of the curriculum: however, their recent industrial or commercial experience is inadequate to meet the needs of a growing vocational programme. The college has mechanisms for ensuring that the staff development programme enables it to meet its strategic objectives. The planning process begins in January each year, with three further review periods up to the start of the academic year.

66 The college has recognised the important contribution made by administrative and support staff. The numbers of support staff have increased since incorporation and are now generally at an acceptable level. Administrative and support staff are effectively managed: they play a full role in college life; they are consulted in college planning processes; and are also involved in staff-development activities. Support staff

attended the recent seminar on the new funding methodology, contracts and inspection.

Equipment/learning resources

67 The work of students and staff is well supported by a good range of equipment for teaching and learning. There is a comprehensive assets register which enables equipment to be tracked. The college has a well-considered strategy and formula for funding new and replacement equipment, and the maintenance of equipment is effectively organised. Information technology and visual aids are centrally co-ordinated. The college has the use of the nearby drama studio for theatre studies.

68 Departments have a good range of learning resources. A substantial number of text books is kept in departments, although copies are also put into the library for reference purposes. The college lost most of its book stock in the fire of 1987. It is making additional funds available to enable the present total of 9,700 books to be increased rapidly to meet the target of 14,000. The library also contains reprographic equipment and a limited range of video and audio tapes which are available on loan. There are three computers which run CD-ROM applications.

69 The college has satisfactory information technology facilities. There is a 10:1 ratio of students to computers. A well-equipped and well-used central resource room is available for students and staff on a drop-in basis or for specific computer lessons. Most of the departmental base rooms also contain computers for staff and student use, and there are classroom and laboratory-based computers for use during teaching sessions.

70 There are no learning workshops to support and develop students' literacy and numeracy skills.

Accommodation

71 The college presents a welcoming image to visitors. The public areas are pleasant, clean, and well decorated and there are examples of students' achievement on display. Staff and students are proud of the buildings.

72 The college has developed a clear accommodation strategy with the assistance of an external consultant. It addresses, through a number of proposed options, many of the targets contained within the strategic plan. However, the strategy does not address the college's shortage of large areas which can be used flexibly or create additional recreational space for students.

73 Teaching accommodation is generally appropriate although a small number of groups are being taught in rooms which are not suited to the activity. Many areas of the college gain a subject identity because of the student work displayed in corridors and classrooms. Some subjects, such as English and business studies take considerable pride in their areas. Some courses, particularly those with small numbers of students, do not have a base area. Staff and students from the performing and creative

arts department enjoy working in the Claremont annexe; however, the building is not ideal for its purpose because many of the rooms are too small. A small number of temporary classrooms have been added over the last 25 years and, although used to good advantage, some are coming to the end of their useful life. The college has made creative use of the small hall to provide facilities for meetings, presentations, displays and exhibitions. For example, during the inspection period an exhibition of students' work inspired by a recent art trip to Florence was attractively displayed.

74 Many of the classrooms and public areas have been refurbished to a high standard, following the fire in 1987. A rolling programme is in place to refurbish most others. The erosion of the concrete pillars in the west wing, added in 1958, is giving cause for concern. Wheelchair access to the college is through the side door of the library and it is limited to the ground floor of the main building. The growth in student enrolments this year has put the student common room under pressure at lunch times. Planned growth in student enrolments will create greater demands on the communal facilities for students. The college does not provide full catering facilities on site but snacks are available in the common room. A number of venues close to the college provide full meals and snacks for students.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

75 The college is held in high regard in its locality. It works closely with its community to provide high-quality academic education for its students in a happy and supportive environment. The college has many strengths, which are:

- good leadership from approachable senior managers and governors
- open and friendly communications within and beyond the college and the effective three-way partnership between staff, students and parents
- positive relationships with the local community
- the well-organised and well-delivered system of guidance and support for students
- the good range of GCE A level subjects and syllabuses
- the positive start made in developing vocational provision
- the high standards of teaching
- the good examination results and the high proportion of students progressing to higher education
- the commitment to developing an effective system of quality assurance
- dedicated, energetic and able staff.

