

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Tower Hamlets College

July 1996

**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 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-95

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 91/96

TOWER HAMLETS COLLEGE
GREATER LONDON REGION
Inspected March 1995-March 1996

Summary

Tower Hamlets College offers a wide range of courses. It is responsive to the needs of its local community. The college has a strong commitment to promoting equality of opportunity. The governance of the college is highly effective. The management of the college is characterised by consultation combined with strong leadership. Staff work collaboratively to ensure the college's mission is achieved. Courses are well planned. The quality of the teaching is generally good. Teachers are committed to ensuring that their students achieve their full potential. The examination results on some courses are good. Students are appreciative of the guidance and support they receive before and during their courses. The procedures for quality assurance are sound and have fostered a self-critical approach on the part of all staff. The quality of resources and accommodation is generally good. The college should: ensure that the views of employers are taken more into account in the planning of courses; improve the rigour of some course reviews; address the few instances of poor teaching in some curriculum areas; and improve the retention rates of students on some courses.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Sciences, mathematics and computing	2	Art and design, including performing arts	2
Engineering	2	Humanities	2
Business	2	Basic education	3
Hairdressing and beauty	2		
Health and community care	2		

INTRODUCTION

1 Tower Hamlets College was inspected between March 1995 and March 1996. Inspectors spent a total of 73 days inspecting curriculum areas and cross-college provision. They visited 182 classes involving about 1,660 students and examined students' work. They met governors, students, teaching and support staff, senior managers, the director of education for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, representatives of local community groups and schools, employers and a representative of the London East Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Inspectors also had access to extensive documentation relating to the college and its courses.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Tower Hamlets College is a further education college in east London. It opened in 1990 following the merger of three annexes from two colleges in neighbouring boroughs when Tower Hamlets Local Education Authority (LEA) took over responsibility from the Inner London Education Authority. In 1991 the college merged with the sixth form centre and parts of the adult education institute. Six local schools continue to offer post-16 education. The college has grown rapidly from fewer than 1,000 full-time equivalent students in 1990 to about 3,400 in 1995-96. The college has five main sites and has provision at 19 community venues. It has courses in all of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas except construction and agriculture.

3 According to the census of 1991 the population of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets was about 161,000. Minority ethnic groups made up 35.5 per cent of the population compared with 20 per cent for London as a whole; 23 per cent of the population were Bangladeshi. The emerging commercial and residential centre in London Docklands is next to some of the most deprived areas in the country. Data prepared by the London Research Centre show that in January 1996, 21.2 per cent of the population in Tower Hamlets were unemployed compared with the figure of 9.6 per cent for Greater London as a whole supplied by the Employment Information Unit. Census data showed that 47 per cent of the Bangladeshi population were unemployed in 1991. Achievements in schools in Tower Hamlets are among the lowest in the country. The 1995 secondary schools performance tables showed that the proportion of 15 and 16 year olds in schools in Tower Hamlets achieving five grades A to C in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) was 21.7 per cent. The national average is 43.5 per cent. About a quarter of those taking GCSEs have been in secondary education continuously in this country for fewer than five years. In 1990, only about 35 per cent of 16 year olds in the area stayed in education. The staying-on rate locally is now 69 per cent.

4 On 1 November 1995, 5,417 students were enrolled at the college, of whom 51 per cent were female and 49 per cent were male. Just over half the students are full time and about 70 per cent are aged 19 and above.

Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3 respectively. Seventy-eight per cent of the students are from minority ethnic groups. Seventy-five per cent of students speak English as a second or other language.

5 The college employs 580 members of staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The executive team comprises the principal, three vice-principals and the finance director. The senior management team of 13 comprises the executive, five assistant principals and the managers of information services, human resources and business and marketing. The curriculum is managed by 10 heads of schools, each of whom report to one of three assistant principals.

6 The college aims to benefit the local community in Tower Hamlets. It sums up its purposes as the raising of levels of achievement and participation and the removal of barriers to educational opportunities.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 The college's commitment to equality of opportunity is vigorously promoted. Staff constantly seek ways to confront and challenge inequality and discrimination. The participation and comparative achievements of different ethnic groups are closely monitored. Courses are designed to encourage the participation of local students and to provide opportunities for them to progress to higher level courses or to employment. Just under half of the college's courses are at foundation level. There is full-time and part-time provision in English for speakers of other languages and in adult basic education, at the five main sites and 19 community venues. Many courses cater for the ethnic and cultural diversity of the students. For instance, there are courses designed for bilingual students, including access courses to higher education, vocational courses in art, business studies, science, a part-time course in nursery nursing and a short intensive course in English to provide additional support to students undergoing vocational training. Hairdressing and beauty therapy courses are designed to reflect the interests of the college's mature and Afro-Caribbean students.

