

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Milton Keynes College

May 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

By June 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

| Activity | Inspection grades | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Programme area | 9% | 59% | 29% | 3% | <1% |
| Cross-college provision | 14% | 50% | 31% | 5% | <1% |
| Overall | 12% | 54% | 30% | 4% | <1% |

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 62/97

MILTON KEYNES COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected March 1996-February 1997

Summary

Milton Keynes College has extensive links with community organisations and with the Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise. There is imaginative provision for young people and for adults from groups which have not usually entered further education. The college is governed by a committed and experienced corporation and managed in an open and consultative way. Services to students are comprehensive and effective and students receive strong tutorial support. Students' learning is enhanced by the recognition and celebration of personal achievement and the sound relationships between staff and students. Quality assurance policies and procedures are clearly documented. Teaching and support staff are well qualified and committed to their work. Specialist facilities and equipment in many areas are of high quality. Issues that the college should address include: the limited full-cost provision for the business community; the insufficient attention paid to improving standards of teaching; weaknesses in the provision for art and design; underdeveloped key skills provision; low retention rates and poor levels of achievement in some areas; inconsistent assessment and referral systems for learning support; and the low impact of quality assurance arrangements on teaching and learning and students' achievements. In addition, the college should continue to develop the childcare and social facilities for students, and to improve the poor quality of some of its accommodation.

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

| Curriculum area | Grade | Curriculum area | Grade |
|--|--------------|--|--------------|
| Science, including mathematics and computing | 3 | Caring and health studies | 2 |
| Business and administration | 2 | Hairdressing and beauty therapy | 2 |
| Management and professional studies | 2 | Art and design | 4 |
| Hospitality and catering | 2 | Humanities | 3 |
| Leisure and tourism | 3 | Basic education, including access to further education and study support | 3 |

INTRODUCTION

1 Milton Keynes College was inspected between March 1996 and February 1997. Caring and health studies was inspected in March 1996. Other curriculum areas and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected between September 1996 and February 1997. Inspectors spent 79 days in the college. They visited 190 classes, examined students' coursework, and scrutinised college documentation. They met with college governors, managers, staff and students, parents, employers, head teachers from local schools, members of the local community and representatives of the Buckinghamshire Careers Service and Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Milton Keynes College was formed in 1982 when the separate further education colleges at Wolverton and Bletchley were combined. The college now operates on three sites at Wolverton, Bletchley and Chaffron Way and has units at Woodhill Prison and Tempus House. The original college at Wolverton was founded on a much older institution which had its roots in the nineteenth century. Engineering provision, which continues to be based at Wolverton, grew out of Wolverton College's association with the former British Rail works. The caring and health studies section also operates from Wolverton. The college at Bletchley was a much younger institution, founded in the early 1970s. It specialised in general education, hotel, catering and hospitality, and art and design. The college has now established hairdressing, beauty therapy and media studies at the Bletchley site. The third centre at Chaffron Way was built in 1984 and provides accommodation for courses in logistics, business and management, leisure and tourism, administration, accounting, computer applications and access to higher education. The college's directorate, finance, personnel and administration offices are also based at Chaffron Way. A second phase of the building at this centre was completed in 1993. In 1992 the employer enterprise unit was opened in the centre of Milton Keynes to co-ordinate the college's European and external training activities. The college manages the educational provision at HM Prison, Woodhill, which opened in 1992.

3 Milton Keynes became a unitary authority on 1 April 1997. It is a semi-rural community with a population of 226,950. There is a high proportion of young people; 63 per cent of the population are under 40 years of age. The minority ethnic population of 5.8 per cent, is slightly larger than in the rest of Buckinghamshire. The population of Milton Keynes has been steadily rising and is predicted to increase by a further 7 per cent by the year 2001. The largest rise will be in the numbers of those aged 60 or over. There are 5,249 firms and businesses of which 95 per cent have 50 or less employees. Most employees work in the service sector (76 per cent) or in production (20 per cent). In 1996, the

unemployment rate in Milton Keynes was 5.4 per cent compared with a rate of 3.8 per cent for the whole of Buckinghamshire and a rate of 7 per cent nationally.

4 The college's students come mainly from Milton Keynes and north Buckinghamshire. Within the area, there are eight comprehensive schools and one proposed grammar school, all with sixth forms, and one secondary modern school. A new comprehensive school is due to open in September 1997. There are six special schools. The college is the only further education institution in the area, although there are four providers of higher education. The nearest college of further education is Bedford College, 15 miles away. In 1995, 72 per cent of 16 year olds continued in full-time education and 21 per cent entered the labour market.

5 In July 1996, there were 6,764 students enrolled on college programmes. Of these, 2,165 were full time. The college offers higher education courses in engineering technology and business and management to over 330 students. It became an associate college of De Montfort University in 1991. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3. The college employs 207 full-time equivalent staff who teach or provide support for learning, and 95 full-time equivalent administrative staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. In 1993, the college became one of the first organisations in Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire to achieve the Investors in People award.

6 The college, in its mission statement, aims to provide a service of high quality which enables everyone to achieve their personal, educational and employment goals. There is a commitment to personal growth and to opportunities for all those involved to learn to their full potential.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 The college has a wide range of vocational and general education programmes, extending from foundation to advanced levels. It also runs a smaller number of higher education programmes in business studies and in engineering, in partnership with De Montfort University, and a distance learning programme with the University of Humberside and Lincolnshire. Twelve subjects are offered at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), although the number of students taking the two-year daytime programme is low. Eight general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects are offered during the day and evening. Courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), national vocational qualifications (NVQs) or other nationally-recognised qualifications are offered in art and design, hairdressing and beauty therapy, caring and health studies, business, accountancy and professional studies, computing, management and administration, logistics, leisure, travel and tourism, hospitality and catering, media studies, and

engineering. Over 200 students study English as a foreign language (EFL) at levels from foundation to advanced.

8 Flexible patterns of study are available in some curriculum areas. There is a partnership with the National Extension College which offers a range of GCSE and GCE A level subjects and a small number of vocational programmes on a distance learning basis. Learning materials and study support are arranged by the National Extension College, while the college administers the programme and offers personal tutorial support. A small number of GCE A level and GCSE subjects are also offered on an open learning basis, with tutorials held at the college. There is some flexible provision on courses in administration, information technology and hairdressing and, on a few GNVQ programmes, students have the opportunity to begin their studies half way through the year.

9 A range of courses specifically for adults has been developed in a number of vocational areas, including a successful access to higher education programme and workshops for administration and information technology skills. Fast-track programmes in business, travel and tourism, and information technology applications enable adults to study for vocational qualifications in a shorter than normal timescale, allowing, for example, a two-year GNVQ to be undertaken in one year. A return to study programme, called 'Pathway', enables adults to build their confidence in preparation for further study. The college works closely with the local adult education service. Accreditation of students' prior learning is well developed in some areas. For example, in administration courses, employees discuss with college staff how they can be accredited for current skills as part of an NVQ. A policy on accreditation of prior learning has been prepared but, as yet, it has not been formally adopted by the college.

10 Links between curriculum areas and employers are generally effective and this helps college staff to arrange appropriate work experience placements for their full-time students. In some areas, the links are particularly productive. For example, in catering there is an arrangement whereby students take over all the functions of a local restaurant for an evening, which enables them to gain first-hand experience of commercial pressures. The college has little training designed specifically for employers, which employers themselves pay for, and it offers little planned provision for employees in the workplace to acquire NVQs. In this aspect of its work the college responds to requests from employers rather than promoting the services it could offer. In some areas, such as administration and customer service, workplace assessment is an expanding area of activity. College staff carry out assessments themselves or train workplace supervisors to assess their students.

11 There is an appropriate range of provision for young people and adults with learning difficulties. As far as possible, students follow general further education courses and are given the individual support they require to do this. On the vocational opportunities programme, students select a vocational area in which they can participate on a 'taster' basis, and this

enables them to prepare for a full vocational programme the following year. There are a range of foundation level programmes across the curriculum areas. Specialist programmes designed to meet specific needs include a partnership with the Buckinghamshire Association for the Blind to set up a computer course for visually impaired students. This was the first course of its kind in the country. It has attracted 30 students in its first year.

