Harlow College

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 127/95

HARLOW COLLEGE
EASTERN REGION
Inspected February-June 1995

Summary

Harlow College is a tertiary college with a strong commitment to serve the whole community. The wide range of general and vocational courses is effectively managed. Full-time students benefit from a comprehensive pastoral support system and an innovative programme of activities designed to broaden their experience. The principal and senior managers provide effective management and value the contribution of all staff. Staff are well qualified. There are high standards of teaching and learning in most subjects. Examination results on general education courses are good, but students' achievements on vocational courses are more variable. The resource-based learning workshops for mathematics and English are outstanding. Rapid developments have led to improved quality assurance procedures but too few performance standards have been specified and clear targets have yet to be set. The college should: develop curriculum and marketing strategies to increase adult participation; provide more reliable and comprehensive management information; assist the corporation in evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of the whole college; adopt procedures for systematically assessing and meeting the learning support needs of all students; replace outdated equipment; and improve the quality of some accommodation.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	2	Health and community care	2
		Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3
Construction and engineering	3	Art and design, performing arts	2
Business, management and administration	2	English, social studies	1
		Other humanities	2
Hospitality and catering, leisure and tourism	2	Adult basic education, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1   Harlow College, in Essex, was inspected between September 1994 and June 1995. Enrolment and induction were inspected in September 1994. Between February and May, 86 days were used to inspect curriculum areas. A further 42 days were used between 5 and 9 June for the inspection of cross-college aspects. A total of 337 teaching sessions were observed. Inspectors examined students' work and held discussions with staff, students, parents, members of the corporation and representatives from local schools, industry, the Essex Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and the community. They also scrutinised an extensive range of course information, minutes of committee meetings, college and faculty plans, and management reviews and reports.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2   Harlow College was established in 1984 as a tertiary college following the reorganisation of post-16 education in the town. The college is based on two sites close to the town centre. The east site is the larger and was formerly a secondary school; the west site was formerly Harlow Technical College. Most of the college's students are from Harlow and north-west Essex, although the catchment area also includes east Hertfordshire and north London. Other further education colleges in the surrounding area include Hertford Regional College, eight miles to the west, Epping Forest College, 15 miles to the south, Chelmsford College, 20 miles to the east, and Braintree College, 30 miles north-east of Harlow. Following the reorganisation of adult education in Essex in 1994, Harlow College sponsors further education provision on behalf of North and West Essex Adult Community College.

3   Essex has the largest school population of any county in England and also has the highest number of grant-maintained secondary schools. In the west Essex administrative area, which includes Harlow, Epping and Loughton, there are 11 secondary schools of which three have sixth forms. There are six secondary schools in the town of Harlow. Five are local education authority (LEA) maintained 11-16 schools. The sixth, St Mark's West Essex Roman Catholic School, is a grant-maintained comprehensive school with a sixth form. There are two secondary schools in Harlow with specialist provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In Essex, the percentage of 16 year olds continuing in full-time education has increased significantly from 54 per cent in 1990 to 71 per cent in 1994. There is, however, wide variation within the county, from 62 per cent at Basildon to 78 per cent at Chelmsford. In Harlow the participation rate is 73 per cent.

4   Major providers of higher education in Essex are the University of Essex, at Colchester; Anglia Polytechnic University, at Chelmsford; and Writtle College, which is a specialist college of agriculture and horticulture. The University of Hertfordshire is located across the county border on two

sites at Hertford and Hatfield. Harlow College has established links with Middlesex University, London.

5   In the 1991 census, the population of Essex was recorded as just over 1.5 million, including 74,600 resident in the Harlow district. Minority ethnic groups make up 3.6 per cent of the population. It is predicted that by the year 2015 there will be an increase of almost 40 per cent in those under 20 living in Essex. The Harlow district has good road links with the nearby M11, providing easy access to London. The M25 is only eight miles to the south. There are also good rail links with London and Cambridge. Over the last 10 years, employment in much of the local manufacturing industry has declined rapidly. However, employment opportunities are increasing in some industries, for example, research and development in pharmaceuticals. The distribution trade, hotels and the service sector provide major sources of employment in Harlow. In March 1995, the unemployment rate in the Hertford and Harlow travel-to-work area was 6.6 per cent.

6   At the time of inspection, 7,498 students were enrolled at the college. Of these 2,061 were full time and 5,437 were part time. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. There are 206 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 227 full-time equivalent support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7   The college's mission is to provide access to high-quality learning opportunities and to achieve excellence in the development of individuals within a professional, innovative, caring, and flexible college community.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8   The college offers a wide range of general and vocational programmes at a variety of levels from basic education to higher education. The majority of provision is at intermediate and advanced level. It includes courses for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), the General Certificate of Education advanced supplementary/advanced level (GCE AS/A level) and General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Thirty subjects are offered at GCE A level, 28 at GCSE and there are courses in 10 GNVQ programme areas. College policy is to offer, whenever possible, syllabuses in which the subject matter can be studied through discrete modules. These are popular with students because assessment takes place throughout the course as the units are completed. The college is also responding positively to student demand by introducing more GNVQ programmes and, as a consequence, reducing the number of GCSE courses. The vocational provision includes a good range of Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) programmes at first and national diploma levels and some at higher national level. There are also a significant number of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1, 2 and 3 and a number of other vocational awards relevant to specific occupations.

9   There is a good range of provision for adults and young people with learning difficulties. For example, in the present session, an integrated foundation level programme called 'Skills Plus', designed to cover foundation level core skills and practical skills, has enrolled over 100 students across nine vocational areas. Opportunities for part-time adult students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to progress to other programmes are limited.

10   In all, the college has 70 full-time programmes covering all the major vocational areas. The range of courses in business and secretarial studies, leisure and tourism, and media and journalism is comprehensive. For example, in journalism there are three full-time programmes; a one-year pre-entry programme in newspaper journalism, a BTEC higher national diploma and a 20-week post-graduate course. The college also satisfies several specialist markets. For example there are full-time courses in floristry, preparation for careers in the uniformed services and a BTEC national diploma in popular music. In some areas there is potential to increase the range, for example in hairdressing where NVQ level 3 is not presently offered. In other areas there has been insufficient demand to sustain the full range of courses that the college has previously offered. For example, the range of programmes in engineering has declined as the local manufacturing base has contracted.

11   There is also a wide range of day and evening courses for part-time students in most curriculum areas. Language provision is strong, for example Russian, Japanese and Portuguese are offered in addition to the main European languages. In health and social care, the lack of part-time routes for the National Nursery Examinations Board (NNEB) diploma and the BTEC national diploma in caring services reduces flexibility and accessibility, particularly for mature students. In order to increase the range of attendance patterns, the college has established a portfolio of Saturday courses. In all, some 38 Saturday courses are offered including seven GCSE subjects. The information technology courses are particularly popular. The college also offers 88 programmes of study by open learning. These are particularly suitable for people who cannot attend regularly at a fixed time. In the current session over 350 students have chosen this mode of study. A range of short summer courses is offered in most curriculum areas. Some are tasters for vocational areas, some are for personal interest and some lead to formal qualifications.

12   In September 1994, the college introduced a modular curricula in which the teaching programme is divided into three trimesters, each of 11 weeks. This has assisted the college in its aim to provide programmes of study which meet the needs of individual students. In some programme areas, for example business administration, students are able to gain formal accreditation for their prior achievements and then choose an individual programme from the range of modules available. The modularised approach also facilitates individual access to additional units

and qualifications. For example, in the current session, over 50 GNVQ students are additionally studying for a GCE A level and a few GCE A level students are taking GNVQ units.

13   The college has good links with Middlesex University, Anglia Polytechnic University and a number of other higher education institutions. It offers a diverse range of higher education programmes including journalism, business studies, electronics, science, social studies, management, counselling and teacher training. Some of these are foundation degree modules. It also has a credit transfer project, supported by the Further Education Development Agency, which has assisted the progression of students studying environmental science from GCE A level to the environmental science higher national diploma or degree at Suffolk College.