8 An ambitious and innovative Language 2000 project is managed by the college and funded by Bethnal Green City Challenge. Through this project local people receive tuition in English and basic skills to enable them to progress into training, including courses at the college. During the last year, over 1,500 students took part in the project. The college is the lead partner in a single regeneration fund project which has secured a grant of £932,000 over four years from the Government Office for London. The project is intended to identify, co-ordinate and develop the borough's many agencies which offer advice, guidance and which teach basic skills.

9 The large programme of access courses provides an important route to higher education for students without traditional qualifications. Full-time, part-time and evening access courses are provided in nine

subject areas. Students can prepare for these on a pre-access course. There are strong links with higher education institutions including London Guildhall University, Queen Mary and Westfield College and the University of East London, which offer about 100 guaranteed places for successful students from the college's access programmes. The part-time course, access to teaching, has been developed in partnership with higher education and the LEA to meet the needs of the borough's many bilingual classroom assistants.

10 Fifty-eight per cent of the college's courses are vocational. General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses have been developed in seven vocational areas, at intermediate and advanced levels. The provision of GNVQ courses at foundation level is small but is planned to be expanded for 1996-97. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are available in seven subject areas. In art and design, some specialist subjects are offered, including digital image-making, photo-video, photo-journalism and fashion styling. In some areas vocational provision is limited in its scope. In health and community care, there are few opportunities to study part time for qualifications such as GNVQs. In business studies, there is a limited number of courses in business administration. The college is addressing ways of developing further its provision of part-time and evening classes. It is also exploring the feasibility of flexible timetabling arrangements which would allow students to attend college at times which suit them, to work on their own with tutorial guidance.

11 The college offers 22 General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects. French and German will be added in 1996-97, when the college will offer a joint GCE A level programme in co-operation with four local secondary schools. GCE advanced supplementary (AS) English and Islamic Studies are also offered. The college provides 20 GCSE subjects. Although there is still a demand for GCSE subjects, the GCSE programme has been scaled down in recent years as GNVQ courses have become established in the college.

12 There is a good range of opportunities at different levels for students with moderate and severe learning difficulties, both on courses specifically designed for them, and on vocational courses. There are 98 students on discrete courses and some 230 students receive additional support with their learning on vocational courses. There are close links with special schools enabling relationships with pupils and their parents to be built from year 10. Through a link course with local schools, pupils receive a structured introduction to the college and can try vocational options; many progress from this to a youth training programme. Pre-foundation level courses enable students with learning difficulties to progress into foundation level NVQ courses in care, information technology, leisure and tourism, catering, motor vehicle studies and business administration.

13 The college regards collaboration with partners as important. It has participated in the borough's training and vocational education initiative called Achievement 2000. As a result, the college provides some GNVQ

foundation courses: pilot courses in leisure and tourism; development of core skills and information technology across the curriculum; and the provision of work experience. Students from the college attend the borough's Keen Students' Supplementary School and its summer university for young people during the vacation. College staff teach at both of these. The college is a member of a charitable trust which provides opportunities for young people who are on extended visits to Bangladesh to continue their education. There are few formal links with countries in the European Union, although some advanced GNVQ leisure and tourism students visit Amsterdam for five days as part of their coursework.

14 The college maintains close links with many community and voluntary organisations. It takes a leading role in initiatives designed to foster the economic development of the area and enable local people to gain access to education and training, often for the first time. The college offers a substantial programme of courses in English as a second language and basic skills. These include classes in English for Bangladeshi mothers of young people with learning difficulties and for Somali women, many of whom have had no formal education before. Courses in core skills, computing and teacher training are provided for women wishing to return to study. A voluntary organisation is collaborating with the college, London East TEC and the borough social services department to run an assessment centre for local authority employees taking NVQs in care. The college makes its facilities available to local voluntary organisations.

15 The college has a good and productive relationship with the LEA. It plans provision, and shares its facilities, with the LEA's community education service. It acts as a sponsor for most of the authority's FEFC-funded courses. The college has generally good links with the 11 to 16 schools in the borough and it seeks to collaborate with the 11 to 18 schools. It is assisting with the development of a GNVQ course in one school and providing GNVQ units in business for another.