12 The college has a strong relationship with the Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise and its education company, Countec. It has 130 youth trainees and 75 modern apprentices on five different programmes. The number of modern apprenticeships has exceeded the target by 50 per cent. A college project, funded by Countec, is aimed at accrediting the key skills which employees in the workplace already possess. To date, the project has recruited 60 people, engaged in all levels of work, from five local companies. The college's enterprise unit is based within the Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise. Two staff from the college have been seconded to Countec and the Chamber for specific project work.

13 Successful bids to the government's competitiveness fund on three occasions in the last two years have enabled the college to set up study centres for the logistics industry and for integrated manufacturing. These are being developed to meet specific industrial training needs in the Milton Keynes area. The logistics centre is the only one of its kind in the country. It is supported by a strong and active steering group which includes local and national representatives of industry. Courses leading to Institute of Logistics qualifications are now offered. Developments with the manufacturing centre are less well advanced.

14 The college promotes itself effectively. Its publicity materials are attractive. An information sheet is distributed three times a year to around 1,000 individuals and businesses in the community. The quality of individual course leaflets is variable. Various marketing activities take place each year. These include media advertising, college advisory evenings for prospective students and attendance by college staff at careers events in schools and at community events. The 'president's lecture', delivered every other year by a high-profile speaker, is a prestigious local event sponsored by a local employer. It attracts a large number of business people. Market research is not fully developed. The college has seconded a member of staff to the Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise to investigate ways in which it can use local labour market information more effectively.

15 The college has highly-effective links with community organisations. College staff are active on a number of boards and steering committees, including the Wolverton Partnership and the Bletchley Town Centre Initiative. There are positive working relationships with the careers service and the probation service and links with voluntary organisations such as the Council of Voluntary Organisations in Milton Keynes and the

Milton Keynes and North Bucks Employment Network. Co-operative arrangements are maintained with a number of schools. These include a small amount of collaborative provision, mainly for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college has joint marketing arrangements with one school and another school has special arrangements with the college to ensure continuity of study for its pupils. There is an arrangement with the Buckinghamshire Local Education Authority (LEA) to take pupils from its pupil referral unit. There are 20 pupils on vocational courses at the college who are unable to attend school because of discipline or personal problems.

16 The education department at Woodhill Prison is managed by the college under a contract with the Home Office. About 150 students at any one time study on a range of courses which includes business and computing, woodwork, catering, art, and social skills. Many courses are accredited by the Buckinghamshire Open College Network or lead to national accreditation.

17 There is a growing number of international links. The college's travel and tourism section participates in an innovative project, 'Jobrotation', funded by the European Union. The project is aimed at increasing the skills of unemployed people by enabling them to substitute for workers who are seconded for further training. So far 18 adults have been successful on the programme and gained an NVQ level 3 qualification. The college works with partners in Sicily, Denmark and Germany. Full-time students undertake a variety of European visits and exchanges. For example, work experience has been gained by business students in Spain and by catering students in France.

18 The college promotes equal opportunities. A subcommittee of the college forum meets frequently and has, for example, analysed recruitment statistics. The college has established an equal opportunities policy, the implementation of which is still in the early stages of development. A training day for senior and middle managers was held in the autumn term and an introduction to the policy is to be included in the induction programme for all new staff. Further training days for staff are planned. Students are made aware of the policy through the learner handbook and at tutorials.

19 Students have a range of opportunities for additional studies and enrichment activities. Many activities, for example the pool lifeguards certificate for leisure students, are related to particular courses. Information technology certification is offered as an additional element on a number of programmes, including the access to higher education programme. Additional subjects such as GCSE English and mathematics are available to full-time students through learning workshops or through the 'plus' programme which, in response to demand, currently offers GCSE mathematics. Although a range of equipment is available and a block of time is made free for organised recreational activities on Wednesday afternoons, few students take advantage of the opportunities open to them.

The college has been unable to take part in local sports leagues this year because of students' lack of interest.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 Corporation members have an extensive range of expertise in business, community affairs and education, which is used to the benefit of the college. The corporation has 14 members: eight independent members, a member nominated by the TEC, a community member, one co-opted member, a staff member, an elected student member, and the college principal. Three governors, including the principal, are women. Members' backgrounds include experience in personnel management, marketing, accountancy, higher education, legal practice, general management, business planning, disabilities, and local government. Most business members hold senior positions in local and national organisations. Members are experienced, have a strong sense of purpose, and are committed to fulfilling their responsibilities effectively.

21 The college is well governed. Corporation business is handled in a professional and efficient manner, and supported by clear records. A comprehensive handbook includes details of members' roles and their terms of reference. The corporation has completed a register of members' interests. Members are clear about the distinction between their roles and that of managers. They have effective contact with managers and staff. The more detailed work of the corporation is undertaken through seven main committees: finance and systems; premises; human resources; curriculum; marketing; audit; and remuneration. The work of individual committees aligns closely with task areas identified in the college's strategic plan, and this enables governors to oversee each strand of the strategic plan. Some committees co-opt experts from outside the college to help them in their work. Members have recently undertaken a review of their own performance. This has led to plans to review the committee structure, to increase the size of the board and to set up performance indicators by which the board can measure the success of its work and that of the college.

22 The three-year strategic plan is central to the work of all areas of the college and members of the corporation, and staff at all levels are involved in strategic planning. The strategic plan is implemented through annual development plans, from which key tasks are identified for groups and individuals. These tasks are then translated into annual work plans. Supporting performance indicators are used to measure and to report on the progress in completing the tasks. Progress is carefully reviewed at college level and in formal reports to corporation committees. The college incorporates national targets for education and training into its own operating targets. A steady growth in enrolments has been achieved.

23 There is effective monitoring of, and reporting on, the college budget. Budget allocations are based on historical factors and modified to take account of changing circumstances and identified needs. There are monthly reports on cost centre expenditure and appropriate controls on

purchasing and the recruitment of staff. The college has recently begun to look at cost effectiveness across the college, the curriculum areas and the programmes. There has, for example, been a lack of information on the effectiveness of the deployment of staff. A number of cost effectiveness measures have been identified and these are being reported on during the current year.

24 The senior management team comprises the principal and three directors with responsibilities for curriculum and learning strategies, development projects, and finance and resources, respectively. Three members of the senior management team, including the principal, have either changed role or are new in post from summer 1996. There is an open and consultative style of management which has led to staff becoming involved in, and committed to, college developments. Generally, staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and those of other staff. They can join a variety of groups and committees and this has widened the scope and improved the quality of consultation. Many of the committees have volunteer convenors who discuss and plan agendas and then organise and control the presentation of items at meetings. Staff gain experience of running meetings through the rotation of chairpersons or by being a secretary. Staff are committed to the process of setting targets and reviewing performance, on a regular basis, and this helps to make line management more effective.

25 The college seeks to promote effective communication and teamwork. It achieves this through formal and informal meetings, widely distributed documentation, newsletters and electronic mail. A staff bulletin is published every two months and recently there have also been newsletters from the personnel, estates and management information system teams. Communication is improved by staff contributions to groups such as the equal opportunities committee, the college forum and the internal verifiers group. Staff at all levels feel well informed about the college's mission and its main objectives as well as the day-to-day business.

26 The curriculum is organised into eight sections, each headed by a curriculum manager and one or more assistant managers. The organisation and deployment of programme managers within each section are the responsibility of the curriculum manager. Management of the curriculum varies in quality. Lines of responsibility and job descriptions are generally clear, although this is not the case for all programme managers. Some course and programme teams work closely together and many aspects of day-to-day organisation and management are carried out effectively. However, there are instances where managers are not sufficiently rigorous. For example, strategies to address poor retention were identified but were unclear or partially implemented. Generally, there has been insufficient attention in the initial years of the current strategic plan to standards of teaching and learning and students' achievements.

