Sutton Coldfield College of Further Education

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.

Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 0203 863000
Fax 0203 863100

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 55/94

SUTTON COLDFIELD COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION
WEST MIDLANDS REGION
Inspected February – June 1994

Summary

Sutton Coldfield College is a major provider of education and training in the West Midlands. It offers a broad range of full-time and part-time programmes for school leavers and adults. The college has effective links with local schools, employers and the Birmingham Training and Enterprise Council. It has recruited successfully over a wide geographical area, achieving an increase in student numbers in excess of its growth target. Sound strategic planning has enabled it to expand its accommodation and staffing to cater for these increased numbers. Students are well taught and receive effective guidance and support. Many achieve high levels of success on GCE A level and vocational courses and a large and growing proportion progress to higher education. Staff are well qualified and experienced. They are supported by well-organised staff development. Imaginative developments for extending and improving the accommodation are under way. Management roles and responsibilities require clearer definitions, particularly in relation to the implementation of whole-college policies. Measures of performance, including the introduction of costings to determine efficiency and effectiveness, require further development. Other issues to be addressed include the inconsistent quality of induction and tutorial support; the attention given to the learning needs of individual students, particularly those on foundation courses; the inadequate library bookstock and provision for information technology; the limited social amenities for students; and the development of a comprehensive policy for the replacement of equipment.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	2	English	2
Mathematics	3	Modern foreign languages	3
Computing	3		
Business studies	2	SLDD	2
Art and design	2		
Performing arts	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1   The inspection of Sutton Coldfield College took place in three stages during the academic year 1993-94. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the beginning of the autumn term, specialist subject areas during February and March 1994 and aspects of cross-college provision from 6 to 9 June 1994. In all, 16 inspectors spent a total of 59 days in the college. They visited 133 classes, examined representative samples of students' work, and held discussions with governors, college staff, students, local employers, parents, teachers from the college's feeder schools and representatives of the community.

2   The report is based on inspections carried out according to 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 Sutton Coldfield college occurred early in the cycle, the opportunity for such a response was not available.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3   The creation of Sutton Coldfield College dates from 1952 when Warwickshire County Council established a business studies department, which it accommodated in the same premises as an art school that had existed since the beginning of the century. The first phase of the present main building was completed in 1963, enabling the creation of departments of engineering and general studies, and the second phase in 1973. In 1974, as a result of local government re-organisation, control of the college passed to Birmingham City Council, where it remained until the college's incorporation on 1 April 1993.

4   The college has 332 full-time equivalent teaching staff, 76 full-time equivalent support staff and 32 full-time equivalent technical staff. A staff profile is shown in figure 1. The college has concentrated on recruiting full-time students, mainly in the 16-19 age range. At the time of the inspection, there were 9,827 students on roll, (4,151 full-time equivalents), of whom 3,357 were full-time, 5,125 part-time and 1,345 evening students. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 2 and 3. Enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 4.

5   The college serves the north of the West Midlands County. It attracts 16-19 year olds from within a radius of about 15 miles, an area which includes the city of Birmingham. There are nine local schools offering General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) provision and six other further education colleges offering a similar range of provision.

6   The unemployment rate in Birmingham is 17.4 per cent. In the West Midlands County it is 14.4 per cent. In the wards adjacent to the college,

the unemployment rate is 6 to 7 per cent and it reaches 22 to 31 per cent in parts of its catchment area. The loss of jobs in the West Midland's traditional engineering and manufacturing industries continues but there has been a rise in vacancies in the service sector particularly in financial services and care. There are skill shortages in management, computing and higher-level engineering areas.

7   The college aims to offer a curriculum which meets the needs of a wide range of students in the West Midlands. It seeks growth through offering courses leading to nationally recognised qualifications including GCE A level courses, General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ), National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) courses, Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses and their equivalents. It also seeks to meet the education and training needs of employed people in partnership with local industry and commerce, and with the Birmingham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). In pursuing these aims it seeks to enhance the quality of students' experience at college by being responsive to their needs and wishes; to anticipate and adapt to change; to achieve its objectives in a cost-effective way and to ensure value for money. It plans to underpin these aims by the recruitment, retention and development of high calibre staff, and by maximising its independence through the development of a range of income-earning activities.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8   The college is firmly committed to expansion within the limitations of its accommodation. The strategic plan shows awareness of the changing local industrial structure and the need to expand education and training to improve the skills of the workforce in the West Midlands. The college has had no difficulty in recruiting students, even in the declining 16-19 age group, where it has secured an increased share. The college achieved a growth in student numbers of 10.6 per cent in 1993-94, exceeding its target by 2.6 per cent.

9   The college offers full-time and part-time courses from foundation level to franchised degree courses. In addition to GCE A level and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses, there is a broad range of vocational courses. The college has moved forward rapidly with the development of GNVQ. There is a wide range of full-time access to higher education courses. Degree and other higher education courses are franchised from five universities. The college franchises BTEC first courses to six local schools. It also provides teaching for GCE A level psychology at a local school and a small number of pupils from local schools join GCE A level courses at the college. The Saturday courses established to meet some of the needs of the local population are an imaginative development. There are also part-time recreation and leisure courses. Courses for industry include a TEC-funded engineering apprenticeship programme and a variety of day release programmes for apprentices. The college has successfully bid for work from local companies, the South Birmingham Health Authority and the Careers Service.

10   There are well-organised links with schools. The school liaison officer and her assistant have provided course information to 114 local schools. College staff contribute to many careers activities in schools. School representatives reported favourably on the quality of relations with the college. The four largest single providers of students to the college are 11-18 schools and there is a close correlation between college attendance at careers conventions for students in the final year of schooling and recruitment to the college. Curricular links in vocational areas, including some in-service training for school teachers, are particularly effective. Feedback on former pupils' progress is given to most schools. The college has recently joined the Walsall Compact; it plans to join the Birmingham post-16 Compact soon, and it belongs to the new Sutton Coldfield Education and Business partnership.