14   Adult students make up 54 per cent of the college's enrolments. Among the courses specifically designed to meet their needs is a successful modular 'flexi-sec' office skills programme which recruited over 500 students during the 1994-95 session. For adults who wish to gain entry to higher education but do not have GCE A levels, there is a modular access programme. There is potential to increase student numbers on the access programme and also to improve adult participation in some vocational areas, for example, health and social care and catering. The college has major contracts with Essex TEC and the Department of Employment for the provision of youth training and the community action scheme, respectively. The latter provides work experience and resources for job searching for unemployed adults. In addition to its own adult provision, the college sponsors North and West Essex Adult Community College and useful links between the two institutions are developing. The college also has a small contract with Essex LEA to provide community provision for the over 50s.

15   There are good links with local employer groups. For example, the college is a member of the Harlow and District Employers Group and the Harlow Education and Industry Forum. At programme level, links are variable. For example, links with work experience providers are good but there are few active advisory panels, or other ways for employers to contribute to curriculum issues. Full-cost short courses and a consultancy service are provided for industry. The needs of several large companies are met by delivering courses on company premises, for example in languages, information technology and supervisory management. However, in some programme areas, full-cost work is limited. In engineering and hairdressing, for example, there has been little attempt to identify market needs. Two staff have been appointed recently to generate and maintain links with companies.

16   Close links exist with seven local partner schools and staff at the schools express a high regard for the college. The college offers some provision for school pupils, for example in Latin and in art. There is a

Saturday 'masterclass' in mathematics for interested school pupils. The principal and other senior staff are members of a number of joint school/college committees, working groups and school governing bodies. The schools and the college seek to maintain a coherent framework for 5-18 education in Harlow. They work effectively together to ease the transfer of students from school to college. The transition is assisted by a range of events including open days, taster days and parents evenings.

17   The college places a high priority on its links with the community and makes many worthwhile contributions. Several of these involve work with disadvantaged or under-represented groups. For example, English tuition is provided within the Chinese community to parents and grandparents of children at a local school. The college, with a number of other agencies, has set up the Harlow Partnership Against Poverty. It is looking at issues of poverty in relation to students. Another college project is the Harlow Family Literacy Initiative which encourages parents to develop their literacy and numeracy skills with their children. Several overseas links exist, including exchanges with Harlow's twin towns in France and Czechoslovakia.

18   The marketing strategy is set out in the strategic plan. It is supported by key objectives for industry, community liaison, schools liaison, events and market research. To date market research has been limited, its focus being on internal customer surveys rather than surveys of specific external markets. The recently-appointed marketing staff have made good progress in promoting the college, but it is too early to assess the results of their work. The college prospectus is well produced and complemented by detailed full-time and part-time course lists. These documents are detailed and may appear daunting to some potential students. There has been little targeting of specific groups of adults.

19   A task group is responsible for the implementation of the college's equal opportunities policy. The task group has set out clear objectives and recommendations and a recent review indicates that progress has been made towards achieving many of these. For example, course information sheets have been produced in several languages and work has been carried out to avoid stereotypes in learning support materials. Several groups are under represented in the college including young white unemployed males, women from minority ethnic groups and students with physical disabilities.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20   The corporation board has 15 members including the principal. Care is taken to ensure that the membership is representative of the community and that it has an appropriate range of professional expertise. There are nine independent members. Seven are senior members of local businesses including two from the legal and accountancy professions and another with expertise in personnel management. One member is nominated by

the Essex TEC and one is the general manager of the local district council. Community interests are also represented by the head of a local 11-16 school and by a member with a background in the health education service. Four of the board members are female but there is no-one from a minority ethnic group. There is no independent member from higher education, though the principal is a governor of Middlesex University. There are two elected staff members, one from the support staff and one from the teaching staff. There is also a student member.

21   The corporation has three main committees: finance and policy, personnel, and audit. In addition, there are remuneration and search committees and an advisory committee on health and safety. A separate finance committee was not established at the time of incorporation, the aim being that as much business as possible should be discussed by the full corporation. However, financial and resource management matters received limited attention and following a review of the committee structures, the finance and policy committee was established and held its first meeting in November 1994. Financial reporting to the corporation has developed and become more comprehensive. The corporation is now more appropriately informed about the college's financial position.

22   The corporation has a clear view of its responsibility towards the staff and students of the college and the local community. Importance is attached to maintaining the breadth of the college curriculum and sustaining the college's ability to serve the needs of the community. It considers, and where necessary approves, all significant matters affecting the operation of the college such as the strategic plan, the budget, the revised management structure, accommodation strategy and new contracts for teaching staff. However, the corporation has not established procedures which enable it to monitor the overall effectiveness and quality of college activities. For example, it has not yet specified a full range of performance indicators and associated targets. Routine reporting of measures of performance to the corporation is limited to quarterly financial reports and examinations results. It has recently identified criteria which will enable it to monitor its own performance.

23   There are regular meetings between the chair of the corporation and the principal. An effective and supportive working relationship exists between the corporation and the senior management team. A series of training events has enabled members of the corporation to develop a thorough understanding of their responsibilities. In order to further assist members of the corporation in their understanding of college provision and the issues it is facing, arrangements have recently been made for board members to be linked with the work of each of the assistant principals.

24   In order for the college to operate more efficiently and to meet increasing competition, a revised management organisation was implemented for the start of the 1994-95 academic year. The

reorganisation mainly affected the senior staff reporting to the principalship but it also clarified reporting relationships and lines of responsibility for other staff. There are now eight assistant principals reporting to the principalship, which comprises the principal, deputy principal and vice-principal. Together they form the college's executive group. Four assistant principals are heads of faculty and are responsible for the delivery of the curriculum. The four other assistant principals are responsible for cross-college functions. Regular meetings of the executive group assist in the effective communication of management decisions; they are supported by clear agenda and minutes which identify those responsible for taking required actions.

25   The three-year strategic plan and detailed operating statements for the whole college are drafted by the principalship and approved by the corporation. The college plan contains clear objectives and measurable enrolment targets. It is built up from the one-year operating and action plans which are drawn up by each section and faculty. However, section and faculty plans contain an insufficient range of targets to enable levels of achievement to be monitored. For example, targets for retention and student pass rates are not clearly identified. A coherent cycle of planning and evaluation has been established and responsibilities for contributing to the planning processes have been defined. The executive group has reviewed progress against the targets in the strategic plan and reported their conclusions to the corporation. There has been wide consultation and involvement of teaching staff in strategic planning but non-teaching staff have had limited involvement. A summary of the plan has been distributed to all staff.

26   Within each faculty, courses are managed by programme leaders supported by curriculum teams. Courses and subjects are grouped to form sections. Section leaders are responsible for the operational management of teaching and learning resources to support the curriculum. Senior tutors are appointed within each faculty and work with section leaders to manage and develop the process of monitoring, recording and reporting the progress of students within a faculty. Senior tutors direct and support the work of a team of programme or personal tutors. The roles and responsibilities within faculties are clearly stated and understood by all staff. There is effective management of both the curriculum and the students. Courses and subject areas are efficiently administered and course documentation is comprehensive and well organised. Regular meetings are held and communication between section leaders and senior tutors is good. Overall, the sections are well managed and staff are effectively deployed to support students and the curriculum.

27   The committee structure was reformed with the reorganisation of the college management. The academic board has been reconstituted and is central to the quality assurance framework. The board has 23 members of whom 11 are ex-officio, two are students and the remainder are elected

by the staff. Members of the executive group are a minority of the board. Faculty management is represented by deputy heads of faculty who have a shared responsibility with the assistant principals for the operation of the college's quality procedures. The board is advisory to the principalship but informs policy and provides a valuable forum for debate and exchange. It has two subcommittees which report to it on matters relating to course approval, and course review and evaluation. It also sets up short term task groups, working to an agreed timescale, to report to it on specific projects. These groups are valued by staff and enable them to be involved in consultation and decision making on changes which affect the operation of the college.