27 Since 1995, there has been considerable progress in developing management information systems. The information strategy is well thought out and provides a framework for further development. The main elements of the computerised system cover finance, assets, personnel, staff development, student records and timetabling. Users have an increased confidence in the reliability and accuracy of the data held. Access to on-line data is being made available to an increasing number of managers and administrative staff, but the systems are not sufficiently developed to include all who need access. Relevant training for users has been offered and there is a users' charter which sets service standards. Standard reports, such as those which analyse the student population by gender, ethnicity or home address, have only recently been available on demand. Use of the data by managers to inform planning and decision making is at an early stage of development. Data on students' destinations are collected but are not used to inform curriculum planning.

28 There is no comprehensive set of quantitative performance indicators and targets against which the college can measure its success. The corporation and senior management are aware of the need to develop a wider range of indicators. Developments, such as the use of cost efficiency measures and 'benchmarking', are making a contribution but they are not yet fully operational. The corporation has identified the need for a detailed view of performance in relation to students' retention, achievements and destinations.

29 The college maintains a range of policies, all supported by comprehensive documentation of high quality. For example, the policy on health and safety is strongly promoted in the college and is accompanied by a helpful manual clearly defining the responsibilities of all individuals and groups of staff. Implementation of the policy is monitored through the health and safety committee which reports to the college forum. All policy documents are dated but they do not indicate when they were last revised or when they will next be reviewed.

30 The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding in 1996-97 is £16.78 per unit compared with £16.80 per unit in 1995-96. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges in 1996-97 is £17.97 per unit.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

31 Students at the college are well supported. The student services provision, offered on all three sites, is well organised. Services include welfare advice, counselling, careers guidance, and learning support. Staff move between the three sites and work closely with reception staff to ensure rapid communications and effective use of their time. All three centres have private interview rooms, learning support areas, and careers libraries.

32 Students have access to comprehensive information about college programmes and the financial implications of continuing or returning to study. There are widely advertised monthly advice days, which are held at all centres, and appointments can be made with any member of the student services team. The college prospectuses emphasise applicants' right to a guidance interview before application, and the admissions unit monitors the process and arranges these interviews either with student services or with the appropriate curriculum area. The college keeps a record of interviews but it does not collate the information or relate it to information on enrolments. The advisory service extends to part-time students. Their enrolment sessions are arranged so that a student services representative can attend. The central admissions system is well organised and its work is monitored against clear standards. An interview record is copied to the applicant. It includes a check for learning support needs.

33 Students' induction is well managed. College standards for induction are agreed by the tutor co-ordinators' group, and the induction process is reviewed annually and modified in the light of feedback from students and staff. In practice, most induction programmes were well planned. Good relations were quickly established between staff and students, and students received helpful support and encouragement. In the better induction sessions, the assignments set for students involved the application of key skills in a vocational context. Some initial assessment and guidance sessions were particularly helpful in enabling students to complete individual action plans. In the weaker sessions, teachers failed to involve students in the activities they had designed for them or to maintain their interest. There is variation between programme areas in the induction of part-time students. For example, not all part-time students receive the learner handbook, which is an entitlement. During induction, staff emphasise that students have time to decide if they have chosen the right course and students' initial action plans stress this. There are good procedures for facilitating course transfer; in the first six months of 1996-97, 161 students changed course. Staff have produced some well-designed course handbooks and assignments for introducing students to the college and to their particular course of study.

34 High-quality support is provided for students identified as needing additional support with their learning. This year, the number of students receiving such help has almost doubled. Small group provision is offered by the learning support co-ordinator, and individual support by the additional needs co-ordinator. These two staff work closely together. Within the study workshops, available on each site, students complete action plans and keep daily records of their work. Progress is reviewed regularly, and tutors receive feedback. However, referrals of students from vocational areas sometimes lack detail. Curriculum areas use varied methods for diagnosing support needs, and the criteria for referral are sometimes imprecise. Not all tutors respond to feedback from the study support team. For example, at the time of inspection, the tutors of

17 students had not reacted to the notification from learning support staff that their students had stopped attending their support programme without explanation.

35 There is strong tutorial support for full-time and most part-time students. This includes a termly session at which each student, in consultation with the tutor, reviews his/her progress and completes an action plan. Most courses have a structured programme of group and individual tutorials. In a minority of instances, students' action plans are sketchy and some group sessions lack purpose. The amount of tutorial support received by part-time students varies. Tutors are provided with a detailed handbook and a supplement for additional needs. The reviews of students' progress are undertaken in three review weeks when normal timetables are suspended. Students value this process although their understanding of the purpose of the weeks varies. The tutorial system is well supported by curriculum managers and by the designated tutor co-ordinator for each curriculum area. Co-ordinators meet monthly to share good practice and for developmental work, such as compiling the tutor and learner handbooks. The standards set by the college for tutorial work include a commitment to maintaining records of achievement, using contributions from the tutorial progress review. Records of achievement software is networked throughout the college. However, some students have not developed a record of achievement, and the college does not monitor this.

36 Systems for monitoring attendance work well. Departmental policies are outlined in individual course handbooks and departmental secretaries have recently taken on a direct role in checking registers. Students and parents felt that satisfactory attendance was expected and that absences were followed up. The college has effective counselling and advisory services which are valued by full-time and part-time students. The counsellors, one full time and one part time, are fully trained and operate to professional counselling standards. The service is used fully. Provision has recently been improved by the addition of a full-time welfare post, part of which involves liaison with the students' union. A budget of almost £40,000 is used to provide support for students in need, regardless of their age or mode of study. There is childcare provision at each centre, funded by the borough council. The college has no reserved places and many students find it difficult to obtain childcare on site.

37 The college has made imaginative use of its local careers service by investing in a joint appointment, the careers co-ordinator, and, in so doing, doubling the time allocated for this service. In addition, two careers advisers offer support linked to particular curriculum areas. This is a new system which the college intends to review at the end of the year. Students expecting to go on to higher education receive specialist advice in the first term and a programme of group sessions, involving the drawing up of action plans, is arranged for the second term. Part of the careers co-ordinator's role is to complete an audit of the careers education offered

within the curriculum areas. Currently, there is no detailed entitlement against which provision can be assessed.

38 The learner handbook summarises the college charter including the complaints and appeals procedures. The majority of students are aware of the charter and how a copy can be obtained. The college offers students various opportunities to take part in the running of the college and to become involved in committees and organisations. However, it has proved difficult to get students to participate or to become representatives. The students' union has a low profile despite the college funding a part-time sabbatical officer and the governors making a block grant of £10,000. Sporting events are poorly supported. Parents and students perceive a lack of extra-curricular activities and opportunities for social contact.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

39 One hundred and ninety teaching and learning sessions were inspected involving 2,223 students. In 55 per cent of sessions, strengths clearly outweighed weaknesses. This compares with an average figure of 63 per cent for the colleges inspected during the 1995-96 academic year, according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. In 10 per cent of sessions there were weaknesses which clearly outweighed strengths. The average attendance at the sessions inspected was 77 per cent. On average, 12 students were present in each class. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

| Programmes | Grade 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Totals |
|--|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|---------------|
| GCE AS/A level | 1 | 6 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 16 |
| GCSE | 0 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 8 |
| GNVQ | 7 | 16 | 15 | 4 | 1 | 43 |
| NVQ | 5 | 13 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 23 |
| Other vocational | 15 | 16 | 19 | 6 | 1 | 57 |
| Basic education, including access to further education and study support | 1 | 9 | 11 | 2 | 0 | 23 |
| Other | 6 | 6 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 20 |
| Total | 35 | 70 | 66 | 17 | 2 | 190 |

40 In the majority of lessons the teaching is sound. Students are well motivated and responsive. Across all courses there is mutual respect between staff and students which encourages learning. Teachers provide their students with effective help and encouragement. The study support sessions and tutorials help students to be aware of their progress. Lessons are generally well planned. Teaching is particularly effective where it enables students to learn in a variety of ways and where teachers make

consistent checks on students' understanding. A common weakness is for the whole class to be expected to work at the same pace and level, without acknowledgement of students' differing abilities. This results in some students undertaking work which is insufficiently challenging while other students find the work too demanding, particularly on foundation GNVQ programmes. Key skills are inadequately addressed on some courses and in some sessions. The feedback given to students on their written work is sometimes inadequate. Some of the handouts used in a number of sessions are poorly written.