76 If the college is to sustain and improve the quality of its provision, it should address the following issues:

- the need for a more focused approach to college and departmental targets
- the widening of provision to meet its stated commitment to open access for students
- effective mechanisms to monitor the quality assurance procedures
- a thorough approach to identifying, monitoring and helping students who require learning support.

FIGURES

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- 1 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by age (April 1994)

 - 3 Enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)

 - 4 Percentage enrolments by level of study (April 1994)

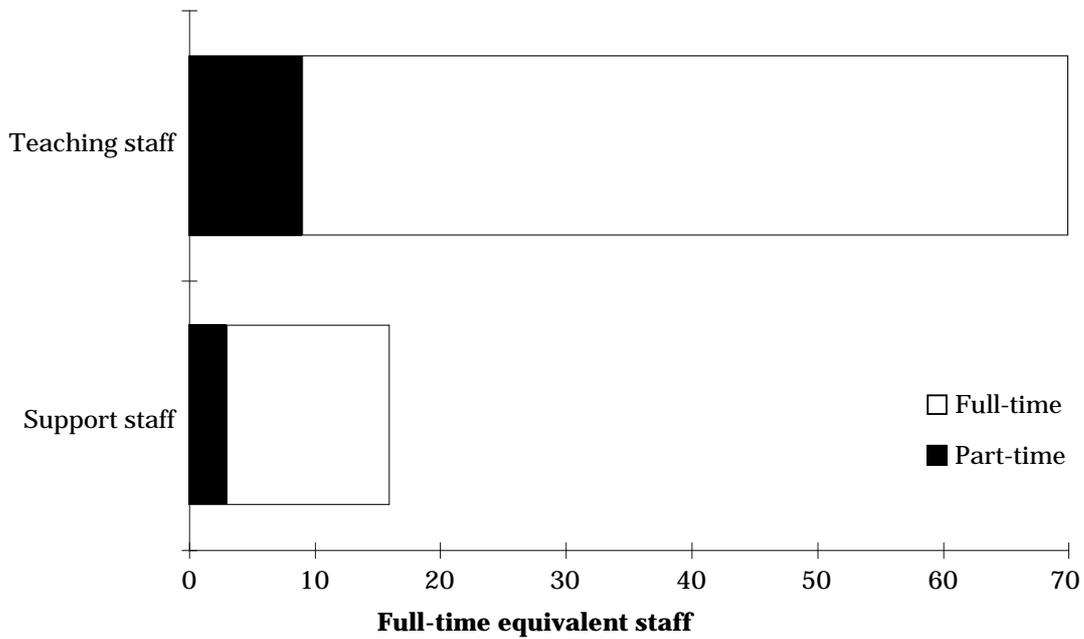
 - 5 Recurrent income (1993-94)

 - 6 Estimated expenditure (1993-94)

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

Figure 1

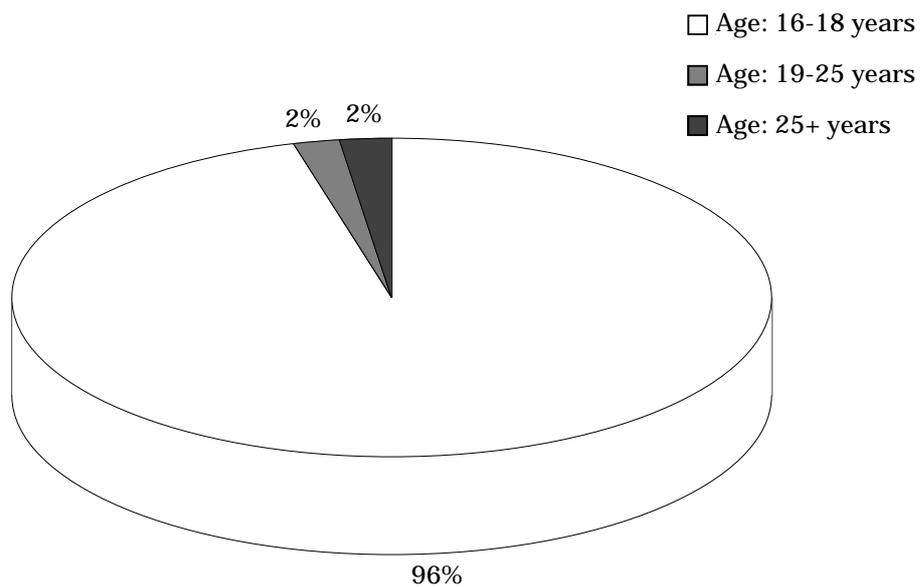
Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)