28   The college is managed in a way which encourages all staff to contribute to the development of policies and procedures. There are effective arrangements for informing staff about developments through meetings of the academic board and through management meetings at section, faculty and senior management levels. The principalship provides positive leadership and members are seen as accessible by college staff. Communication is facilitated by regular college development days, newsletters and open seminars held by the principal. Staff welcome and appreciate the efforts to keep them informed. The changes to college structure and working practices have been carefully managed and effective team working has been successfully encouraged at all levels.

29   The college failed to reach its growth target in the academic year 1993-94 and a more modest target was set for 1994-95. At the time of the inspection in June 1995, the college was expecting to exceed this target. In 1994-95 the average level of funding is £18.82 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £18.17 per unit. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) recurrent funding is forecast to form 75 per cent of the total college income for 1994-95. FEFC income is supplemented by TEC and Department for Education contracts, and some full-cost course provision income. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The principalship receives monthly management reports showing income and expenditure to date, a forecast out-turn for the year, and the balance sheet position. The corporation approved the budget for the current year.

30   There is a comprehensive strategy for the development of the college focused on curriculum initiatives and on improving the experience of students. The college has maintained investment in resources for curriculum delivery where this has been necessary to sustain and improve the quality of provision. However, limited consideration has been given to monitoring efficiency or value for money. Existing allocations to the sections for materials and part-time staff hours are made mainly on a historical basis. The introduction of a modular curricula has provided an opportunity for resources to be more closely linked to courses and student

numbers. The resources required for the implementation of the strategic plan can also be analysed and monitored more systematically. A resource model has been developed which the college intends to use to devolve budget management to section he ads.

31   The college has introduced a number of other initiatives to increase efficiency. It is actively pursuing an accommodation strategy to bring all facilities together on one site in order to reduce operating costs. New flexible contracts have been negotiated for all teaching staff. Development of curriculum support roles and the introduction of client advisers have enabled more efficient use of teaching staff time. The staff-development programme has assisted in ensuring staff have the skills to perform their appointed tasks effectively.

32   The college has identified inadequacies in the present management information system. For example, information on student enrolments, retention and destinations is collected but is insufficiently co-ordinated and not always available when it would assist decision making. Course completions and examination pass rates are monitored and performances compared with national averages. There is an information request service but little routine reporting of information to managers. Only expenditure data are reported routinely to budget holders.

33   There is a computer network and a number of independent computer applications to support finance, personnel and student-related functions but there is no computer support for preparing registers or monitoring attendance. Computer-based systems for curriculum management are not well developed. Faculties and sections receive little information to enable them to monitor the efficiency with which they use their resources. For example, not all budget holders have computer access to information on their own budgets. There is limited sharing of data between computer systems, for example, between information on student applications and enrolments.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

34   The college has an effective admissions policy. The provision of advice and information both before and during enrolment assists students in making an informed and usually appropriate choice of learning programme. The process of recruitment and admission is well planned and includes opportunities for 15 and 16 year olds from schools to visit the college for taster days; visits to schools by college staff; and pre-college careers information and advice provided by college staff working closely with the Essex Careers and Business Partnership.

35   The college has recently appointed a team of 'client advisers' in order to provide a rapid and comprehensive response to enquiries from potential students. Faculty advisory teams are being formed to co-ordinate the admissions process and ensure effective co-ordination between the centralised admissions service and teaching faculties. Staff training is being undertaken to develop these useful initiatives further.

36   There is an extensive and well-organised induction programme for full-time students which includes an opportunity for students to reconsider and, where necessary, change their course. The induction process is regularly reviewed and a project team plans further improvements to it. For example, a comprehensive college-wide approach for induction to GNVQ programmes has been developed. All part-time students, including those attending evening classes, also have a planned induction programme.

37   During induction, students are made aware of the availability of support services, including support for basic skills and study skills. They are also provided with a student services handbook which summarises the comprehensive range of services available. These include a nursery; financial information/advice; accommodation information; medical and health promotion services; confidential professional counselling; and referral to a range of other agencies/services. The services are well used and valued by students. There are good links with local voluntary organisations. In addition, a local authority youth counselling service is available, located in the student block.

38   Students make extensive use of the well-developed arrangements for accreditation of prior learning in business administration. Accreditation of students' prior learning is also being used by an increasing number of students on management courses and the scheme is gradually being extended to include courses in leisure, hair and beauty and catering.

39   Advice on careers is available to all students throughout their courses. It includes information and guidance on employment and higher education opportunities. A full-time adult guidance worker and four other members of the college careers education and guidance team provide a free guidance service for adults within the community as well as for adult students.

40   Personal support for full-time students is provided by a well-developed tutorial system which operates effectively and is valued by students. All full-time students have a personal tutor and timetabled tutorials. National records of achievement are maintained but there is some variation in the quality of recording. All full-time students are involved in action planning, setting their own learning objectives in consultation with tutors and evaluating their achievements. Progress is closely monitored and regularly reviewed. Part-time students have a designated tutor and tutorial periods are usually timetabled. Some part-time students do not have a scheduled opportunity to meet with their tutor either on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. However, they are appreciative of the level of informal support provided by staff.

41   Personal tutors work together to improve the pastoral and administrative support for students. For example in developing procedures to ensure that students receive an induction programme which is of a consistently high standard and improving the design and content of tutorial programmes. Monitoring the performance and progress of individual students is given a high priority.

42   All first-year full-time students, who are under 19 years of age, are expected to participate in an innovative and well-managed personal enhancement programme for 1.5 hours each week. The aim is to help students broaden their outlook and increase their confidence and self-reliance. The programme is accredited by the Essex Open College Federation. Students can also take part in a programme of optional studies called 'electives'. These include sporting and creative elements as well as opportunities to participate in community and personally challenging activities. Each student has a personal enhancement programme tutor who may liaise informally with personal tutors. Most students value and enjoy participating in this broad and balanced programme of enrichment activities. However, the personal enhancement programme, 'electives' and careers education programmes are not sufficiently integrated and the relationship of these to the tutorial programme is unclear.

43   Attendance on learning programmes is closely and effectively monitored. There is a clear policy and follow-up procedures are promptly and consistently applied. For example, engineering employers are notified of part-time students who are absent on the same day. Full-time students who are absent are contacted at home within hours. Students' perceptions are that attendance at personal enhancement programme sessions is not as vigorously monitored. Lateness in arriving for classes is addressed less consistently. There is no college-wide policy or agreed system for dealing with lack of punctuality and the disruption to learning which sometimes results.

44   Some students have their need for additional basic literacy, numeracy or study skills support identified during admission or induction. These needs are met in a variety of ways including one-to-one and small group tutoring, participation in adult basic skills programmes, and in-class support by a specialist tutor. The support provided is fully documented and closely monitored. A number of staff have attended an accredited training programme in the development of basic skills support. The college has recently gained the Basic Skills Agency quality standard for its basic skills provision. However, the initial screening of basic skills does not take place in all curriculum areas. The college intends to develop a more systematic procedure for identifying and responding to students' needs for additional support.

45   The college has made effective arrangements to ensure that a range of specialist support services for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is available. These include educational psychology and expertise relating to hearing impairment. Communicator support is available during the day and in the evenings. An integral part of the induction of new staff is to raise their awareness of disability needs.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

46   Inspectors observed a total of 337 teaching sessions. The majority of the teaching was judged to be of a high standard. The strengths outweighed

the weaknesses in 76 per cent of the sessions inspected. This is significantly better than the national figure reported in the 1993-94 *Chief Inspector's Annual Report*. The weaknesses outweighed the strengths in only 4 per cent of sessions. The following table summarises the grades given for the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		16	31	7	0	0	54
GCSE		3	11	3	1	0	18
GNVQ		10	22	17	3	0	52
NVQ		6	29	10	3	0	48
Access		4	5	1	1	0	11
Basic education		3	16	5	1	0	25
BTEC		11	30	4	2	0	47
C&G		1	3	3	0	0	7
Other vocational		12	29	15	1	0	57
Other		8	7	2	1	0	18
Total		**74**	**183**	**67**	**13**	**0**	**337**

47   In almost all of the classes inspected teachers displayed a thorough understanding of their subjects and this contributed to their confident and clear exposition. Teachers had well-written schemes of work and lessons were well planned. To support each course comprehensive programme management files have been developed. These contain schemes of work, course organisation details, timetables, evaluations and other course performance indicators. Rapport between staff and students was generally good. This helped generate enthusiasm and often resulted in a productive attitude to learning. Teachers frequently asked questions to check the level of students' understanding.