41 The majority of science lessons are well planned. Students are provided with substantial information about their courses, particularly on GCE A level programmes, where learning outcomes and key skills are clearly identified. In many lessons, teachers use well-directed questions to develop students' knowledge and understanding. In a minority of sessions, there are not enough checks on students' understanding, and some students receive inadequate attention or inadequate feedback on assessed work. In mathematics and information technology, teachers are well prepared and use a wide range of learning materials. The GCSE mathematics programme is well structured and includes a schedule of work to be completed by students each week. Most work in the classroom is practical and students are involved in a range of activities. Assignment briefs in computing are clear and students are given appropriate guidelines for their completion. However, students do not have advance information on schemes of work and assignment schedules in computing to help them plan their work effectively. In some sessions, there is not enough attention to students' differing abilities and the work lacks variety and challenge.

42 There is good teaching in business and administration, and in management and professional studies. Lessons are well prepared and the work is supported by relevant handouts, teaching aids and helpful work packs. Links with industry are good and on some NVQ courses students are assessed in the workplace. Schemes of work are shared with students in advance and appropriate assessments are set and marked effectively. Relationships between staff and students are always good and students are encouraged to work in groups and to help each other. Assessments are marked fairly and returned with comments which are both critical and encouraging. In a minority of lessons, some of the questioning designed to check students' learning is inadequate and there were examples of poor use of the overhead projector.

43 Teaching in hospitality and catering is generally effective. Schemes of work are well structured and lessons are carefully planned. Teachers encourage students to join in discussion and to practise activities appropriate to the level of the programme. In most lessons, teachers made effective use of questions to check students' understanding. Practical sessions are conducted according to rigorous health and safety standards. Key skills development is appropriately timetabled for foundation GNVQ and first-year advanced level students but there is no provision for NVQ

level 2 food preparation and cooking students. Assessment schedules and copies of assignments are issued at the start of the academic year to foundation and advanced GNVQ students. There is not enough difference between the assignments set for students in year one of the advanced programme compared with students in year two. In some theory classes, insufficient attention is given to the varying abilities of the students.

44 The quality of teaching in leisure and tourism varies widely. Students are positive about their course which contains a good variety of activities including work experience and residential visits. In the better lessons, teachers provided work which was challenging and interesting; in one course a group of mature students had been set the task of planning a United Kingdom holiday for over 150 war veterans who had been based in the United Kingdom during the war. The students presented an outline of their itinerary to the rest of the class. The tutor gave feedback on the quality of the itinerary immediately after each presentation. The students responded well, producing written work of a high standard and mounting clear presentations. In some weaker lessons, planning was poor, the work was insufficiently challenging, handouts were badly designed, learning activities were inappropriate, or discussions were poorly managed. There is generally sufficient feedback on students' assignments. The grading of work is not sufficiently discriminating. Some grades were overgenerous.

45 Teachers use a variety of effective teaching and learning methods in hairdressing and beauty therapy. There are systems for the tracking and recording of students' achievement and progress in practical classes. Positive working relationships between teachers and students strengthen learning. Teaching is responsive to students' needs. For example, timetables were altered to suit the individual requirements of mature students, specifically those requiring childcare arrangements. There are frequent checks on students' understanding and progress. There is no systematic development of key skills on hairdressing and beauty courses, thus limiting students' opportunity to develop a range of skills relevant to work in industry.

46 The documentation on caring and health studies courses is good. All main courses include work experience. Lessons are well planned. For example, in a lesson jointly planned by two tutors, students from two separate classes worked in small groups, conducting research into agencies involved in childcare and producing reports to present to each other. Explanations were clearly given; one teacher supervised students in the library while the other remained in the classroom; the librarians knew about the visit and were ready with extra help. Teaching on programmes in nursery nursing and for mature students in employment is particularly good. Handouts produced to a professional standard are in general use. Theoretical, professional and practical issues are made vocationally relevant. In marking work, staff provide students with thorough feedback, including guidance on how to improve. Key skills are not fully integrated with other aspects of coursework and schemes of work rarely touch on the

teaching of study skills. In one-third of the lessons inspected, teachers spent most of the time addressing the class and this tended to reduce students' motivation.

47 The standard of teaching in art and design varies widely. Drawing and painting is taught with an emphasis on the development of critical observation skills and a good balance between theory and practice. The level of concentration sustained by students is exemplary. The development of their work is well structured and students understand what they are doing and take pleasure in their achievements. In a minority of lessons, teachers drew profitably on the previous experience of students in order to introduce new ideas. However, some teaching is poor. Assignment briefs do not identify aims or assessment criteria and students are unaware of how their work will be marked or how it could be improved. In a significant number of lessons, tutors grade the work and return it with little or no feedback. On the full-time graphic design course students' interpersonal skills are poorly developed and little attempt is made to improve them. Key skills are identified but they are not sufficiently addressed in teaching and learning and they are not objectively assessed. The work involved in many assignments is not sufficiently challenging to motivate students to continue the work in their own time. The practical applications of the work are often not made clear and this results in a high proportion of students losing interest. In some art and design classes the lack of challenge in the work led younger students to disrupt classes. In a high proportion of lessons, there is a lack of progressive skill development and students are required to produce work without the necessary underpinning knowledge and skills.

48 Humanities teaching varies in quality. Social science teachers use a variety of methods of working, including effective group activities. Students show a high level of interest and concentration. In a communication studies class, students presented their storyboard designs for a chocolate advertisement to the rest of the class. The sequence was recorded on video so that the teacher could provide evidence to support an evaluation of the students' communication skills. There are helpful student guides. Teachers are well informed about examination requirements in English, history, EFL, and teacher training courses. Sessions are well planned, linked to previous learning and prepare students effectively for examinations. For example, GCE A level English students used the overhead projector to create spidergrams of major themes and motives in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which were then used to explore the types of questions asked in previous examinations. The teaching is often lively and teachers make effective use of appropriate resources. The marking of students' work is constructive and helpful. Teachers complete detailed assessment sheets. In some weaker sessions in social sciences, there was a lack of clear objectives, teachers posed poorly-focused questions and failed to encourage students to take notes. In some English and history lessons, teachers took inadequate account of

students' differing abilities. For example, in group work, those students who were experiencing difficulties were given extended support whilst students who had finished the task were left to their own devices. Note taking is of uneven quality and teachers do not give it enough attention.

49 All sessions for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have schemes of work and lesson plans which identify intended learning outcomes. Good relationships are established between staff and students and there are some examples of particularly effective individual assessments. Support for students with learning difficulties on general further education courses is well planned and seen by students as meeting their specific needs. Students with dyslexia receive support of high quality. There is little variety in the methods of working which teachers use on the vocational opportunities course. Insufficient use is made of vocational materials and of information technology. In some sessions, students have their work done for them by staff. Consequently, they lose opportunities to learn by doing things for themselves. In contrast, some students received insufficient attention from the teacher or support worker. Feedback to students on assessed work is minimal, and there is no evidence of formative assessment to encourage learning. Study support sessions are well organised. The teaching of individual students is good; teachers check the student's learning regularly and make effective use of review sheets. One student said that she would not have survived on her higher education access course if it had not been for the study support sessions. Sometimes, however, there is insufficient detail from the initial assessments made of students to allow effective learning plans to be created. Teaching methods are limited. There is insufficient use of information technology or other media.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

50 Students spoke positively about their courses and generally worked well in sessions, answering questions willingly and accurately. In hospitality and catering, for example, students were enthusiastic and demonstrated competent technical skills in the kitchen and restaurant. English and history students were motivated to achieve success in examinations, and their classroom behaviour reflected this attitude. In most caring and health studies classes, students demonstrated good knowledge and understanding. Good professional standards were demonstrated by students in hairdressing and beauty therapy. On several other courses, students achieved high levels of practical skill and, without exception, they were observed to work safely and competently in practical sessions. In painting and drawing classes, first-year art and design students were able to bring together learning from previous sessions and apply this to new situations.