11   There are good links with industry. Employers' representatives commented on the college's increased sensitivity to industry's needs, particularly since incorporation. College staff at all levels deal rapidly and effectively with issues raised by employers. Arrangements for industrial placements, undertaken by many students, are effective: students are generally well prepared; tutors visit them on their placements and discuss their progress with employers. On some block release courses for apprentices, the feedback to employers could be more precise. Representatives of small firms welcomed the help the college had given in explaining NVQs. However, the college has only three industrial liaison committees in place and some relevant areas, for example computing and science, do not have any formal inputs from industry. The college should ensure that current industrial and commercial perspectives are used in the evaluation of vocational courses.

12   The college training group, headed by a training manager has good links with the Birmingham TEC. The college agrees TEC contracts which can be offered on at least a break-even basis and has taken up adult and training credits programmes. It plays a major role in the business administration and finance 'compact' which, with private sector providers, acts as an intermediary between the TEC and training providers. The TEC is also assisting the college in developing its Investors in People initiative. The training group is responsible for the management of contracts with the Department for Employment; it runs a job club and it also manages the job-centre Options programmes. The college has been a major recipient of money from the European Social Fund and estimates that more than 1,000 students have benefited from this.

13   The college has a clear marketing plan, which has been approved by the governors. The major emphasis has been upon the 16-19 market but the college now plans to recruit greater numbers of mature students. Training needs have also been analysed. As a result, the college is extending its marketing to neighbouring areas beyond the Birmingham and West Midlands conurbation.

14   An assistant principal has overall responsibility for marketing, including promotion, advertising and links with schools. The marketing budget is substantial and represents a major increase in real terms over previous years. A marketing committee, which is a subcommittee of the academic board, reviews policy and its implementation. The marketing manager liaises with curriculum area heads to ensure that he is aware of specialist curricular developments. The college has recently established a well-organised information centre. A record is kept of personal, telephone and written queries. However, these are not categorised by type of enquiry; consequently, opportunities to obtain useful information about the effectiveness of marketing and potential areas for course development are lost. More precise knowledge about how the centre is used would assist in monitoring effectiveness.

15   The college produces a full-time course prospectus and a range of curriculum area prospectuses for both part and full-time courses. These are well presented and provide prospective students with appropriate information. Part-time courses are frequently advertised through the press and vocational courses are promoted through mail shots to local companies. Prospective students have the opportunity to visit the college on one open day and two open evenings. These events are well attended and attracted favourable comments from school representatives. The college has experimented with 'taster days' in June, enabling pupils in their final year of compulsory schooling to sample courses, but these were not well attended. There are plans to move the taster days to the autumn half-term period.

16   Market research is still developing. A consultant's report has been commissioned and the college has received a preliminary report. The college will need to undertake more rigorous market research to ensure that new opportunities are identified and evaluated quickly. There is a fair degree of in-house knowledge, for example, on the effectiveness of newspaper advertising, but the college does not have comprehensive procedures for evaluating the success, or otherwise, of its marketing strategies.

17   The proportion of students from ethnic minority backgrounds is well above the ethnic minority proportion of the local population. The college monitors enrolments in terms of gender and ethnicity and has analysed the relationship between initial achievement, ethnicity and entry to higher education. Equal opportunities policies have been in place for some years but they do not yet inform all aspects of the college's activities. The college approved a new equal opportunities policy in 1991, which covers marketing, recruitment, selection, admissions and the curriculum. The policy contains a commitment to eliminate discrimination and provides for counselling, tutorial support and staff development. The policy statement is included in job packs and student handbooks and college policies on sexual and racial harassment are explained to tutor groups. The college seeks to remove ethnic and gender bias from its publications.

All applications for posts are monitored to encourage the recruitment of appropriately-qualified and experienced staff from all communities. Training for interviews includes equal opportunities issues. There has been some recent increase in the numbers of ethnic minority teaching staff. Although there is an equal opportunities subcommittee of the academic board, this has not functioned effectively and its role is being reconsidered.

18   The college's policy towards students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been strongly influenced by the past polices of Birmingham Local Education Authority (LEA) which did not include Sutton Coldfield in its designated funding to colleges to enhance access for these students. The college is now faced with a large potential expenditure if it is to improve access for wheelchair users. The college has sought to assist students with restricted mobility by timetabling classes in ground floor accommodation. It has recruited students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are likely to integrate with mainstream courses. Some parents spoke warmly about the effectiveness of support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the role of the 'special needs' co-ordinator. However, the use of the term 'special needs' is not always clear within the college. Parents and students voiced some concern that labelling of students in this way made them reluctant to take up the support offered.

19   There is a subsidised play group on the main site which offers 16 places for morning, afternoon and all-day sessions at low cost. The supply of places appears to match the demand.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20   The governing body comprises 20 members, including the principal. There are nine women and three from ethnic minorities. Twelve governors represent business, industry and the professions, and there is a representative of the Birmingham TEC. Community groups, staff and students are also represented. Corporation meetings are well attended and supported by clear briefing documents and concise minutes. A range of subcommittees exists, for finance, employment policy, audit, student affairs and remuneration. Governors are committed and highly supportive of the college. They have made it clear that they wish to be concerned with strategy rather than detail. Individual governors contribute specialist expertise, for example in financial and personnel matters. Since incorporation, governors have focused mainly on financial, personnel and accommodation matters. They are now beginning to play a more active role in strategic planning.

21   The college's strategic plan addresses medium and some long-term aspects of the education and training needs of the community. The planning process involves a wide range of staff and includes contributions to the draft plan from each section of the college. Departmental and section plans reflect the overall college strategy. Governors considered and agreed the strategic plan for incorporation and are bringing their influence to

bear on some aspects of the current plan. The college has successfully achieved its major objectives for 1993-94.