48   Students were encouraged to make use of the good range of resource-based learning workshops that are available in eight subjects. Some students used these facilities to develop their numeracy, communication and information technology core skills. However, insufficient demands were made of students on general education courses to develop their information technology skills.

49   Science teachers gave students clear objectives at the beginning of lessons. Students benefited from a variety of methods of working. However, in some two hour lessons activities were insufficiently varied and students became bored. Good use was made of the increasing library of learning materials designed to support students working on their own. Examination of marking records revealed that there was some lack of rigour in chasing-up work that students had failed to submit.

50   In computing, wide use was made of graded exercises. Learning materials which allowed students to work at their own pace with effective support from teachers proved popular and successful with adult students. Informal tests, exercises and regular assignments were used to check students' progress. The quality of teachers' comments on students' written work was consistently good. However, some elements of the computing curriculum were not appropriate to the level of the course. Professional program design disciplines were not being fully developed and students were not gaining experience of some standard analysis and design techniques.

51   Mathematics teaching was generally effective. Two workshops provided a stimulating environment to support student learning. Teachers used an appropriate range of teaching methods; for example, puzzles and competitions were used to generate and sustain students' interest in mathematics. However, students' marked work often lacked written comments from teachers to help them improve their performance.

52   In construction, teachers maintained a good balance between requiring students to sit and listen and offering them opportunities to develop their own ideas. In practical classes, students displayed interest, were well motivated and worked at a good pace. The up-to-date experience of part-time teachers enabled them to relate the curriculum to modern industrial practice but some of these teachers need more support in preparing and delivering lessons.

53   The variety of teaching and learning activities found in engineering was typified by the approach used in one of the engineering classes inspected. Electrical installation students were examining the use of a special cable often used for fire alarm circuits. The well-prepared lesson began with an introduction from the teacher using overhead transparencies and handouts. Students were then shown a video outlining the advantages of the cable. The lecturer went on to demonstrate the methods and tools employed to make connections using this type of cable. Throughout the lesson students asked a number of sensible questions. The session concluded with the students completing a question sheet designed to assess the level of their understanding. In a few engineering classes students spent too much time copying from the board or taking dictation and in some classes not all the students were sufficiently challenged by the work they were asked to do.

54   On secretarial and administration courses well-produced, good-quality handouts were used to support lectures and assignments. The method and pace of delivery were generally appropriate. Access to appropriate information technology was poor but the college has addressed this issue during the course of the inspection. In a small number of sessions staff spent too much of the lesson on course administration tasks. Students with learning difficulties were generally well supported although the

content of one lesson was inappropriate for these students. On business and finance courses, team teaching was effective and provided stimulating opportunities for students. The integration of work on language skills with other aspects of vocational programmes was effective and supported by a new workshop. The timetable for some students had too many large gaps and this contributed to absences and some demotivation. Teachers in management and professional studies gave particularly clear explanations to students and made good use of marker boards and overhead transparencies. Groupwork was used effectively to provide students with the opportunity to learn from each others' practical experiences.

55   In hospitality and catering, teachers planned BTEC courses to provide students with opportunities to develop good research, analytical and evaluative skills. Oral feedback to students on their performances in class was of a high standard. Students were encouraged to develop creative skills and were frequently praised for their work. Assessment tasks were not always pitched at a suitable level for students. For example, some briefs were not fully understood and this resulted in low levels of achievement and loss of interest. The quality of teachers' written comments on scripts varied. The progress of NVQ students towards completion of the award was carefully monitored. Application of number and communication skills development were fully integrated with vocational work. In leisure and tourism work was set regularly and in most cases returned promptly with supportive comments. The assessments were well structured and set at an appropriate level.

56   Teachers in health and community care provided good opportunities for students to learn. In one of the childcare classes students were exploring positive images. The teacher had obtained over 50 publications which the students, working in small groups, critically analysed for examples of prejudice, stereotypes and positive or negative discrimination. The exercise generated searching discussion. Teachers have designed practical laboratory work to encourage students to think critically and develop their understanding of biological concepts. Their feedback on written assignments was constructive and students' responses indicated that they found the comments helpful. The comments provided on the forms for recording the assessment of competences were less detailed. In hairdressing, the teaching was of a good standard. There was effective use of teaching aids.

57   The work in art and design was carefully organised to meet the needs of students wishing to continue their education, as well as those wishing to gain the skills required for employment. Teachers produced imaginative and challenging briefs for students' projects. On the graphic design programme there was insufficient attention to visual studies and observational drawing. Teachers provided students with prompt, constructive feedback on their work. Students were also provided with

examples of excellent work and challenged to think about their own work and the work of others in relation to these. In performing arts the quality of most of the teaching was good and students made obvious progress. In a dance movement class for students from a local special school who had severe physical disabilities and learning difficulties, there was patient teaching and a high level of support from regular helpers and volunteer students. The work required was at an appropriate level and made real demands upon the students. Poor levels of achievement were accepted in a small minority of classes.

58   Students of English were taught to develop analytical, creative and research skills. The teaching was well structured. Students were trained to approach the subject in a disciplined manner while at the same time, developing their own responses. GCE A level students were given course study packs written by the staff. These were attractively produced and offered students a range of critical ideas and clear examples of ways to analyse and respond to poetry and prose. Where necessary other students had good opportunities to develop their core skills using the excellent provision in the English workshop. In psychology and sociology teachers were enthusiastic, well informed and up to date with their material. Students were involved in a variety of activities and had good opportunities to express their own ideas and to discuss issues. Teachers' use of good overhead transparencies and/or effective board work helped to develop students' understanding of key issues.

59   The teaching in history and government was lively and inventive, and there were many occasions on which subjects were discussed with an infectious enthusiasm. Students were provided with study guides that clearly indicated course requirements and assessment criteria. In a history class on Pride's Purge and the execution of Charles I, a discussion on why these events occurred was linked to an outline of the various assessment levels used by the examination board together with an analysis of the work students had already carried out. In GCE A level German, Portuguese and Russian, language teaching was conducted mainly in the language being learned. Many of the teachers were native speakers. In BTEC and GNVQ language provision, teachers acted as facilitators and helped students to take some responsibility for their own learning. There was less evidence of this in GCSE and GCE A level provision. In some evening classes, there was insufficient use of the foreign language. On tutor training courses and access to higher education courses, there was good interaction between students and teacher. Teachers dealt sensitively with students' queries and gave good explanations. The assessment process was well documented and known to students. Feedback to students did not always indicate the reasons why a particular grade had been awarded. A limited range of teaching aids was used on the access courses.

60   On courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities teachers sought every opportunity to develop students' adult status.

Teaching styles were appropriately varied to meet the wide variety of needs. Good classroom relationships enabled teachers to offer students honest criticism of their work, general attitudes and behaviour. Students in turn felt able to identify and ask for the support that they required. In a minority of lessons, students were insufficiently challenged and there was an excessive reliance on worksheets.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

61   Students enjoy their studies and speak positively about their learning Experiences. Most students are motivated, well behaved and study in a purposeful manner. On many courses, students are required to take some degree of responsibility for their own learning. They carry out practical work competently and with a high regard to safety. In some subject areas, core skills are not sufficiently developed and there is a need for students to develop a greater familiarity with, and competence in the use of, information technology.