51 The coursework of some students was of high quality. In business, administration, management and professional studies the standards of

students' individual and group work were good. Most NVQ portfolios in business and management and hospitality and catering were well managed and contained good evidence of students' achievements. High standards of practical work were achieved in video and media production on the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) media course. In GCE A level social sciences, students' work showed a good grasp of research methodologies, their uses and limitations. English and history students applied themselves well to the tasks set and achieved high-quality collaborative work in many sessions. In both computing and mathematics, some of the work submitted by students had been produced with inadequate care, despite the guidance given by staff. The presentation of written work by students following the advanced GNVQ course in hospitality and catering varied in quality. In art and design, students' work on the GNVQ and graphic design programmes lacked appropriate research and the level of originality was low. In social sciences, students' preparation for writing GCE A level essays was sometimes superficial. Print media production work on the BTEC media studies course was very basic, and subject specific information technology skills were underdeveloped.

52 The effectiveness of courses in helping students to develop the key skills of number, communication and information technology is recognised by the college as being an area for development. In caring and health studies, students were developing numerical confidence in the context of practical vocational work. Key skills in information technology and application of number were well integrated with other aspects of work on foundation and advanced GNVQ courses in catering and hospitality. Leisure and tourism students made effective use of information technology skills in their assignments; for example, in producing wordprocessed overhead projector slides in several colours. However, on a number of courses, such as the NVQ level 2 in hospitality and catering, students were not systematically developing key skills. Business and management students made insufficient use of information technology skills in their presentation of assignment work. Spelling and grammar were weak in the assignments produced by a significant number of 16 to 19 year old computing students. In English and history, the standard of note taking at GCSE and GCE A level was poor and weak communication skills inhibited progress in oral and written work.

53 In 1995, there were good GCE A level results in psychology, biology and chemistry. In 1996, there were good results in English, with students achieving an 83 per cent pass rate, and environmental science, where the pass rate was 87 per cent. Pass rates in economics, politics, mathematics, chemistry and biology were at or above national averages. There were also some poor results in 1996; for example, in physics only 18 per cent of students passed. In humanities, GCE A level results for most one-year and two-year courses were below the national average for further education colleges. For example, the pass rate in psychology was 44 per cent, in

history 38 per cent, and in sociology it was 21 per cent. Pass rates in fine art and art history were also below the national average. The college analyses the value added to students' achievements by comparing their actual performance at GCE A level with their predicted performance based on GCSE achievements. The data for 1994-96 show that more students are underachieving than overachieving. In 1996, the 75 students aged 16 to 18 entered for one or more GCE A level examinations scored, on average, 2.5 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This places the college in the bottom third of all further education colleges on this performance measure, according to data published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). This position is lower than in the previous two years. However, pass rates for those aged 19 and over were higher than the national average in English, mathematics and graphic design. The pass rate of 85 per cent for students studying EFL was also good.

54 There were 348 entries for eight GCSE subjects in 1996, of which 197 were from students under 19. Forty-one per cent of candidates obtained grades A to C. This figure is below the national average for schools and colleges. In five of the six subjects taken by those under 19 the pass rate was below the national average, including English language and mathematics. Results for those over 19 were better than average in almost all subjects, particularly accounting, mathematics and English language.

55 There were good achievements in 1996 on vocational and general programmes, including courses for mature students in art and design, and one-year courses in business and management, and in hospitality and catering. In business and management, results were above the national average for the certificate in marketing, the National Examining Board for Supervisory Management certificate and the BTEC certificate in management studies. There was a pass rate of 88 per cent on the advanced GNVQ management studies 'fast-track' course in 1996 and very good results on the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply foundation course. In hospitality and catering, pass rates were high for students completing craft qualifications at NVQ levels 1 and 2 and the CENTRA cake decoration programmes. All students taking the work-based NVQ level 4 catering and hospitality management programme achieved the award. GNVQ test results in leisure and tourism were generally good, with most of the current students passing the tests they took in their first year. In art and design, the pass rate for those completing GNVQ intermediate has been above average for the last two years. Mature students taking art and design also did well; there has been a 93 per cent pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate course and a 100 per cent pass rate on the EMFEC foundation for the last two years. The pass rate for the GNVQ foundation course in health and social care was 14 per cent above the national average. Students' achievements on the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) care management course were high.

56 Vocational courses with low pass rates included the part-time NVQ level 2 food preparation and cooking course in hospitality and catering and the NVQ level 2 food service course, which serves as an additional qualification for full-time students. There was a low pass rate of 61 per cent on the NVQ level 1 food preparation and cooking programme. In leisure and tourism, achievements were poor at intermediate level and on the part-time national certificate course. There were also poor results on the national diploma in travel and tourism in 1993-95; 52 per cent of students who started the course and 70 per cent of those who completed the course achieved a pass. In health and social care, the pass rate for the intermediate GNVQ in 1995 was below the national average. Results for 1996 show a slight improvement. Of 42 students who enrolled on the first year of the one-year Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate, only 29 achieved the qualification. However, nine of these students (31 per cent) passed with a distinction or merit. Pass rates on the two-year full-time programmes in hairdressing and beauty therapy in 1996 were low, at 48 and 55 per cent, respectively. In 1996, results for vocational programmes included in the performance tables produced by the DfEE showed that 43 per cent of the 162 students in their final year of study gained their intermediate qualification and that 60 per cent of the 178 students taking advanced vocational qualifications were successful. This places the college among the bottom third of all colleges in the further education sector on each of these performance measures. There has been a significant decline in success for students in their final year of advanced vocational qualifications, from 76 per cent in 1995 to 60 per cent in 1996. However, the majority of the college's students on vocational courses are over the age of 18 and their achievements are not reflected in the tables published by the DfEE.

57 Students' achievements have been affected by poor retention rates on a number of courses. Retention rates were low on the advanced GNVQ programme in hospitality and catering; only five students (36 per cent of those starting the course) progressed to year two. Retention rates on the national diploma in computer studies have been low for the last two years; 38 per cent in 1995 and 55 per cent in 1996. In leisure and tourism, the retention rate on several of the programmes has been poor; for example, on the intermediate GNVQ it was 55 per cent in 1995 and 67 per cent in 1996 and on the national diploma in leisure, 1993-95, it was 58 per cent. The number of students on the second year of the GNVQ advanced course has already fallen to 65 per cent of those who were enrolled on the 1 November 1995. Although the retention rate for health and social care courses has improved steadily from 68 to 77 per cent over the last three years, a significant proportion of students have dropped out from the two-year course leading to the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma. In 1995-96, the retention rate on the art and design GNVQ intermediate course for mature students was only 51 per cent. It was also low on the equivalent course which the GNVQ replaced. The retention rate on two-year art and design programmes is low, at 58 per

cent. One-year art and design programmes have a retention rate of 66 per cent compared with a national average of 82 per cent. There are poor retention rates on GCSE humanities courses, ranging from 50 to 55 per cent, and on GCE A level English and history courses which have retention rates of 49 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively. Business studies and management courses have good retention rates. On the advanced GNVQ course in leisure, the retention rate is 79 per cent. There was also a good retention rate on access to higher education courses (85 per cent) and on BTEC media courses.