22   The college management group consists of the principal, the deputy principal and five assistant principals who hold cross-college responsibilities. Four of the assistant principals also head curriculum departments; the fifth is responsible for support services and acts as clerk to the governing body. Within each department, section leaders are responsible for an area of the curriculum or a support service. The management structure has evolved to meet the demands of delegation and incorporation. At middle management level, incorporation has led to new functions being added to the existing structure. The increase in the range and depth of the responsibilities of the management team may require a more fundamental review of its management structure and processes.

23   The college departments are run effectively on a day-to-day basis by the assistant principals. The principal, deputy principal and assistant principal in charge of support services, work together closely and carry a major responsibility for ensuring cross-college co-ordination. However, within the management structure overall there is some confusion about roles and some overlap of responsibilities. Staff who hold management responsibility, or are members of working groups and committees, are not always clear about their remit and responsibilities. As a result, the expectations of senior and middle management, especially when new policies and procedures are being developed, are not always based on a common understanding.

24   The academic board of the college has a number of subcommittees. Some of these have ceased meeting and some of their work has been taken over by the re-organised departmental boards of study. Members of the college regard the academic board as weak and having little influence; its role is currently under review. Cross-college groups have met to draft or re-draft various college policies. The college's policy on information technology indicates that information technology will continue to have an important role to play in the curriculum provision, administrative support and information support for students, staff and managers. There is a computer users' committee which meets regularly.

25   The college has a number of other important policies at various stages of development. These include health and safety, equal opportunities and special needs. The special needs policy is still in draft form and the equal opportunities policy has yet to be fully implemented. Although the college has responded to recent health and safety legislation, the current health and safety policy dates from 1989. A full-scale, cross-college review of all health and safety matters has been under way since February and is scheduled for adoption later this summer. The college should review its system for establishing, communicating and implementing policies; for example, to consider priorities and resource implications when setting up working groups, so that recommendations can be effectively considered and followed through by senior management and the governing body.

26   There are regular meetings of the college management group. A meeting of section leaders is held on average once a week, for information receiving rather than decision making, and there is a weekly timetabled hour for meetings to allow course team and other groups to meet. A staff bulletin is issued, on an occasional basis, in addition to memos and circulars. Meetings of the college management group and some cross-college groups are minuted, but this is not true of all groups. Records of important decisions and discussion points are not always recorded. There are many informal communication networks but there has not been any adoption of a whole-college communications plan to ensure that there is consistency of access to information.

27   The college's unit of funding for 1992-93, as recorded in the FEFC report, *Funding Allocations 1993-94*, was £2,033 per weighted full-time equivalent student. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges was £2,436. Summaries of the college's recurrent income and estimated expenditure for 1993-94 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college pays careful attention to finance. Detailed management accounts are produced monthly, broken down into departmental and sectional detail. Pay budgets are held centrally by the deputy principal. Budgets for part-time hours, equipment, furniture and materials are devolved to assistant principals. The basis for financial allocations has been mainly historic. Attempts have been made to develop a formula for financial allocations and this has worked in some areas, for example in the case of the college library. However, financial constraints have impeded further development. Some departments feel that they receive less favourable treatment than others. In practice, decisions about financial allocations remain with the principal. This has enabled the college to keep a careful control of resources and to achieve a healthy financial balance. Some work has been undertaken on unit costing but departmental and section managers do not have a clear idea of the costs of the provision for which they are responsible. A more systematic and open approach to financial allocation would reassure managers and help to develop management expertise and accountability.

28   The college has a management information system, parts of which have been purchased and parts of which have been developed in-house. It collects and disseminates information on admissions, enrolments, registration, finance, examinations, personnel and some aspects of the college timetable. Twenty-two computers within administration and departmental offices on the main site are networked and provide access to these databases. Software is available to enable staff to access the information but the system does not have an up-to-date interface which is easy to use or which produces information in easily digestible formats. Academic staff have access to the data only through departmental offices. A member of staff with programming expertise develops reports when the demand arises. Data are available to enable unit costs of provision to be calculated. For example, all students are issued with a bar-coded identity card which is used to record their access to the library, the drop-in

information technology centre and other learning areas. The hardware, network and software of the management information system are supported by a team of staff who are also responsible for the upkeep of the information technology facilities.

29   Data on enrolment, attendance and retention are collected weekly and monitored by a senior manager. Where enrolments differ significantly from targets, or retention rates are lower than expected, reasons are sought and appropriate action is taken. Student destination statistics are carefully collected but to date there has been little analysis of the data to assist the college to evaluate its performance.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

30   The college has well-established recruitment and admissions procedures. Potential students receive information about the college by word of mouth, through publicity or their school. The information centre is increasingly being used and those who used it spoke highly of the service they had received. The college marketing team maintains contact with schools in the greater Birmingham area, Lichfield, Tamworth and South Staffordshire and consequently applications come from a wide area. Applications are processed by the college admissions officer, who analyses them and arranges an interview with a member of the appropriate course or section. Applicants have an entitlement to a 20-minute interview with an experienced interviewer. Where a suitable course is not available at the college, students are advised of the possibilities further afield. The quality and impartiality of the advice given is highly regarded by students and parents. It is a major factor in the college's success with recruitment. In the past year, the process of application, interview, enrolment and induction has been reviewed by a quality improvement group.

31   Interviews take place throughout the year, but almost a third of students apply at the end of August when examination results are known. Although some high calibre students apply at this time, a high proportion of the withdrawals are from the late applicants. The interview process does not always identify students who have special learning needs. However, few students find themselves on unsuitable courses or change their minds in the early part of term. The admissions office monitors course changes. Some accreditation of prior learning is currently undertaken by the management centre. Accreditation of prior learning has been identified as one of the areas for development.