16 The college is an active member of a number of bodies linked to the London East TEC and a prominent member of the Education Business Partnership. Projects developed with this organisation include mentoring programmes for students and staff, and work placements for staff. One scheme provides individual mentors from business for 12 black students and another assigns groups of business students to mentors from an international firm of bankers based at Canary Wharf. The college is also represented in other organisations such as the Tower Hamlets Business Forum and the Docklands Business Club. The college has links with employers over the provision of work placements for students. The college does not, however, make sufficient use of these contacts to ensure that the content of courses is relevant to employers' needs, especially in hairdressing, engineering and business. An employers' liaison task group has been set up to identify existing links with employers and to encourage the development of additional links.

17 The college's marketing unit produces attractive and informative publicity materials designed to meet the needs of different groups of students. Some of these materials are produced in Bengali and Somali as well as English. The unit assists curriculum managers to make links with employers and to formulate bids for projects designed to generate income. The unit has conducted research into demographic and labour market trends in the locality, which it uses to inform the planning and development of provision.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

18 The governing body of 18 includes the principal, a representative of London East TEC, and three members elected from the teaching staff, the students and the support staff respectively. There are five women and five members of minority ethnic groups. At the time of the inspection, the search committee was attempting to recruit two further members who would reflect the cultural diversity of the local community. In addition to the search committee, the subcommittees of the governing body cover finance and general purposes, audit, and the remuneration of senior managers. The attendance rate for governing body meetings in 1995-96 was just over 80 per cent. Governors manage their procedures well. They have appointed the college's director of finance to the post of clerk to the governors.

19 There is a clear, appropriate delegation of powers from the governing body to managers. Governors and managers understand each other's roles and they have a high degree of respect and trust for each other. This does not inhibit governors from closely scrutinising developments within the college. Managers regularly present detailed reports to the governing body on financial, staffing and other resource matters as well as on developments related to the curriculum and its quality. The expertise which individual governors have in areas such as finance, personnel management and estates management enables them to probe the reports in a detailed, knowledgeable way. In addition, the college has been able to draw upon the experience of governors in developing personnel and estates strategies, and in improving links with the local community. Governors have established a register of their interests and introduced a code of conduct. Plans are well advanced for governors to assess formally their own performance. They have carried out a survey of their immediate training needs.

20 Staff at all levels are strongly committed to the college's mission and its aim to benefit the local community in Tower Hamlets. The mission statement contains clear aims which are translated into operational objectives within the strategic plan. The annual operating plan specifies actions to be taken, the managers responsible for ensuring that actions are taken, and the dates by which actions should be completed. All areas of the college have contributed to the formulation of the strategic and

annual operating plan. The relevance of the college's mission to changing circumstances and the strategic objectives are continuously reviewed.

21 The management of the college is characterised by consultation involving all staff, combined with strong leadership. The organisational structure of the college is defined clearly. There are job descriptions for managers and terms of reference for committees. Line management roles and responsibilities are widely understood. The college's executive meets every fortnight to formulate policy and to monitor the achievement of strategic objectives. The senior management team also meets fortnightly and is concerned mainly with operational matters related to the implementation of the strategic plan. The 10 heads of schools and the assistant principals meet regularly to ensure that the curriculum is developed in line with the strategic plan and the schools' operational objectives. In general, schools are well managed and teachers work together effectively in course teams. Most meetings of schools and course teams have a formal agenda, minutes are produced, and actions to be taken following the meeting are clearly specified. Managers are responsible for monitoring and implementing key policies. A detailed manual has been prepared which explains health and safety procedures. Heads of schools and other managers are required to prepare risk assessments for their areas.

22 Communication within the college is good. Senior managers regularly prepare briefing papers for staff which cover a broad range of policy and resource issues and indicate areas for discussion and possible action. Managers discuss points raised in these briefing papers with groups of staff throughout the college. There is a weekly newsletter which is distributed to staff and governors. A conference in December 1995 for all staff enabled them to discuss the strategic development of the college. The academic board provides an important forum for teachers and senior managers to discuss the quality and development of the curriculum. Two-thirds of the members are teachers. Meetings are held at least once a term and discussion is lively and purposeful. Teachers feel that their contributions to meetings are valued. In order to take account of students' views of the college, there are regular meetings between officers of the students' union and the principal.