58 The college holds an annual 'celebrating achievement' event. The achievements of several outstanding students, including individuals with dyslexia, a physical disability or learning difficulty, have been recognised publicly. In 1996, two students achieved silver medals for excellence from C&G. One student also secured a permanent job in one of the United Kingdom's most prestigious restaurants. In most programme areas, students progress to advanced courses in further education, to higher education or directly to employment. In hospitality and catering, the majority of students progress to vocationally-relevant employment. Of the first cohort of students completing the BTEC national diploma in media studies in 1996, nine of the 12 students obtained a place on a media studies degree course. Students taking the access certificate have been particularly successful in gaining entry to higher education in each of the last three years. Students on advanced childcare programmes have an outstanding record of progression to employment or to higher education. In 1995, the 34 students who completed the programme gained the qualification and found employment. Of 15 students who completed the BTEC national diploma in early childhood, four gained places in higher education and 10 gained employment. The majority of students gaining BTEC national diplomas in sports science and in computer studies also go on to higher education or employment. On some courses, such as the one-year courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy, and in art and design, information on the destination of students is poor.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

59 The college has demonstrated its commitment to the development of quality assurance. Its Investor in People status, achieved in 1993, was reaffirmed in 1996. Engineering technology was accredited with BS 5750 (now ISO 9002) in 1994. The Basic Skills Agency quality mark was awarded in March 1996. The college's mission statement includes a commitment to the provision of a service of high quality. The director of marketing and development has overall responsibility for quality assurance, although all directors have quality assurance within their job descriptions. At middle management level, a development manager for quality and achievement, is responsible for the direction and operation of quality assurance systems.

60 Collective responsibility for quality control, assurance and assessment is vested in a quality standards committee, which is a subcommittee of the

college forum (academic board). The committee is chaired by an elected staff member, a curriculum manager. The forum's role in quality assurance is not central and it does not actively promote quality assurance. The quality standards committee receives reports from curriculum, development and resource managers and from other staff, such as those involved with tutorial and induction processes. The quality standards committee sets and monitors standards in response to key tasks identified in the annual development programme for 1996-97. Progress has been made in establishing standards for induction, achievement and retention. Staff are becoming more aware of the importance of setting standards and of monitoring the extent to which these standards are being reached and maintained. The benefit can be seen in a number of areas, for example, in the improvement of induction arrangements.

61 Curriculum and development managers have clearly-defined responsibilities for the implementation of quality assurance at programme level and within support services such as marketing, learning support and counselling. Programme teams, subject specialists and personal tutors all have a responsibility for monitoring, evaluation and quality improvement. Currently, the college's quality assurance system is undergoing a process of rapid change and development. A number of recent initiatives are designed to sharpen the focus on teaching and learning. As yet, it is too early to assess their impact.

62 In order to formalise existing practice, a revised annual quality review process has been developed which incorporates action plans and a review of achievements at programme level. A programme log has been introduced, which is designed to support programme teams in planning reviews and implementing decisions. The log helps staff to focus on key phases of the student cycle, when students enter the college, while they are on a programme and when they complete or leave the programme. There are established mechanisms for finding out students' views on quality issues, based on termly questionnaires. Returns are analysed centrally and key issues are reported back to curriculum areas. Resulting action is not yet fully documented and evaluated.

63 The college recognises the need for institutional self-assessment on a regular and systematic basis. The second annual self-assessment report has been produced. It is a realistic document which contains much balanced and critical comment but, partly due to the timing of its production, it omits sections on teaching and learning and on students' achievements. The judgements in the report are broadly consistent with the findings of the inspection team. The twice yearly audit of a sample of programmes across curriculum areas has been established. Its purpose is to monitor the quality of teaching through observation and ensure that programme recording systems are in place. Only one audit exercise has so far been completed.

64 The college charter fully meets national requirements. It is distributed to all students and staff. Charter commitments are linked to specified standards and performance criteria. Staff are aware of these standards, which are helpful in the process of quality review and evaluation. The charter incorporates a section which students may use to activate a complaints procedure, if they so wish. Complaints are dealt with fairly and efficiently.

65 There are sound procedures for the appraisal of staff which involve the negotiation and setting of targets, and reviews of performance in relation to these. Targets are appropriate to individual needs and to the college's strategic development. There is a close link with staff development. Priorities and targets for developmental activity are now set at the beginning of the appraisal cycle. There has not yet been time to evaluate the impact of these on levels of participation and involvement. Classroom observation as an element in the appraisal process is encouraged but optional. Its use is subject to agreement between the appraiser and appraisee, and it is more widespread with part-time staff than with full-time staff. The increasing emphasis on classroom observation as an aspect of quality assurance forms part of a growing understanding of the key role of teaching and learning.

66 There are well-established policies and procedures for staff development, including arrangements for support staff and part-time staff. Designated time is available on a weekly basis for staff-development activities. The college increased its budget for staff development by 46 per cent between 1995-96 and 1996-97. There is a staff training and development pathway to match the learning pathway for students. Within this framework, there is a well-documented programme of activity, organised on an annual basis, which includes induction for new staff and associated mentoring arrangements. There is some evidence of the positive impact of the mentoring initiative, although there has not yet been time for full evaluation. Staff training and development takes account of the corporate plan, the annual quality review and curriculum development programmes. Much staff development is initiated by middle managers or by individuals themselves, and the staff training and development committee also identifies needs.

67 The college has not established systematic procedures for measuring employers' satisfaction with programmes which are provided for commercial and service organisations. There are effective quality assurance arrangements for the college's higher education provision. Staff liaise closely with colleagues from De Montfort University and the University of Humberside and Lincolnshire, and they participate in inter-collegiate staff training. The college pays careful attention to the quality assurance requirements of both universities.

RESOURCES

Staffing

68 There is a committed team of well-qualified staff. Approximately 67 per cent of teachers have a first or higher degree and 12 per cent a higher level professional qualification. Eighty-four per cent have a teaching qualification and, of the remaining staff, only six are not following a teacher training course. There is a good balance of full-time and part-time staff. Administrative and technician support is adequate in all areas of work other than health studies and social care, and study support. In most teaching areas, a high proportion of staff have achieved assessor and verifier awards to support NVQ and GNVQ programmes. Staff in leisure and tourism and art and design have been slow in gaining accreditation. A good number of staff in most vocational areas have gained, or are working towards, the accreditation of prior learning award.

69 Staff are able to take advantage of an industrial placement scheme, arranged in conjunction with Countec, to update their knowledge. Industrial experience undertaken by staff is not always well documented, although in areas such as hospitality and catering staff have close contacts with the industry. Recently-appointed staff bring relevant commercial expertise, which benefits students, particularly those on computing and media courses. The industrial experience of some business administration staff is dated. A few leisure and tourism staff lack relevant experience and most sports science staff have little commercial experience.

70 The specialist personnel unit provides a valuable support service to college managers. Comprehensive personnel policies and procedures are well documented. Induction days for staff are well planned and published widely. Most new staff have a named mentor. Induction continues throughout the first year of employment. All staff are issued with an informative staff handbook which gives an overview of the college and details of its main services, policies and procedures. A confidential independent counselling service is available to staff, including those involved in prison education.

Equipment/learning resources

71 On each of the three main sites there are learning resource areas with an adequate number of study places and quiet areas. Some rooms at Chaffron Way are designated for quiet study, primarily for mature students. The library is well stocked with a wide range of up-to-date books to support the curriculum on each site. There is effective liaison between library and teaching staff on the choice of bookstock and other resources. Many courses have sets of key text books, which are issued by the library. Each learning centre has an ample stock of videos and compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases. The libraries have limited evening opening hours which is particularly restricting for some part-time students. Each library has a computerised database of its stock but the three libraries are

not yet networked. Library staff are well qualified. Most have recently been undertaking staff development for NVQs in customer care. Service targets have been set to improve the quality of the provision.

72 There are 362 computers with a wide range of modern software and 72 printers available to students. The ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers is 10.6:1. About 15 per cent of the computers are available for students to use whenever they wish. There are sometimes difficulties in students gaining access to equipment outside class time. There is a sound strategy for the progressive upgrading of equipment and for the development of the college's computer network. Information technology technicians on each main site provide a valuable technical guidance and advice service to students and teachers. Students do not have access to the Internet and the satellite link is seldom used.