62   In 1994, the college entered 301 students aged 16-18 for GCE AS or GCE A level examinations. They achieved an average point score per entry of 4.0, (where A=10, E=2). Based on this performance measure, the college is among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector in the 1994 tables published by the Department for Education. Students achieved an average point score per candidate of 10.9, slightly above the national average for further education colleges of 10.7. The GCE A level pass rate at grades A-E was 81 per cent which is significantly better than the national average for candidates aged 16-18 in general further education colleges. Seventy-seven per cent of the 126 students aged 16-18 in their final year of study were successful on the vocational courses included in the tables published by the Department for Education. This places the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Investigations by the college revealed that this disappointing result was largely due to the poor performance of one group of students. Remedial action is already leading to improved performance by students in the subsequent year of the course.

63   In 1994, the pass rates in many GCE A level subjects were good and some were outstanding. All the students entered for the examination passed in classical civilisation, dance, English literature, government and politics, history (Cambridge syllabus), media studies, further mathematics, and religious studies. The average percentage of GCE A level passes at the higher grades, A-C, was 43 per cent, compared with a provisional figure for all general further education colleges of 37 per cent.

64   In mathematics, the percentage of students passing GCE A level has risen consistently over the past three years. Similarly the percentage of students retaking GCSE mathematics and gaining passes at grades A-C is good and has improved over time, though the proportion of grades A and B is lower than might be expected. Written work indicated that the majority

of students are able to respond at an appropriate level but in class discussions students were slow to respond when questioned. Students' achievements in BTEC science courses and in GCE A level biology and environmental science have been good. Results in GCE A level physics and chemistry were below the national average. Science GCSE results have generally been good. However, retention rates in some GCE A level science subjects have been poor. In computing, GCE A level and GCSE examination pass rates are consistently good and well above national averages. However, vocational course pass rates over the last three years on both the BTEC first diploma and national diploma courses in computer studies have been below national norms. For example, in 1994 only 50 per cent of students passed the first diploma. Retention rates have also been poor on some computing courses.

65   There were examples of some good practical and assignment work produced by construction craft and technician students. Examination pass rates for NVQ brickwork were good but those for the pilot year of the GNVQ advanced were poor. The overall pass rates for engineering are equal to or better than national averages. In 1994 the pass rate on the BTEC first diploma in automobile engineering was 77 per cent; on the first diploma in engineering it was 73 per cent. Both results are significantly better than the national pass rates.

66   In the secretarial and administration section, successful completion rates for NVQs are at or above national averages with the exception of part-time NVQ level 2 where the successful completion rate in 1994 was 39 per cent. In the business and finance section the percentage of GCSE accountancy students gaining a pass at grades A-C was 86 per cent, almost twice the national average, but the percentage of those passing business studies at grades A-C was below the national average. GNVQ advanced business students achieved an 84 per cent pass in external tests. However, there was some inconsistency in decisions on internally-assessed work. The college is addressing this issue through its staff-development programme. At the time of the subject inspection, there was some outdated and limited information technology provision on the east site which was preventing students gaining the skills required for industry and commerce. Some new equipment has since been installed. In business and management studies students' classwork and homework was generally of a good standard. Students have achieved high levels of success on internally examined management programmes. For example, all students completing the higher national certificate programme during the last three years have achieved at least a pass grade. On external courses, pass rates have been close to national averages.

67   Catering students developed good practical skills in both kitchen and restaurant sessions; these are further developed during their work experience. Results in BTEC national diploma and NVQ levels 1 and 2 for the 16-18 age group were at about the national average but the

achievements of part-time students at NVQ level 2 were poor. The retention rate on the GNVQ advanced course was low. Examination pass rates were good both on vocational and GCE courses. However, few students gained higher grades. Students worked well using structured worksheets but there was little opportunity for more extended learning. Students on vocational courses were unable to develop their information technology skills owing to the limited availability of equipment.

68   Students in health and community care attained good standards on BTEC and NNEB programmes. On the GNVQ course the level of achievement was satisfactory. Teachers' comments on marked work were generally too brief and insufficient attention was paid to the correction of spelling and grammatical errors. Students were assessed rigorously during their work placements. On NVQ programmes in hairdressing and in beauty therapy retention rates and standards of achievement varied considerably between full-time and part-time students. For example, in 1994 all part-time body massage students were successful in gaining their qualifications but just over half of the full-time NVQ level 2 hairdressing students completed the course and only 21 per cent gained the award. An action plan was produced to try to improve the learning outcomes and steps taken to monitor the progress of students more rigorously. Examination of the pass rate for the current session indicates a significant improvement in students' performance.

69   In art and design, portfolios of the students' work were well presented, contained a broad range of work and displayed evidence of steady development. Retention rates, and examination results were good; almost 90 per cent of students starting BTEC foundation and national courses were successful. On media courses the quality of work is generally of a high standard. Students are mutually supportive and work well within groups. Retention rates are also good; on the BTEC national diploma in graphic design it is 96 per cent. Students' progression to higher education is generally below the national average as a significant proportion of students choose to enter employment. In photography, the percentage of full-time students achieving their target qualifications has been poor and the course is being phased out. An alternative part-time course has been started and students' performance has significantly improved.

70   Over the past two years, almost all students on the BTEC national diploma courses in performing arts have achieved their qualification. Recent examination results of GCE A level and GCSE students in drama and music have been equal to or below national averages. In music there were high quality individual performances from some students. In dance, most students achieved high levels in individual performance and also displayed a good understanding of the Laban system of dance notation. GCE A level courses have good course completion rates. There is also a high retention rate on the pre-entry and post-graduate journalism courses but a significant proportion of students have difficulty successfully

completing all modules while at college. There has been a decline in results in GCSE and GCE A level film studies over the last three years.

71   Humanities students generally perform well in examinations. English GCE A level examination results are above the national average for general further education colleges. At GCSE the pass results grades A-C are very similar to the national average. In psychology and sociology the percentage of students achieving GCE A level passes at grades A-C is consistently higher than the national average. GCSE results in psychology, sociology and geography are generally satisfactory. In government and politics and history, GCE A level results for full-time students are generally above the national averages and in history they are significantly better. In the modern languages section, examination results at GCE A level have been consistently good in German. Results in French have varied considerably over the past two years but are generally less satisfactory; the pass rate at grades A-C is similar to the national average but the overall pass rate is lower. On tutor training courses, retention rates and successful completion rates are high. Students' achievements on access courses were generally good but retention rates were low (57 per cent in 1994-95). Adult students on counselling courses, for example, the RSA Examinations Board certificate in counselling skills have achieved a high level of success over the last three years and retention rates have been high.

72   Students' achievements on basic education courses are generally good. For example, in the 1993-94 session, 75 per cent of students on the Springboard programme obtained a vocational access certificate and almost 60 per cent obtained all, or part of, the City and Guilds of London Institute (C &G) wordpower communication certificate. Many full-time students progress to other courses but progression routes are not always available for part-time students. In contrast, there are good opportunities for progression for students who complete the English for speakers of other languages course. Some two-thirds of the students proceed to other courses.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

73   The strategic plan confirms the college's commitment to promote the continuous improvement of all its activities. The recently-revised policy for quality assurance encompasses all curriculum and service activities. A coherent strategy for implementation, referred to within the college as the quality framework, has been drawn up. It is based on three cycles of activity: planning, to ensure fully-evaluated approval of new programmes; review and evaluation, which includes an internal inspection process and course review; and development, which links staff development to the first two cycles. The new framework is built upon existing good practice. The planned procedures are rigorous but full implementation of the whole strategy is still at an early stage. The college is beginning to develop performance indicators and performance standards which relate to the whole institution.

74   Overall responsibility for quality assurance lies with the principalship. Assistant principals are responsible for quality assurance in their own faculty or service area. The assistant principal for curriculum development and evaluation has made good progress in managing the development and implementation of the quality framework and its monitoring and evaluation.

75   The academic board and its two subcommittees, one with responsibility for programme approval and the other for review and evaluation, have an important role in monitoring quality assurance. All new programmes are subject to thorough internal validation through the process of programme approval. The board also commissions or approves projects, proposed by managers or other staff, to improve the quality of some aspect of college provision. These projects are undertaken by quality action groups whose final reports assist the board in making recommendations to the principal.