Full-time equivalent staff: 86

Figure 2

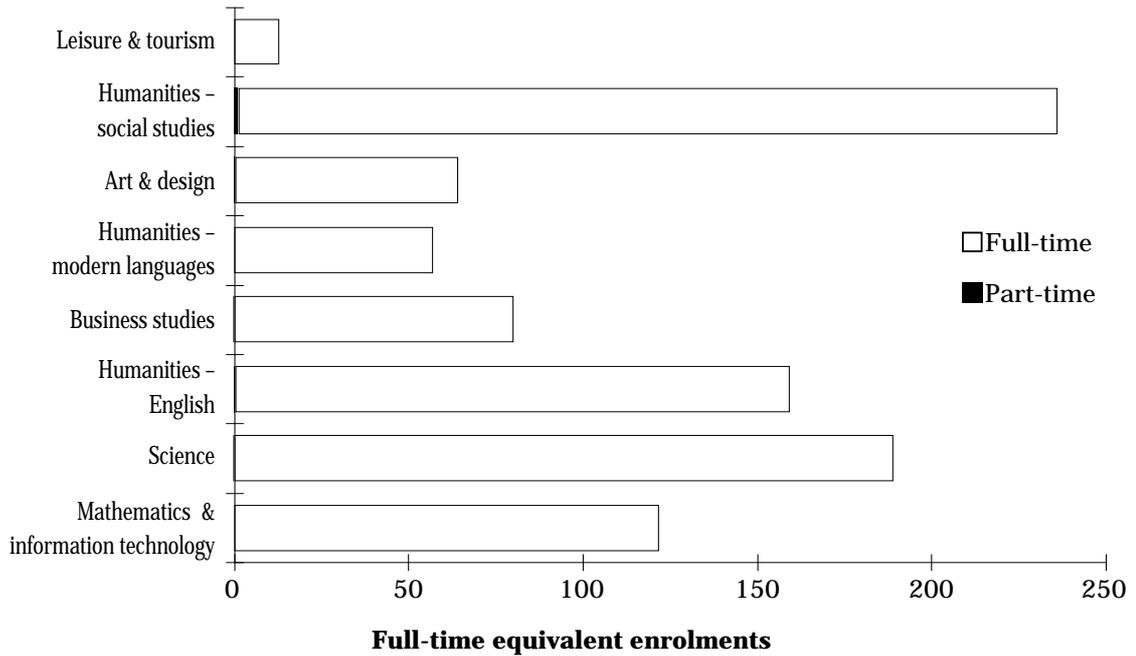
Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College: percentage enrolments by age (April 1994)



Enrolments: 935

Figure 3

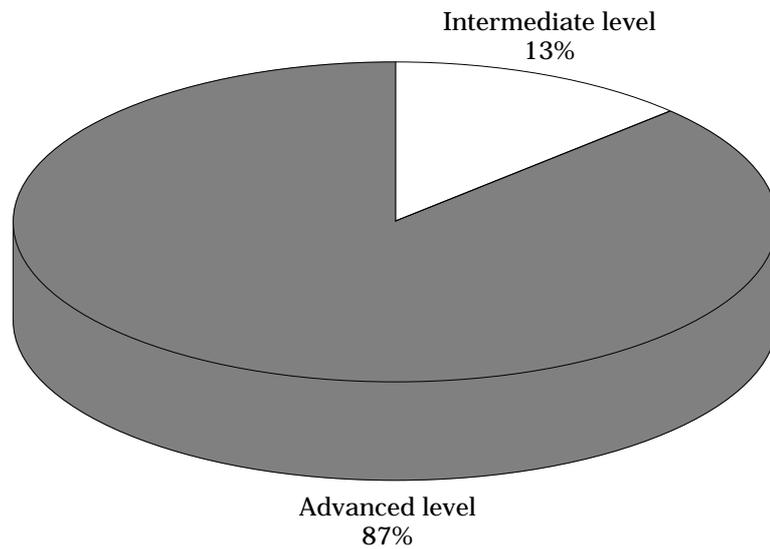
Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College: enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)