73 In most subject areas, there is sufficient up-to-date equipment of appropriate quality to support teaching and learning. The realistic work environments in hairdressing, beauty therapy, and hospitality and catering are of a high commercial standard. Media students benefit from a well-resourced television and video studio production facility, which they have used to create an episode from a soap opera. The travel office and well-equipped exercise room are favourably sited to attract customers. The computer integrated manufacturing and logistics centres are equipped to high specifications. However, not all curriculum areas are well resourced. There is insufficient small electrical equipment for beauty therapy and very little sports equipment for leisure students. Print, textiles and three-dimensional equipment is old and inadequate for the number of students using it.

Accommodation

74 The college is based on three main sites: Chaffron Way in Milton Keynes, Bletchley and Wolverton. There is considerable variation in the quality of accommodation across the three sites. The reception areas on all sites provide a welcoming environment but they are not conspicuous. The Chaffron Way site occupies nine acres. Accommodation was built in two phases, in 1984 and 1993. It is of a good standard. Part of the first phase building is shared with a school sixth form, the adult education service and a youth club run by the youth and community service. Under arrangements with the youth service, students have access to the youth club. However, few take advantage of it. The Bletchley campus, which formerly housed a grammar school, was constructed in the 1950s and 1960s. The 12-acre site has four main buildings and a number of huts. Some of the buildings are in need of renovation and modernisation. The tower block has poor soundproofing and heating systems and does not provide an environment conducive to learning. The four-acre Wolverton site is the oldest. The building is generally in poor condition. The main part of the building was opened in 1953 and extensions were constructed in 1958 and 1983. The college shares the site with a grant maintained

secondary school. Parts of the site are poorly maintained. There is adequate car parking on all three sites.

75 The original accommodation strategy submitted to the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) lacked sufficient detail. Much work has been done to correct the deficiencies. The college has an annual maintenance and improvements programme. This includes a routine schedule for external and internal works and daily cleaning services. Service standards have been set for cleaning and maintenance. These are monitored routinely and by random sampling. Those with restricted mobility have good access to most buildings on the Chaffron Way and Wolverton sites. A few rooms are inaccessible to wheelchair users due to the width and layout of some corridors. At Bletchley, there is limited access to some teaching rooms. The tower block is inaccessible to students using wheelchairs as the lift is too narrow, and there is no access to the library. Detailed access surveys have been undertaken. Some improvements have been completed and others are planned.

76 The allocation and management of accommodation by the curriculum areas has led to some inappropriate use of rooms. A centralised system of room allocations is being introduced to improve the use of accommodation. The college has not produced revised data on use of rooms since 1993. Most rooms are appropriately furnished, well maintained and clean. A few need refurbishment. Most, but not all, rooms have blinds and overhead projector screens. All specialist computer rooms are well appointed and provide pleasant working environments. Rooms at Chaffron Way are of a good standard but some are bare and lack visually-stimulating materials. Art and design rooms are generally small and were not designed for their current purpose. In many instances, they are unsuited to the activities for which they are used and the size of classes. There is no studio for photography and the room used for viewing and preparing prints is unsatisfactory.

77 Refectory facilities vary in quality. At Chaffron Way, they are sited in a draughty entrance to the college. There are limited social areas for students and refectories double as meeting and social areas. Common rooms on each site are small for the number of students. They are managed by students' union stewards and are open for limited periods. There is a pleasant common room for adults at Chaffron Way but it lacks refreshment facilities. The college has few sport and recreational facilities. The playing field at Bletchley is seldom used.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

78 The college's main strengths are:

- its extensive and innovative links with the Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise and community organisations

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- the provision for young people and adults from groups which have not usually entered further education
 - a committed and experienced corporation
 - the consultative and inclusive management style
 - comprehensive and effective student services
 - strong tutorial support for students
 - the mutual respect between staff and students, which encourages learning
 - the recognition and celebration of personal achievement
 - well-documented quality assurance policies and procedures
 - well-qualified and committed teaching and support staff
 - high-quality specialist facilities and equipment in many areas.

79 The college should:

- extend the full-cost provision which it offers to the business community
- devote more attention to improving standards of teaching
- tackle inconsistencies in the assessment and referral systems for learning support
- strengthen the quality of provision in art and design
- improve retention rates and levels of achievement in some areas of work
- develop its key skills provision
- ensure that quality assurance arrangements bear more effectively on teaching, learning and students' achievements
- improve social and childcare facilities
- improve some poor-quality accommodation.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at December 1996)

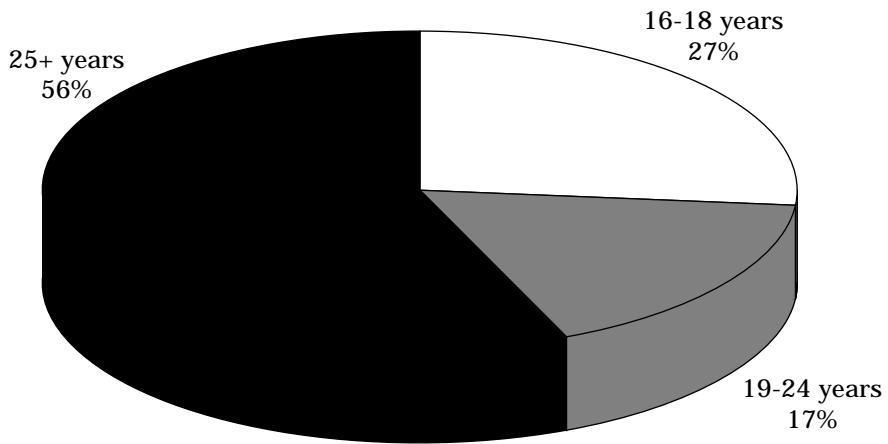
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

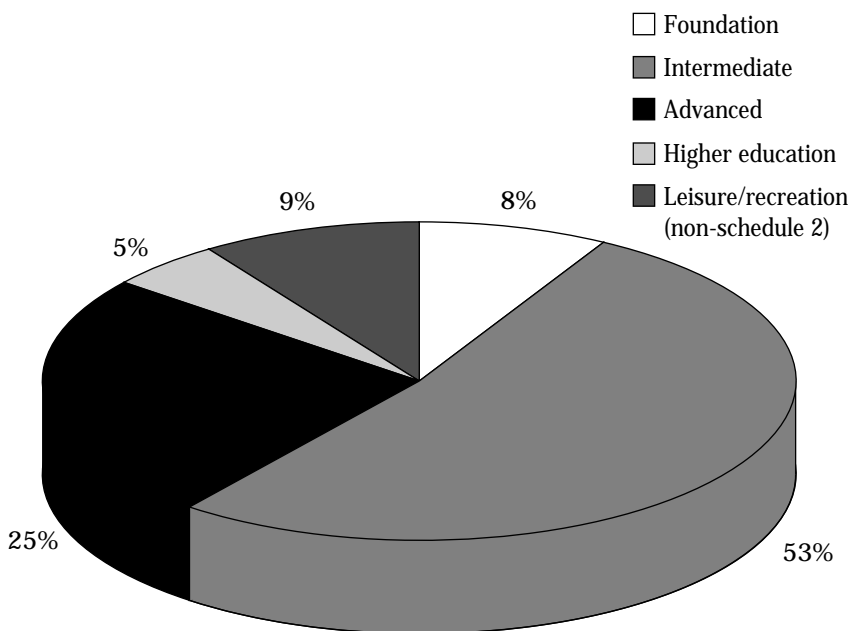
Milton Keynes College: percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 6,764