76   All staff are encouraged to be involved in quality improvement through participation in the quality action groups. The groups have clear aims, are established for a limited period and are charged with developing proposals for improving quality in practical ways. For example, one group is building on previous work on health and safety by developing guidelines and good practice for safe working environments. In addition to improving existing practice, the groups also address ways of ensuring quality in new developments, for example, in proposing standards of guidance for faculty interviewers following the introduction of client advisers. Overall, the quality action groups are a valuable part of the quality assurance process.

77   Improvements in curriculum are approached in a similar way to whole-college issues. Task groups are set up to monitor the implementation of major initiatives such as the introduction of GNVQs. Curriculum projects are proposed either by task groups or by faculty staff. A consistent college approach to GNVQ induction has been developed to meet the needs of GNVQ teams and their students.

78   The college has recently developed a system of internal inspection closely modelled on the FEFC's inspection process. The system is more fully developed for teaching than for service functions in the college. The inspections have provided in-service training for 35 staff who completed a preparatory course in inspection, improved communication across faculties, and encouraged staff to reflect analytically on their teaching. Outcomes of the process are incorporated into the course review reports.

79   Course review is based on the programme management file which forms part of the college's continuous monitoring procedures. Files are comprehensive and contain detailed records of the programme itself and of students' progress. As part of course review, a questionnaire to assess the quality of programme provision has been introduced this year to address the lack of consistent information on the quality of courses. It is

supplemented by other questionnaires which are specific to the particular programmes. Most programme leaders are assiduous in seeking and acting upon the views of students. At the end of each year, a quality assessment report covering curriculum, teaching, performance, external moderator comments, resource and staff-development needs will be submitted to the section head prior to discussion at the faculty board. At the time of the inspection, these reports had not been prepared because the current faculty system is in its first year of operation. The lack of value added data on students' progress and the lack of statistical data provided by the college information system have limited the development of analytical reporting. The clear format for reviewing courses has been introduced in response to variations in the degree of critical self-evaluation in previous reports.

80 Common procedures have also been developed by a central verification team to ensure a consistent standard of internal assessment on GNVQ and NVQ courses. For example, documentation for planning assignments and recording progress has been developed as a means of ensuring the quality both of courses and internal verification. The academic registry monitors effectively all responses to moderators' and verifiers' reports.

81 The college is committed to staff development. At the time of the inspection, 1.5 per cent of the staffing budget was allocated to staff development. The budget is carefully monitored and there is a partial devolution of funds to the faculties. Staff development is well managed: there is a planning cycle linked to the college's overall planning cycle and to priorities in the college's strategic plan. Faculties and service areas are encouraged to identify their needs for training and development. The staff-development manager rigorously analyses staff-development needs to devise an annual college staff-development programme. Many of the staff-development activities are organised internally and staff value the quality of these events. Staff development related to NVQ and GNVQ programmes is substantial. A high proportion of staff has been trained as assessors. An annual appraisal scheme links individual development needs to the staff-development programme.

82 All new, full-time staff attend a comprehensive induction programme. Heads of section have a useful common checklist and each new member of staff has two mentors, one from the specialist area and a second to offer more general support. Staff judge the induction process to be extremely supportive. Induction for part-time staff is less well developed. This is being addressed by a quality action group who are preparing a charter for part-time staff.

83 Evidence of the college's progress in developing its quality assurance is the achievement of Investor in People status in summer 1994. The benefits of the process leading to the award have been analysed to identify good practice. For example, following the use of seminars to introduce the

principles of Investor in People to staff, seminars have now become a valued method of communication in the college.

84   A special post of director of charter initiatives has been designated. The director is responsible for the development and monitoring of the college charter. The college produced its charter in response to the requirements of the Charter for Further Education in September 1994 and this was distributed to all students. Following surveys of students, parents and employers, the charter has been revised for 1995-96. The new charter is clear, easy to read and informative. It contains commitments on a wide range of college services to students and other clients, many of them in the form of measurable targets, such as response times. Staff, full-time students and employers recognise the commitments made in the charter but not all are familiar with the detailed minimum standards outlined in the service statements.   Members of the corporation have not comprehensively considered the implications of the college charter and its importance in establishing minimum standards of service for college customers and clients.

85   A range of questionnaires is used to gather feedback from students and staff in order to monitor charter commitments and the quality of provision. The results of these are promptly followed up by the director of charter initiatives. Changes have been made, for example, in enrolment procedures. In addition, a 10 per cent sample of students is tracked throughout their college career in order to provide a picture of the students' full experience. Since September 1994, following the introduction of a learning resources quality charter, 22 areas of the college, including the academic registry, commercial services, catering and reception are each identifying eight appropriate quality standards and four performance indicators for their work.

86   The college produced a 42 page internal quality assessment report identifying strengths and issues under the headings in Council Circular 93/28, Assessing Achievement. It provides a comprehensive, critical review of the work of the college and concludes with an action plan to address the issues raised which is cross-referenced to the strategic plan. Many of the judgements in the report are consistent with the findings of the inspection team.

RESOURCES

Staffing

87   Teaching staff are well qualified for their roles. Eighty-four per cent are trained teachers, 63 per cent have first degrees and most have appropriate industrial and teaching experience.   Additional staff development will be required for some staff who are expected to undertake more advanced teaching in the future. Good progress has been made in acquiring assessor and verifier qualifications. Seventy per cent of

full-time staff had achieved these awards by June 1995. Part-time teaching staff carry out approximately 21 per cent of the teaching. They are effectively integrated and make valuable contributions in many areas of the college, although inexperienced part-time staff do not always receive the level of support they require.

88   Support staff are an integral part of the operation of the college and work collaboratively with teaching staff. Technician and some support roles have been reviewed and an increasing number of staff are developing their skills to enable them to work in more than one specialist area. The introduction of curriculum support technicians in information technology, business and professional studies, technology and performing arts has been successful. They provide valuable support in the study centres and workshops.

89   Personnel policies and procedures are well documented. A comprehensive staff handbook is in place and readily available throughout the college for reference. All staff have job descriptions. Information within sections and faculties indicates that teaching and technician staff are effectively deployed, but there is no common policy for recording staff utilisation and the information is not recorded centrally.

Equipment/learning resources

90   Libraries are provided on both sites. On the east site, the library is light, airy and pleasant and has ample student workplaces. On the west site, space is adequate. The total bookstock of approximately 42,000 volumes provides an average of 13 items per student, and is sufficient in most curriculum areas. However, there are insufficient and/or dated books in a few areas such as health and social care, science, and leisure and tourism. Overall, the number of journals available is low. Additional functions of the library include the provision of class sets of subject textbooks for students and resources to support specialist courses. The library staff are establishing a database to record the total learning resources available. The level of computing facilities in the library, including the availability of information on compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases, is limited. A review of the central learning resources, which includes the library, audio-visual and technical support services, has taken place and a development plan and quality standards for learning resources have been drawn up. They will be monitored and evaluated by a quality action group.

91   The college is firmly committed to developing students' ability to work on their own. To help facilitate this, it has established eight learning resource workshops. They provide stimulating environments in which students have access to good quality paper-based materials and information technology, and receive support from technicians and teachers. In particular, the two mathematics workshops and the English workshop are outstanding. They have benefited from the high level of time, energy and imagination that have been put into their resourcing and

development. Full-time students are provided with opportunities to develop practical competencies in one of the realistic work environments that have been set up in catering, hairdressing and office studies.

92 There is sufficient specialist equipment in most subject areas to meet the needs of current programmes but in motor vehicle engineering, construction and business studies much of it is dated and barely meets course needs. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have good access to well-equipped teaching areas for vocational work and are supported by appropriate equipment, including closed circuit television, large print and speech software and a keyboard for one-handed people. Classroom and laboratory areas are generally well equipped with basic teaching aids such as boards and overhead projectors. There is a good range of other audio-visual aids. A purchasing manager has been appointed in order to obtain maximum benefit from the available funding. There is currently no rolling programme for the replacement of equipment.