Full-time equivalent enrolments: 921

Figure 4

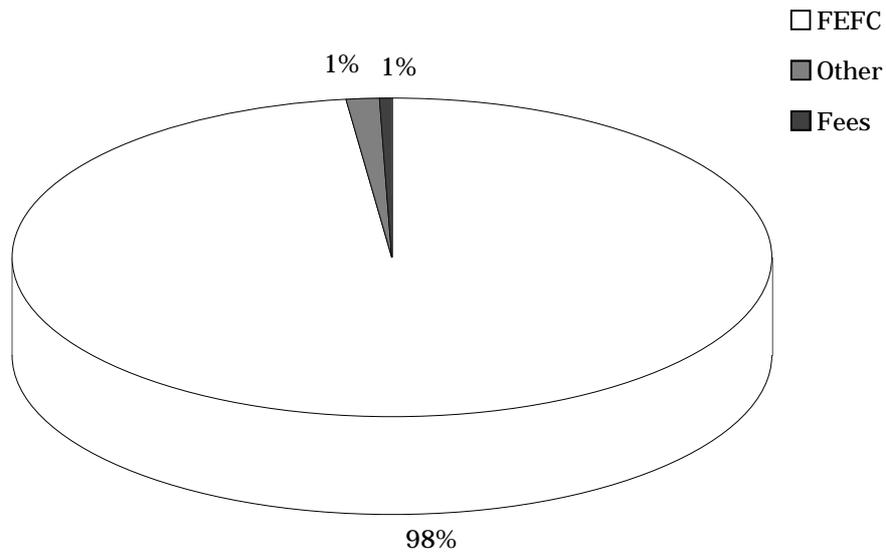
Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College: percentage enrolments by level of study (April 1994)



Enrolments: 935

Figure 5

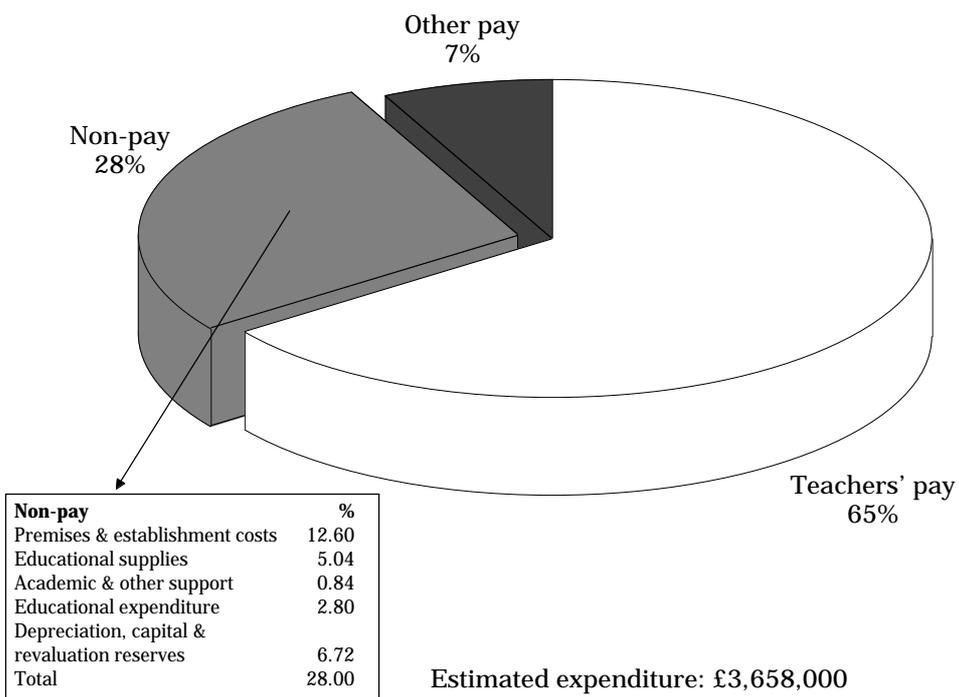
Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College: recurrent income (1993-94)



Recurrent income: £3,658,500

Figure 6

Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College: estimated expenditure (1993-94)



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