32   The induction processes vary from section to section, but the programmes are thorough and most are appropriately documented. Study facilities and the arrangements for support and guidance are drawn to students' attention. All students are made aware of administrative arrangements, particularly those relating to attendance, which is monitored through the college management information system. Tutors give high priority to following up absences and assistant principals are alerted to persistent absences. Parents expressed satisfaction with the

induction process, which enables students to settle quickly into a new environment. They also comment favourably on the efficient way in which they are notified of attendance problems.

33   Students are allocated to tutor groups within sections and the personal tutor is usually one of the students' subject tutors. In vocational sectors, the course tutor generally fulfils both functions. Although a tutor's handbook and a small bank of resources have been devised as a result of a Technical Vocational Education-funded initiative, there is no consistency of tutorial provision. In some sections, for example, tutors do not attempt to identify under-performance or work with students to establish individual action plans. Although records of achievement are presented by 90 per cent of applicants at interview, their use across the college is not consistent. There has recently been an increase in the time allocated to tutors who work through records of achievement with individual students.

34   Although senior management has a stated commitment to the tutorial system, staff actively involved in developing tutorial work do not feel well supported. There is no overall monitoring of the efficiency of the system and no senior post holder oversees it. Tutors do not meet as a group outside their teaching sections except when undertaking training in tutorial work. This area of college activity has been examined by a quality improvement group, who have identified a link between effective tutoring and student retention rates. Their proposals are to be implemented in phased stages from September 1994 but staff have indicated that this timescale may be too protracted.

35   A strong learning support system has been established. The information technology centre and open-learning centre are used extensively and students appreciate the availability of staff to assist them. In September 1993 all full-time students took the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) tests for basic numeracy and literacy during induction, to help identify those with learning difficulties. Some students and staff are resistant to the idea because they fail to perceive the value of the test. Efforts are being made to overcome this resistance. Having identified students' requirements, the college seeks to ensure that students take advantage of the support. The study centre co-ordinator visits all courses and explains how and where students may seek additional support. Some students with more general learning problems are directed to the vocational foundation course but this does not meet the needs and expectations of some students, for whom it is a cause of considerable dissatisfaction.

36   The student guidance team, based in the information centre, offers personal, financial and careers counselling, and guidance on opportunities in higher education. It operates in a mutually supportive and efficient manner, provides an excellent service and works closely with the adjacent LEA careers advice centre. The team visits tutorial groups and is highly effective in making young people aware of the full range of advice and support open to them. Students value these services and there is evidence

that some would have withdrawn from their course but for the support and advice received.

37   Advice and guidance on higher education is of a high standard, especially on the GCE A level general studies course. Students on GNVQ and BTEC national courses are making increasing use of materials developed in this connection, but the consistency of advice on higher education opportunities cannot be guaranteed. The number of applications for higher education has almost doubled over the last two years.

38   Students are generally enthusiastic about the college, its range of provision and its support facilities. However, they commented on the shortage of social space on college sites. The students' union is making a generous financial contribution to the improvement of the sports hall and the development of an all-weather tennis facility, to be administered by the newly-appointed sports hall manager. The students' union liaison officer administers a small student loan system.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

39   The standard of teaching and the promotion of learning was generally high. Just over 59 per cent of the 133 teaching sessions inspected had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses. The following table summarises the grades given to the sessions which were inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCSE		2	5	9	1	0	17
GCE A/AS level		4	19	8	3	0	34
GNVQ		0	4	2	2	0	8
NVQ		0	4	0	0	1	5
BTEC		2	16	12	3	0	33
Other		3	20	12	1	0	36
Total		11	68	43	10	1	133

40   The majority of lessons were well planned and effectively managed. Schemes of work were employed constructively. English lecturers used records of work as the basis for team discussions and planning. High-quality teaching was observed in part-time and evening classes, as well as in full-time course programmes.

41   The quality of teaching varied widely within and across the curriculum areas. In the better sessions, there was a good range of teaching styles, including class and group discussion and exercises which allowed for students' differing abilities. Challenging learning objectives helped to promote high standards of achievement. For example, in English, the critical interpretation of set texts was purposeful and perceptive. Evening sessions in modern languages embodied cultural as well as linguistic

elements; the work was conducted at a good pace and there was a high degree of student involvement. In sessions where the weaknesses outweighed the strengths, the factors responsible included poor planning and delivery. Some classes were taught without sufficient regard for the wide-ranging abilities or prior experience of individuals within the group. In biology, teachers employed a narrow range of teaching styles, there was too much dictation and some of the practical assignments were pedestrian. Some GCE A level modern language courses gave too few opportunities for students to work in pairs or groups in order to practise conversation, and there was insufficient use of the foreign language in some classes.

42   In computing, the teaching was lively and informative, and the content and terminology used were up-to-date. In practical sessions, students assisted each other in their learning. A system of rotation for the organisation and delivery of practical sessions in physics worked well; students were able to draw effectively on the technical expertise of staff.

43   Part-time staff were generally well deployed to broaden the range of expertise available to students. This was particularly so in art and design, where staff were able use their industrial experience in professional design for the benefit of students. The standards of drawing were a specific strength in this area.

44   Support tutors, working across the college curriculum areas, have adapted materials to match vocational course content. Some vocational tutors have gained, or are in the process of gaining, the initial certificate in teaching basic communication skills. However, many lecturers require more guidance on how to adjust the curriculum to meet the needs of individual students with learning difficulties.

45   In some vocational areas, lecturers give inadequate attention to the development of numeracy skills. The use of information technology, as an integral part of students' studies, varies between courses.