23 The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The average level of funding in 1995-96 is £25.39 per unit of activity compared with £26.68 in 1994-95. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £17.84. The college now has a complete specification of costs for all courses and heads of school are being encouraged to use these in deciding how resources are to be allocated.

24 The college's budget is formulated after widespread consultations amongst managers. Heads of school and cross-college services bid for funds in line with their operational objectives and the cost of resources

needed for courses. There is extensive delegation of funds to the schools to cover the costs of staff as well as consumables and equipment. Once funds have been allocated, actual expenditures are compared regularly with budgeted figures by the managers responsible. The close scrutiny of expenditure is facilitated by informative financial reports which are sent regularly to managers. Heads of schools have been trained in financial management.

25 The capacity of the college's computerised management information to help staff in taking decisions and monitoring developments has improved over the past year. A management information task group has carried out a review of the nature and scope of the information needed by staff and this has been used to guide the development of databases and the design of reports. The college has an expanding range of up-to-date information which relates to staff and students. Some staff, however, are not yet fully aware of the range of data and reports available to them.

26 There is increasing use of performance indicators and targets to monitor developments and promote efficiency. Governors expect managers to provide them with cash flow forecasts and trends in staffing costs. Enrolment targets have been achieved for 1993-94 and 1994-95 and are expected to be exceeded for 1995-96. Targets have been established for students' attendance and punctuality. The destinations of students and their achievements and performance after they leave college are monitored in detail. For example, the local careers service has analysed how well the college's students perform once they progress to higher education.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

27 The college has effective procedures for recruiting students. Enquirers who telephone or call at the college receive initial information from the central admissions unit. The college holds weekly advice sessions throughout the year when applicants can obtain more detailed guidance. Local authority careers officers, students' advisers, staff who can offer support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and staff fluent in relevant community languages are present at these events. College staff visit partner schools and community centres. All year 11 pupils in eight secondary and five special partner schools are offered an interview with college staff at their school, and a guaranteed place at the college if there is a course suitable for them.

28 All full-time students and those on longer part-time courses are interviewed by specialist staff. Students express satisfaction with the careful guidance they had received when they applied to the college. Few wish to change their course after enrolment although there are clear procedures to help them do so. Students applying for courses in hairdressing, social and community studies and motor vehicle engineering are given credit for their previous knowledge and experience, and are not

required to repeat parts of courses which cover learning they have already completed. People without formal qualifications applying for access courses are helped to assemble portfolios demonstrating their prior achievements. These are used in their interviews and students can later gain credits which count towards their award. This accreditation of prior learning does not yet extend to students on other courses.

29 All students take part in a welcoming and effective induction programme suited to their needs. A useful support pack for tutors lists the administrative tasks required of them, gives dates for talks by the principal, the centre director and the support services staff and suggests ways of helping the students to get to know each other and work together as a group. In the most effective of the induction sessions students were given an introduction to the nature of the skills required on the course and to the methods of teaching. In one lively session, students attending a course in English for speakers of other languages were practising useful oral skills as well as learning information about the college by working in pairs to practise telephoning the college to say they were unable to attend.

30 Most students' needs for support in number and/or language are assessed using the screening tests devised by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA). Specially-designed tests are used for courses for speakers of other languages and access courses. In September 1995, the results for 1,045 students taking the BSA tests showed that over 60 per cent of students needed additional support. The following table illustrates the percentage of students needing support by level of study.

Level of study	Percentage needing literacy support	Percentage needing numeracy support
Advanced	60	68
Intermediate	65	75
Foundation	71	65

31 Because of the extent of the identified need, the college has decided to integrate the support with courses. It has allocated a substantial amount of time on foundation programmes and courses in English for speakers of other languages to joint teaching by subject specialists and numeracy and communications teachers. In addition, a significant number of courses include extra hours of tuition in basic skills. There are some communication and numeracy workshops which students can use when they wish. Eight members of staff serve as leaders of additional support for learning and they help other teachers to provide, and monitor the effectiveness of, this support for their students. The college is providing training for some teachers who lack experience and skills in providing this support as part of a course.

32 The support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. In many cases, such as dyslexia, the college's learning support

unit offers students a learning programme devised to suit their individual needs. Students with disabilities may receive support in the form of specially-adapted equipment or assistance with taking notes in class. The college works well with other agencies such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind and the community health team to ensure that students have continuity of support. The students' union has its own disabilities officer.