Figure 2

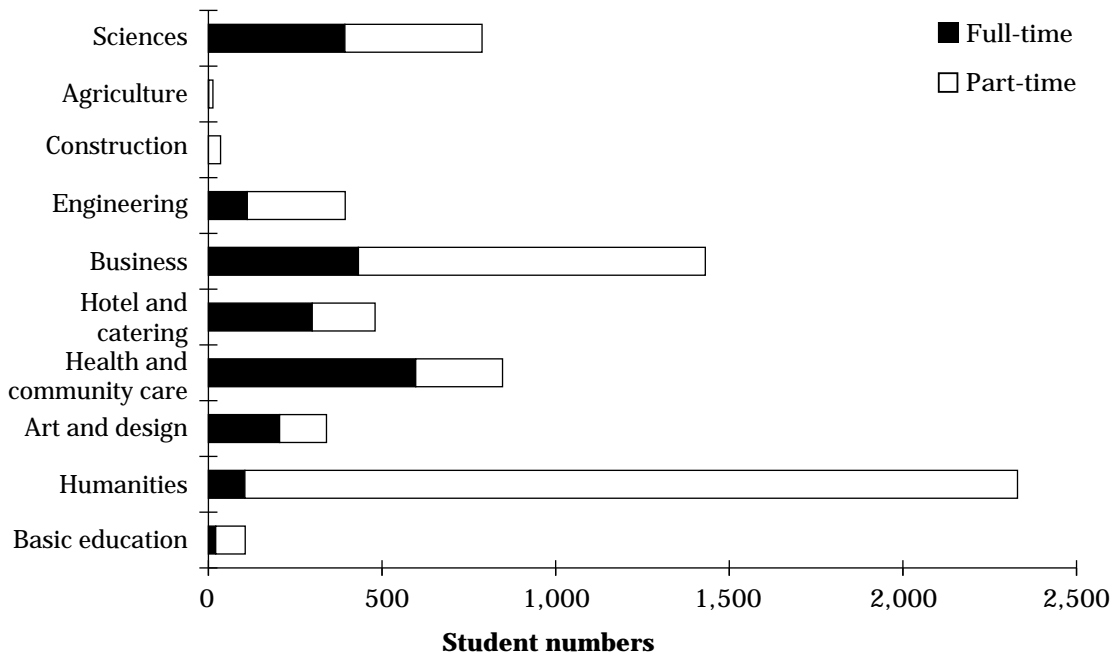
Milton Keynes College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 6,764

Figure 3

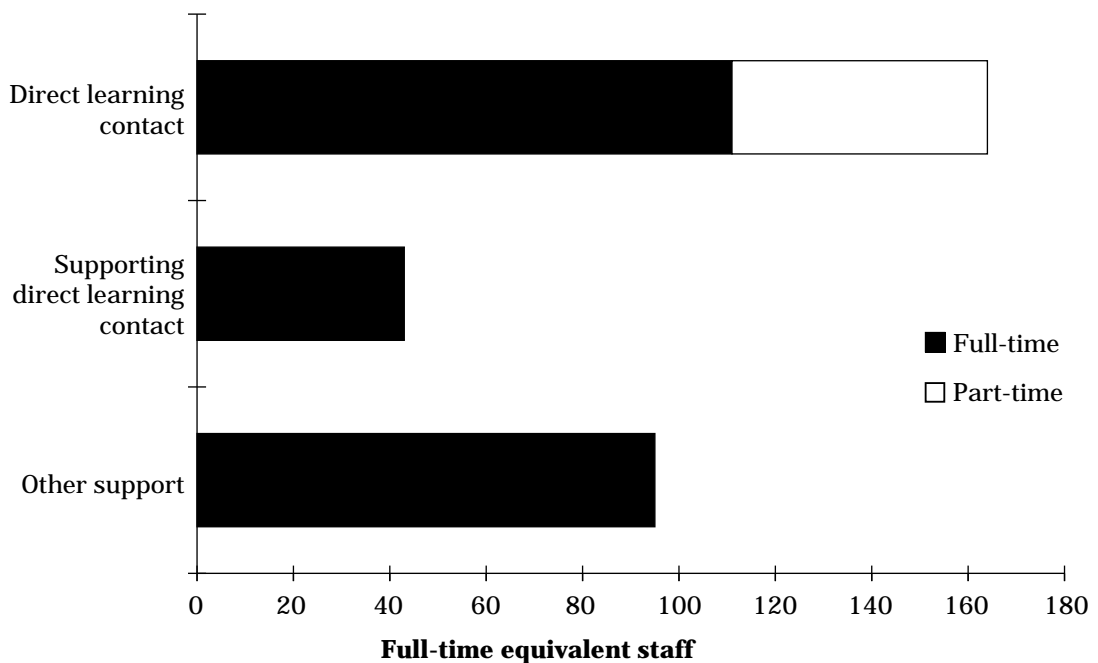
Milton Keynes College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 6,764

Figure 4

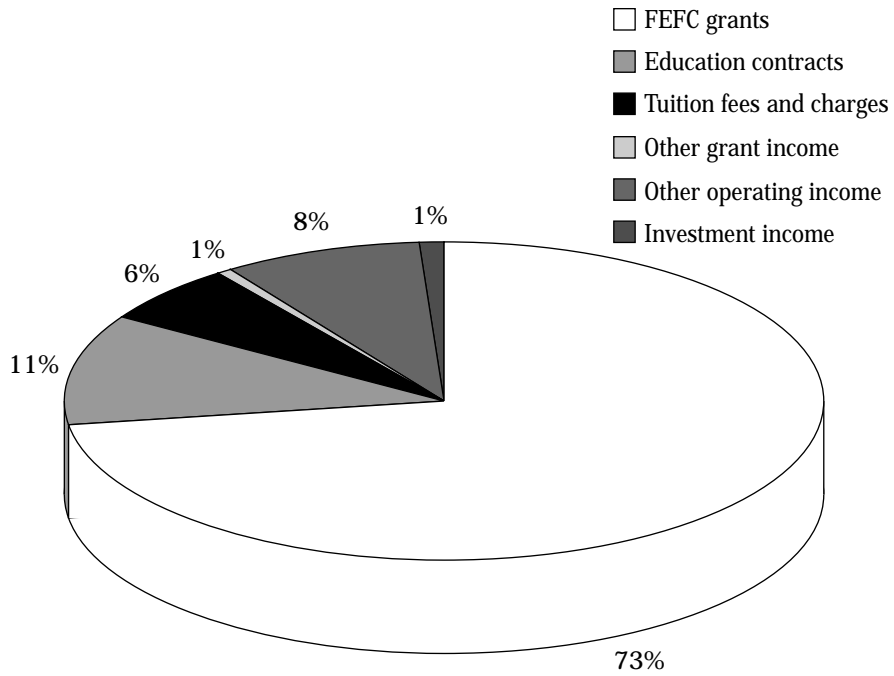
Milton Keynes College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at December 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 302

Figure 5

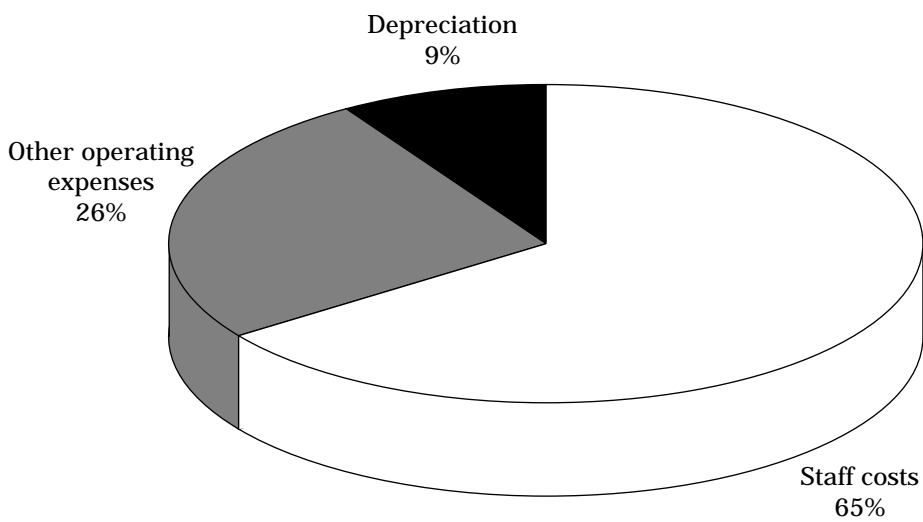
Milton Keynes College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £8,888,000

Figure 6

Milton Keynes College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £8,881,000

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