46   Student assignments are set regularly. Practical assignments are introduced through well-written briefs, and many assignment questions include statements of the related objectives and the assessment methods. Assessments are marked fairly, often to an agreed scheme and within an agreed timescale. GCSE lecturers hold weekly meetings to moderate course work. On some courses, there are penalties for assignments which are handed in late. In some subjects the quantity of marked work was insufficient to enable the students to develop an awareness of their progress and lecturers' comments on the work were minimal. There were also instances where students' work contained a substantial number of uncorrected spelling mistakes. The marking of core skills work was generally inconsistent.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

47   Students speak enthusiastically about their courses and most have positive attitudes to their studies. Some of the oral work is of good quality; for example, students' presentations in English were generally lively and

well organised. Students undertake a good range of written work in appropriate styles for English and the sciences. In science, students undertake practical work with proper attention to safety. The great majority of students achieve standards appropriate to their level of study.

48   The results of the ALBSU screening tests, conducted by the college in September 1993, indicated that a significant proportion of the new full-time intake of students needed support with basic skills if they were to achieve an NVQ or equivalent at level 1. Some 12.5 per cent required support with basic communication and 10 per cent with numeracy skills. A small number of students on advanced GCE and GNVQ courses also required support.

49   In 1993, the 256 students, aged 16-18, sitting GCE A level examinations achieved an average points score of 12.6 (where A=10, E=2) compared with the average figure for all schools and colleges of 14.7. The average for full-time students only was 15.0. This performance placed the college in the top 25 per cent of institutions within the further education sector. In 1993, the overall pass rate at GCE A level was 74 per cent compared with an average of 66 per cent for further education and tertiary colleges and 77 per cent for all schools and colleges. GCE A level courses with results significantly above the national average included art, classical subjects, computer science and geography. Subjects significantly below the national average included business studies, French, mathematics, psychology and physics.

50   GCSE examination results were mixed. In 1993 pass rates, grades A-C, in English, French, German,and mathematics were good, but those for biology, chemistry, economics, and history were below the national average. Of particular note was the high pass rate in English, with over 70 per cent of students gaining grades A-C. Two physics syllabuses were offered with different examination boards. On the one syllabus, examination results were below the national average. On the other, students achieved a high pass rate, grades A-C, of 89 per cent. The drop-out from the GCSE mathematics course was unsatisfactorily high.

51   The BTEC national diploma statistics returned to the Department for Education indicated that the college achieved a 69 per cent pass rate, which placed it in the bottom 25 per cent of colleges within the sector. However, this data was incomplete at the time of submission and did not take into account students retaking examinations. The final BTEC results indicate a 91 per cent pass rate. BTEC national courses on which students achieved a 100 per cent pass rate in 1993 were caring, art and design and graphic design. Many other BTEC results were over 85 per cent and all had a pass rate of over 70 per cent.

52   The college publishes its examination results in a clear and concise form. The proportion of students progressing to higher education is high. More than 70 per cent of the students who apply gain entrance. The college does not set targets for success rates in external examinations and does not undertake an analysis of the added value achieved by students,

comparing their qualifications on entry with their results in final examinations.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

53   A draft student charter is almost ready for consultation with relevant external groups. The final version is to be published during the academic year.

54   In 1993, a fresh start was made on quality development in the college. The principal and 35 managers met at a residential conference to discuss quality and to agree a way forward on quality management. This produced agreements that the college should make total quality its goal and that it should seek registration as an Investor in People. Managers identified four areas of the college for special attention: GNVQ courses, admissions and induction, course tutoring and an engineering course. Four working parties were formed to write standards and devise measures of performance in the selected areas. They have produced well-designed standards together with appropriate mechanisms for monitoring.

55   An implementation plan for the full sets of standards has yet to be formally agreed. Progress with the Investors in People initiative has been relatively slow. The whole strategy for quality improvement is supported by the briefest of action plans, which gives little guidance on the stages of implementation and the deadlines for achieving objectives.

56   Quality monitoring has been conducted through course review. Each course submits standardised documentation to boards of study so that a consistent system of course monitoring is applied across the college. Course reviews are conducted at two levels: short annual reviews and full reviews. Most courses are reviewed annually but the documentation lacks detail and the scrutiny is less than it might be. Selected courses, agreed in advance by the boards of study, undergo a more complete review. The full reviews are thorough although, for most courses, they occur only once every three years.

57   Course reviews include the use of performance indicators, such as examination results and retention rates, but there is insufficient analysis in depth to identify problems and provide action plans for improvement. The examination results for 1993 were received by governors but at the time of the inspection these had not been discussed as a formal agenda item.

58   Students' perceptions are monitored through completion of questionnaires on three occasions in the year. Their views are sought on the experience of applying to enter the college, how well courses are taught and the resources available for their use. However, the analysis of the questionnaires is inconsistently conducted at course and section level and there is little overall analysis.

59   Staff development is well managed. A thorough needs analysis is carried out based on interviews with each member of staff. Training

requests are analysed in relation to a list of the competences the college requires. Funding decisions are matched to staff development priorities. Recently, there has been an emphasis on the training of vocational assessors and verifiers. All course tutors have undergone some training on the college tutorial system. The budget available for staff development was £60,000 over the 16-month period to July 1994. This is equivalent to 0.5 per cent of the total budget but it under-represents the full expenditure on staff development since it does not include expenditure on replacement staff or the salaries of the staff development manager and other associated staff.

60   The college monitors the effectiveness of its staff development programme. It assesses lecturers' perceptions of the courses and events they attend. It has not yet considered the wider question of the impact of the staff development programme on the college as a whole. Staff development in information technology should be increased to enable lecturers to update their skills. More than 90 per cent of staff, including senior managers have received appraisal training. The process is now at a halt while progress is reviewed. At present, links between the existing staff development activities and the new appraisal system are weak.