93 There is a large open-access information technology workshop on the west site which has approximately 90 workstations. There are also substantial computing resources distributed throughout the faculties. The overall ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is 1:7.7. Students generally have access, through specialist and/or centralised provision, to appropriate computer facilities to meet the needs of their programmes. However, there are some subject areas, for example health and social care and leisure, where access is not as easy as it should be. Some of these areas also lack simple learning guides for commonly used applications.

Accommodation

94 The college operates from two sites in the centre of Harlow, approximately 500 yards apart, separated by a shopping centre and a busy dual carriageway. The accommodation on the five-acre west site was originally built for the former further education college in the 1950s. The main buildings on the 26 acre east site were built as a school and are of a later design; this site includes a large area of playing fields. Careful timetabling reduces the need for students to repeatedly move between sites. Some of the buildings on both sites are in a poor structural state and a survey has recently been carried out to determine the extent of remedial work required. Much of this work is being held in abeyance pending decisions on the future development of the sites.

95 The college has more accommodation than it needs to deliver its current provision. Rooms are allocated to the faculties and sections and a centralised record of use is maintained. A recent survey conducted by the college indicates that the overall use of rooms on both sites is low. An accommodation review, carried out with the assistance of external consultants, has recommended that the college should be concentrated on the east site where few additional buildings would be required. This move

would depend on the sale of the west site and on the college receiving planning permission for further development of the east site. Negotiations on both of these issues are expected to be concluded in the near future.

96   Classrooms are generally of a good size and suitable for the use to which they are put. The college has had to make modifications to a significant number of rooms on both sites. For example, a recent modification has resulted in the creation of a language suite. Many rooms provide a pleasant learning environment and have been refurbished. There are still a number of areas which are in a poor condition and unsuitable for the work being carried out in them. The hairdressing section, for example, has three salons which are too small to cater for the number of students, particularly during client sessions, and there are sound-proofing problems in the music block. Some of the poor accommodation is due to uncertainty about the proposed buildings programme.

97   The refectory areas on both sites are of a good size and adequate for their purpose. Both entrance foyers have been developed into welcoming and pleasant environments. The standard of cleaning throughout the college buildings is generally good. On the east site there is wheelchair access to all buildings except the one used for secretarial courses. On the west site people who use wheelchairs are unable to obtain access to much of the accommodation.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

98   The strengths of the college are:

*   the wide range of vocational and general education provision

*   the strong links with partner schools and the community

*   effective and participative management

*   the comprehensive planning and management of the curriculum

*   well-managed course and subject delivery

*   a well-developed and effective student recruitment, guidance and

*   support system

*   an innovative programme to broaden the experience of full-time students

*   high standards of teaching and learning in most subjects

*   good examination results in some general education subjects

*   a clear, systematic approach to quality assurance

*   a well-developed college charter

*   a good level of staff-development activity

*   a well-qualified and committed staff

*   mathematics and English learning workshops which are of outstanding quality.

99   If the college is to raise standards further it should:

- develop curriculum and marketing strategies to increase the participation of adults

- provide more reliable and comprehensive management information

- establish and implement procedures that enable the corporation to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the college

- introduce systematic procedures for assessing and meeting the learning support needs of students

- raise the level of students' achievements in some vocational courses

- develop appropriate performance standards and set clear targets to assure quality

- replace outdated equipment

- improve the quality of some accommodation.

FIGURES

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

Figure 1

Harlow College: percentage enrolments by age (as at May 1995)

Legend:
- ☐ Under 16
- ■ 16-18 years
- ■ 19-24 years
- ☐ 25+ years
- ■ Not known

1% 1%   27%
54%
17%
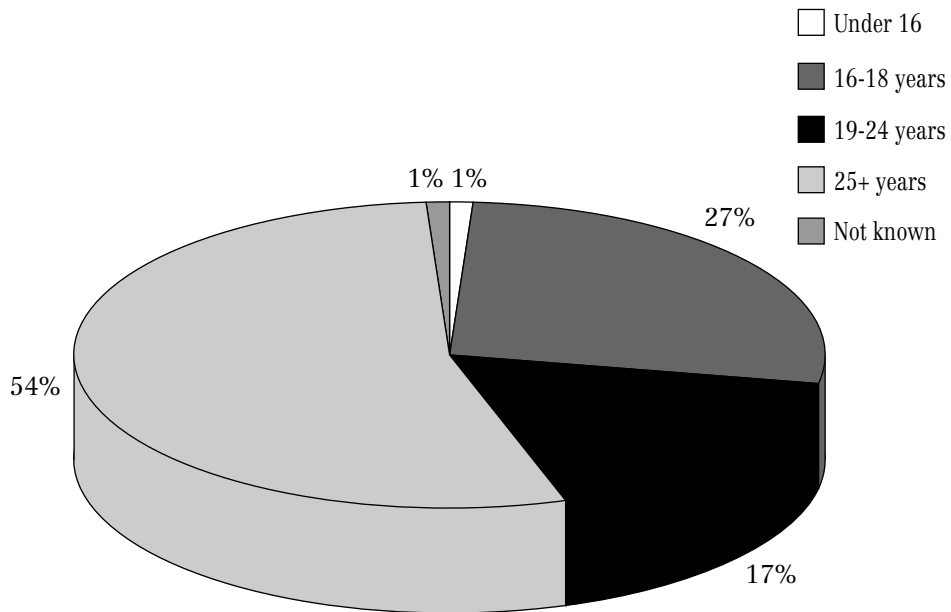
Enrolments: 7,498

Figure 2

Harlow College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at May 1995)

Legend:
- ☐ Foundation
- ■ Intermediate
- ■ Advanced
- ☐ Higher education
- ■ Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)

2%   13%
7%
28%
50%
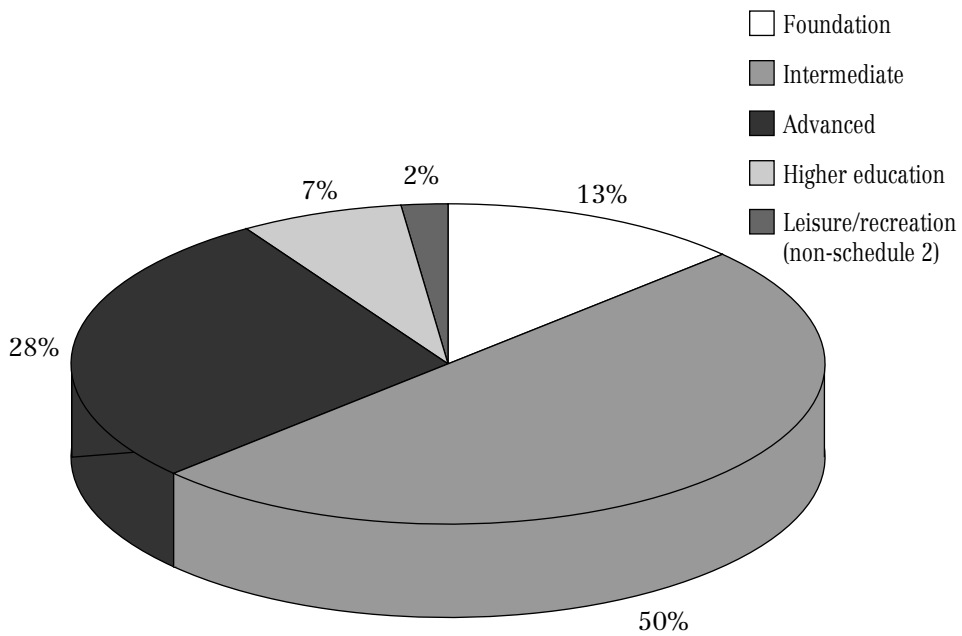
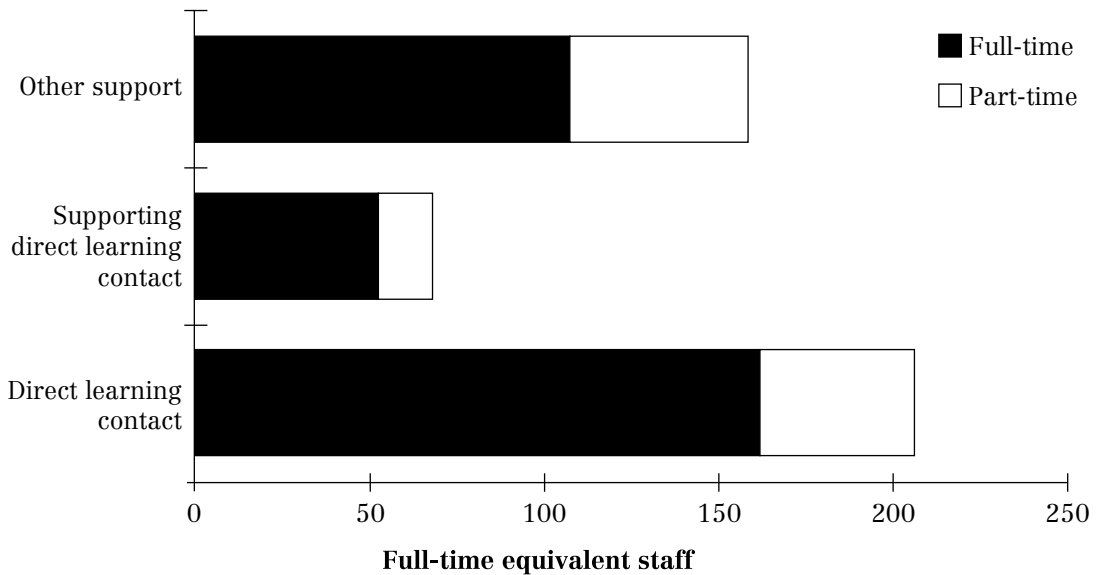Enrolments: 7,498