61   There is a thorough process of induction for teaching staff. New staff have an initial induction meeting with senior managers, followed by regular weekly meetings throughout their first term. Experienced tutors assist new colleagues in tutorial work by acting as mentors.

RESOURCES

Staffing

62   Teaching staff are experienced, and appropriately qualified. Of the full-time staff, 85 per cent hold a teaching qualification. Recent part-time appointments in some curriculum areas include staff with significant industrial and commercial experience. It is the policy of the college to maintain a relatively high level of part-time lecturers. The college also employs some lecturing staff on fixed term contracts where there is uncertainty regarding demand for certain subject programmes. In some areas, the reliance on a high proportion of part-time and fixed contract staff places additional pressure on full-time subject lecturers and affects their ability to fulfil tutorial and administrative roles.

63   There is a relatively equal balance of men and women on the teaching staff but this is not mirrored in the composition of the senior management team. The college has taken some positive steps to recruit academic staff from minority ethnic groups who now comprise 6 per cent of the full-time establishment.

64   Administrative and technical support staff are well qualified. Their total number is adequate at present but there is a need for increased support in some areas and a development plan has been produced to meet this demand. A recent innovation has been the employment of teaching

support technicians who assist lecturers in practical areas where supervision is required.

Equipment/learning resources

65   The quality and quantity of equipment, furniture and teaching aids in classrooms is adequate. The range and quality of learning materials in most of the subject areas is good. The college is spending a significant amount on equipment to meet curriculum needs in the current year.

66   Methods for deciding the priorities for the replacement of equipment are in the early stages of development. Art and design equipment is heavily used and problems arise when breakdowns occur. In a number of subject areas, such as media studies, there is a need to upgrade and replace redundant equipment. Engineering equipment is becoming dated.

67   The library is centrally located at the main campus. There are no library facilities on the other sites. The library is well maintained and offers quiet study facilities. Staffing is adequate and library opening times during term and vacation periods are satisfactory. The library bookstock is small and compact discs, including CD-ROMS, are few. The allocated budget for books has been substantially increased this year.   The computerised library management system is unreliable.

68   The information technology equipment in the college is inadequate. Some of the equipment is becoming outdated. Although there is a comprehensive range of software available for students' use, little of it employs windows technology. This makes it difficult for students to gain knowledge and experience of modern software. The comprehensive information available on the use of equipment in the information technology centre shows that this area is heavily utilised during most of the college week and that resources are unable to meet the student demand. Staff do not have sufficient computers readily available to enable them to develop their own information technology skills.

Accommodation

69   The college is located on five sites within an eight mile radius of the main campus in Sutton Coldfield. The old art school complex is a listed building and the Sutton management centre is leased property. The buildings are a mixture of traditional and more recent prefabricated buildings, constructed at various times during this century. The external fabric of the buildings on four of the sites is good.

70   The college recognises as a high priority the need to extend its accommodation to meet its expected 25 per cent growth in student numbers over the next three years. There are imaginative plans to expand and improve the accommodation in order to support curriculum development. The college has purchased a design centre which has the potential to offer very good accommodation for art and design.

71   There is reasonable access for wheelchair users on the main campus but improvements are required on the other sites. The college is generally

well maintained and the size of the classrooms and other work areas is adequate. The open-study centre, information technology centre and the science areas provide good learning environments. Various room layouts need redesigning so that students have a clear view of blackboards and other teaching aids. A number of internal areas are drab in appearance and require decoration. The interiors of the old art school and the design centre are in a poor condition, but are now being refurbished extensively.

72   The college requires more detailed information on space utilisation in order to optimise its use of accommodation. Considerable repair and refurbishment have been undertaken, but the college has yet to establish a planned maintenance programme. Professional advisers have been appointed to produce an accommodation strategy by July 1994.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

73   The college is making progress towards achieving its mission to meet local and national education and training needs by providing a curriculum responsive to the needs of a wide range of students. The particular strengths of the college are:

- its successful recruitment

- the broad range of courses

- effective and responsive links with schools, industry and the local TEC

- sound strategic planning

- careful attention to finance

- successful teaching

- effective support and guidance for students

- satisfactory levels of student achievement on GCE A level and vocational courses

- well-qualified and experienced staff

- well-organised staff development

- imaginative development of buildings.

74   If the college is to continue its planned growth and further develop the quality and responsiveness of its provision, it should address the following issues:

- the effective development and implementation of cross-college policies

- clearer definition of management roles and responsibilities

- information on financial allocations and costings at department and section level

- the use of performance indicators to monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of curriculum provision

- improved procedures for ensuring the consistency of induction and tutorial support

- greater attention to the learning needs of individual students, especially those on foundation courses

- the lack of social facilities for students

- the inadequacies of the library book stock and the need for improved facilities for information technology

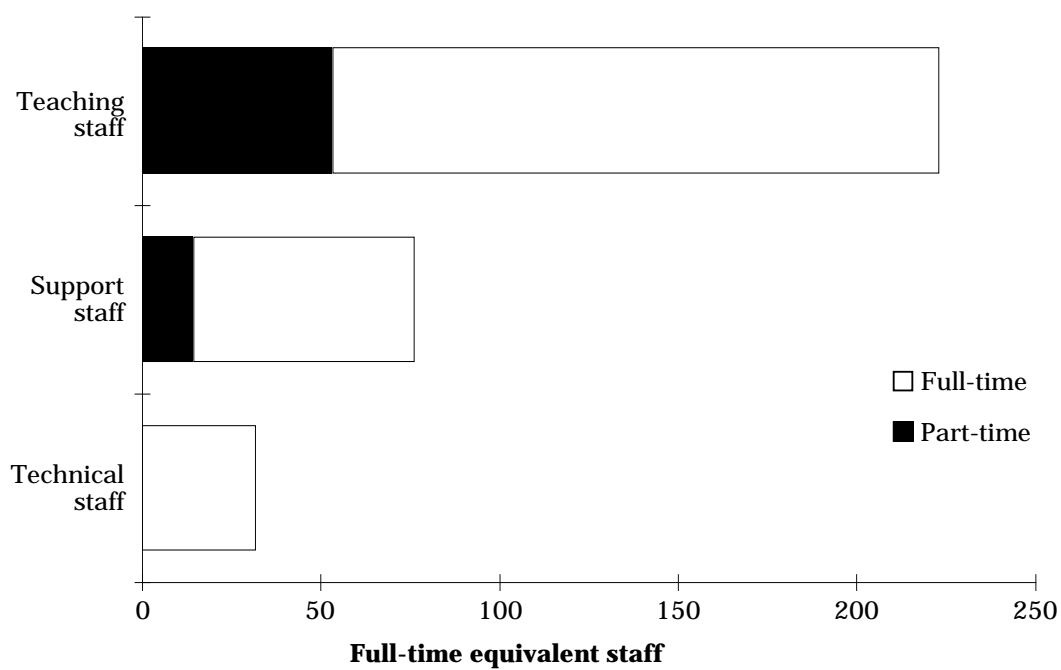- the further development of procedures and priorities for the replacement of equipment.

FIGURES

Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.
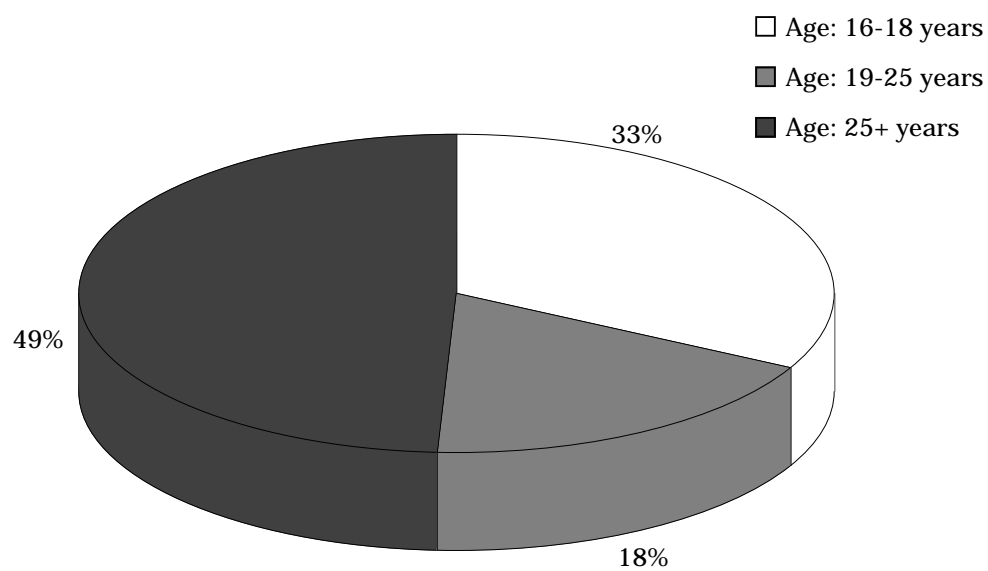
Figure 1

Sutton Coldfield College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)

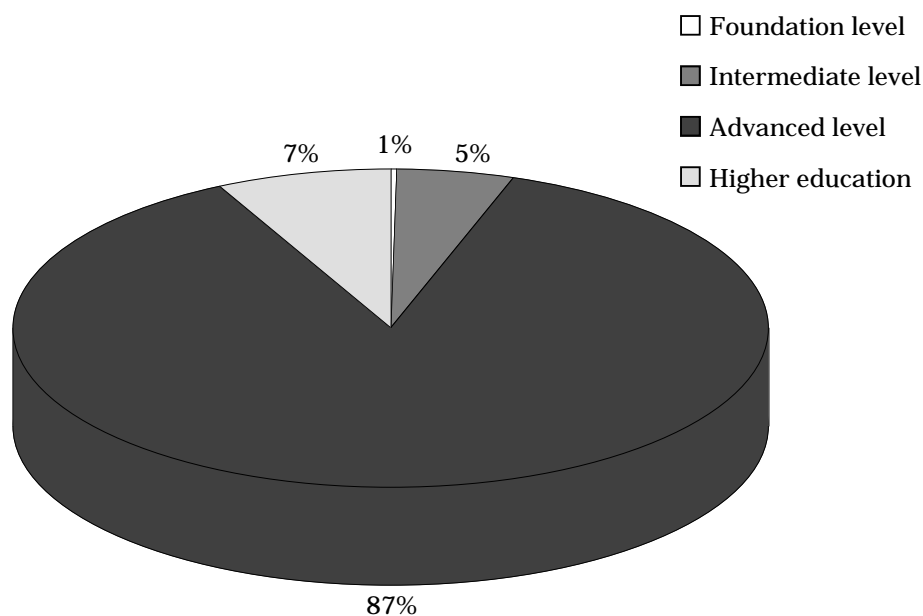Full-time equivalent staff: 332

Figure 2

Sutton Coldfield College: percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)


Enrolments: 9,827

Figure 3

Sutton Coldfield College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)

Legend:
- □ Foundation level
- ▨ Intermediate level
- ■ Advanced level
- ▧ Higher education

7%   1%   5%

87%

Enrolments: 9,827

Figure 4

Sutton Coldfield College: enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)