Figure 3

Harlow College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at May 1995)
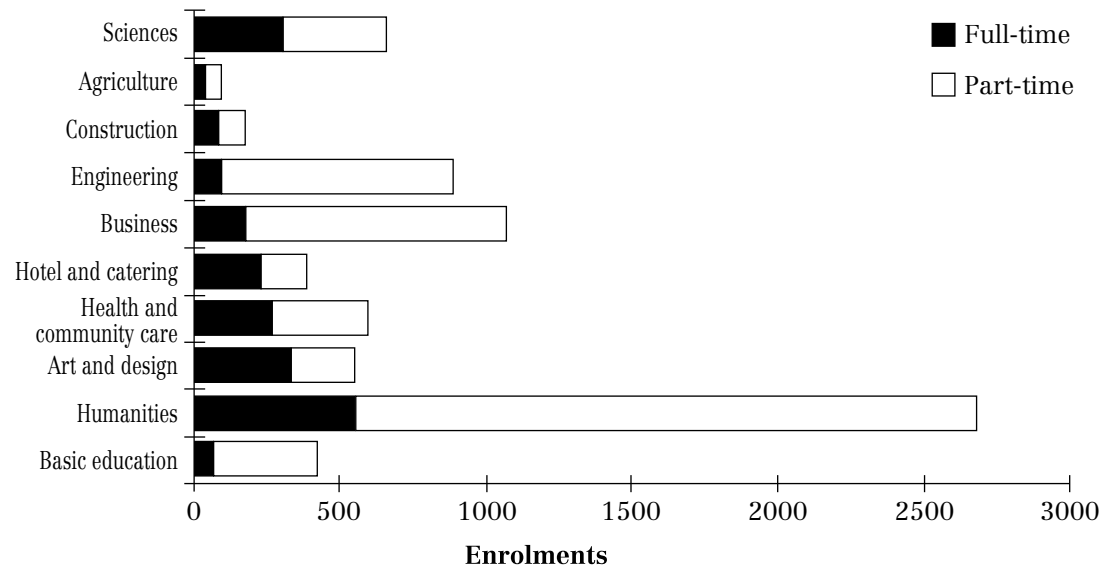
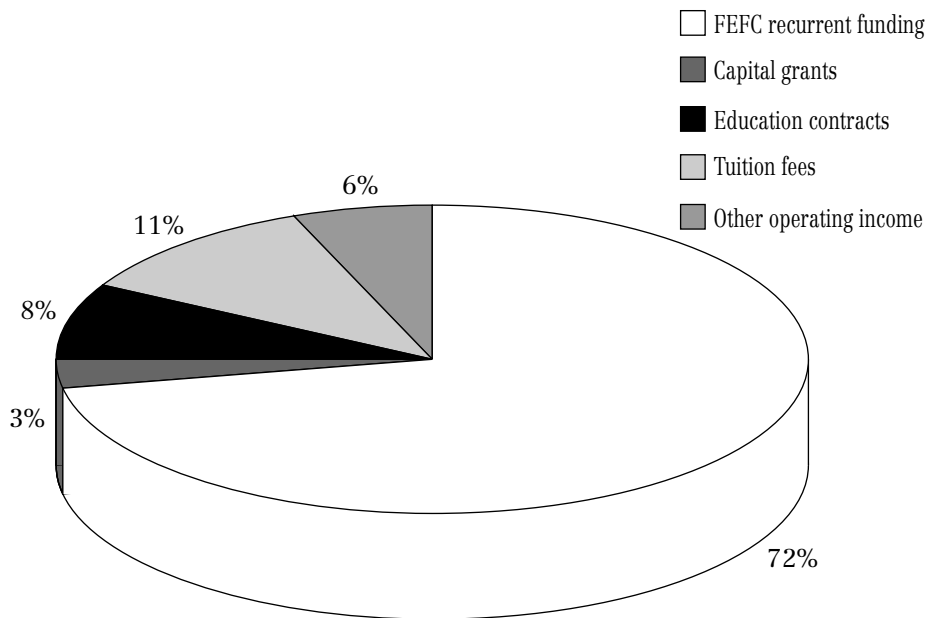Enrolments: 7,498

Figure 4

Harlow College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1994)


Full-time equivalent staff: 433

Figure 5

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

Legend:
- ☐ FEFC recurrent funding
- ▨ Capital grants
- ■ Education contracts
- ░ Tuition fees
- ▒ Other operating income

6%
11%
8%
3%
72%

Estimated income: £11,386,000   *Note: this chart excludes £50,000 other grant income.*

Figure 6

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

Depreciation
5%

Other operating
expenses
20%

Staff costs
75%
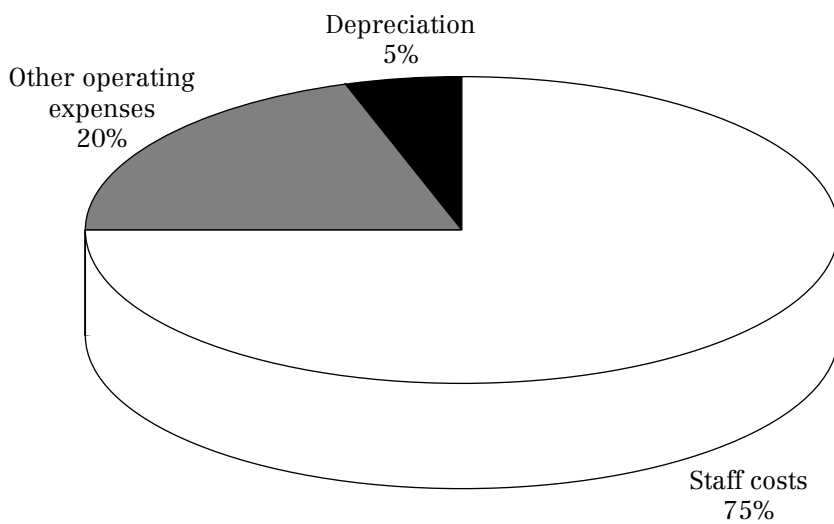
Estimated expenditure: £12,047,000   *Note: this chart excludes £8,000 interest payable.*