Full-time equivalent students

Legend:
- □ Full-time
- ■ Part-time
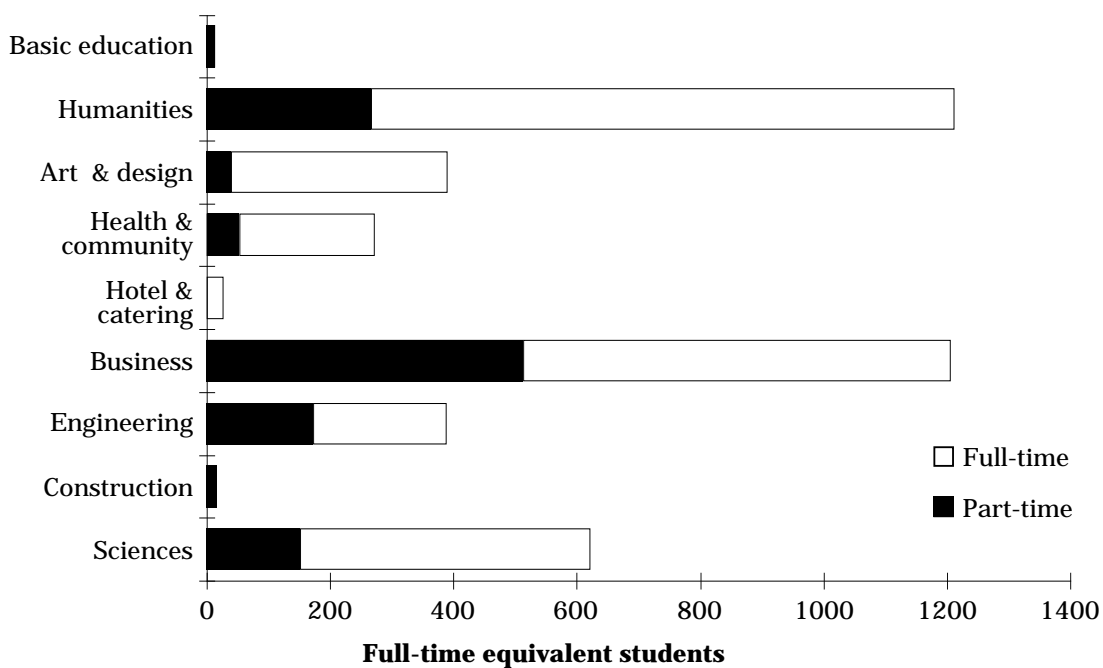
Full-time equivalent students: 4,151

Figure 5

Sutton Coldfield College: estimated income (16 months to July 1994)

Legend:
- ☐ FEFC
- ▦ Other
- ■ Higher education
- ☐ TEC
- ☐ LEA

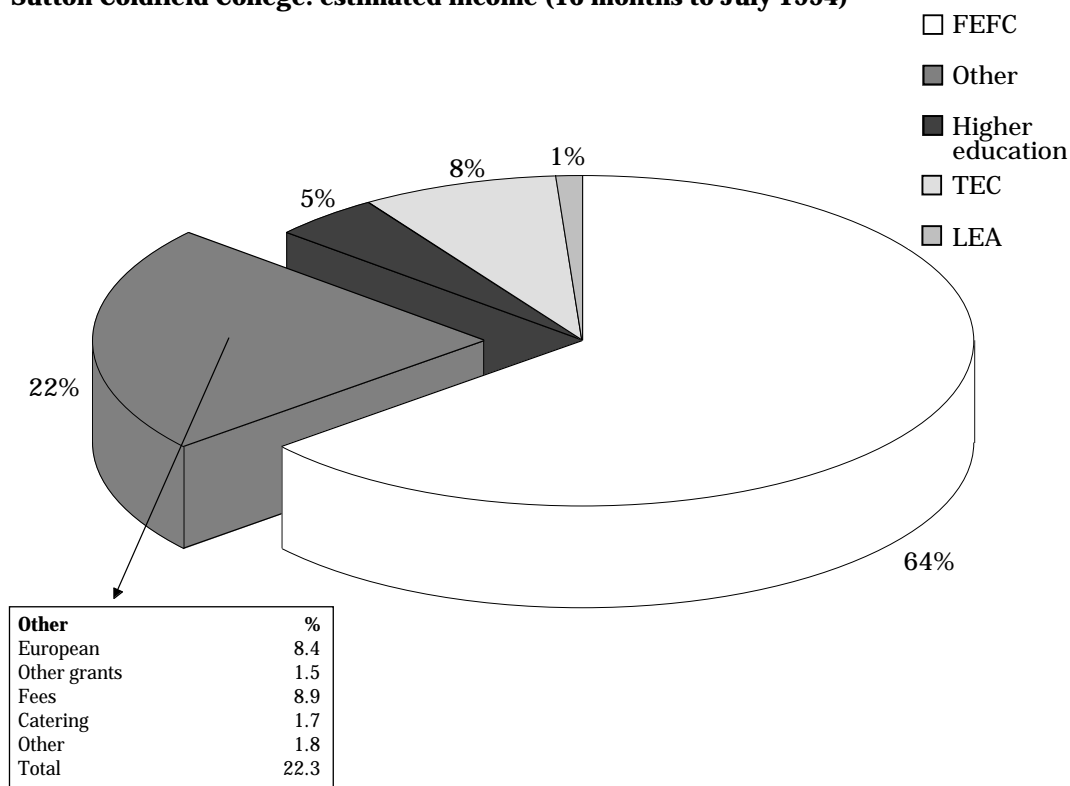| Other	%
European	8.4
Other grants	1.5
Fees	8.9
Catering	1.7
Other	1.8
Total	22.3

Figure 6

Sutton Coldfield College: estimated expenditure (16 months to July 1994)

Other pay 18%
Non-pay 30%
Teachers' pay 52%

Non-pay	%
Teaching departments	5.8
Teaching support	0.6
Staff development	0.5
Other support	1.1
Administration & central	3.9
General education	2.5
Premises	13.1
Catering	1.8
Miscellaneous	0.5
Total	29.8

Estimated expenditure: £12,629,000