33 Full-time students and part-time students on longer courses have a group tutorial for one hour a week and a minimum of three individual tutorials a year when they discuss their progress with their tutor and set priorities for action. Tutorial materials have been developed to suit different courses. The tutorial sessions observed covered effectively a range of topics and activities, such as preparing for examinations and interviews, completing records of achievement, careers advice and higher education opportunities. Students straight from school are encouraged to use and update their national records of achievement.

34 There is poor attendance by the students on some courses. The college has set a target for attendance of 90 per cent on all courses. Students are only permitted to complete their assessments or enter an examination if they have attended at least 85 per cent of their classes. Tutors monitor students' punctuality and attendance and assiduously follow up unauthorised absence. The college uses a computerised registration system which provides weekly reports on students' attendance. This has helped to improve the marking of the registers and gives tutors ready access to information on the attendance of students. The college requires its students to maintain good standards of behaviour. Clear and firm disciplinary procedures are in place. Students say they find the college is welcoming, friendly and secure.

35 Several initiatives have been taken to improve the retention rates, achievements and progression of students to higher education and employment. These include: a compact scheme developed with the local Education Business Partnership in which the students and tutors monitor the achievement of targets for attendance and punctuality; a scheme in which students' progress is monitored against their predicted achievements based on their entry qualifications; completion of psychological tests to help students make informed choices about employment and higher education; the development of students' confidence and skills through their working alongside teachers in local schools and acting as mentors and role models for school pupils; and the distribution of awards from a charitable trust to students on access courses as an incentive for them to complete their course and progress to higher education.

36 The college works closely with the borough careers service which has offices at two college sites, where good information and advice are readily available. All students on advanced courses have an interview about possible careers for them; interviews are also offered to students on intermediate courses and about 60 per cent take advantage of this. Careers

education forms an important part of the tutorial programme. Designated careers officers work with tutors throughout the year to offer students guidance about employment and higher education. Visits to universities are arranged. Applications from students wishing to progress to other courses within the college are considered carefully. The libraries hold a good collection of relevant materials on careers, including information about careers in the rest of Europe.

37 Youth workers, advisers and counsellors provide considerable support for students. A senior youth worker leads a team of two full-time and 11 part-time staff who provide informal advice, a health and social education programme for students and a programme of events such as an anti-racism week. The youth workers help tutors and students to organise a wide range of societies and cultural and sporting activities. They support the students' union which has about 30 societies and clubs including the Islamic society, the Bengali women's music group and a variety of sporting clubs.

38 The senior students' adviser and her team of two full-time and two part-time staff provide students with information and advice about such matters as grants, childcare, housing and immigration. Students can normally have an appointment with advisers within two days of booking one; in an emergency they can be seen within 24 hours. In 1994-95, advisers saw 3,865 students; mostly about financial hardship, grants and benefits. The team administers the college's hardship fund which was used to help 370 students in 1994-95, and 600 by March 1996. The college has been successful in attracting external contributions to this fund which this year totalled £158,000. There is a qualified counsellor; two part-time posts are currently vacant. In 1994-95, counsellors saw 158 students about a range of problems. Students express satisfaction with the services provided. The college is reviewing the services to ensure that resources are used efficiently to meet the identified needs.

39 Two nurseries and a creche provide childcare at three sites but these are not sufficient to meet demand. Care is provided for 47 children and at the time of the inspection, there was a waiting list of 35. There is a small charge to parents to cover the costs of refreshments and materials. There are childcare facilities at 17 of the 19 community venues. The substantial costs of care by other providers is met from the hardship fund; last year the costs of childcare for the children of 38 students accounted for more than half of the total hardship fund allocated.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

40 Strengths outweighed weaknesses in 62 per cent of the lessons observed. In 9 per cent of the sessions, weaknesses outweighed strengths. The average attendance rate of students in the lessons observed was 62 per cent. Many of the specialist inspections took place during Ramadan and in the week immediately following a bomb explosion half a mile away from the college. College records indicate that average attendance from

September 1995 to March 1996 was 76 per cent. The following table summarises the grades awarded as a result of the inspection.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		6	22	6	2	0	36
GCSE		2	11	6	1	0	20
GNVQ		8	13	11	5	0	37
NVQ		2	8	3	0	0	13
Other vocational		4	12	10	1	0	27
Access to higher education		8	7	3	2	0	20
Basic education		3	4	6	5	0	18
Other		0	3	7	1	0	11
Total		33	80	52	17	0	182

41 Courses are carefully planned. Comprehensive schemes of work with clear aims and objectives are prepared for almost all courses and are generally in a standard form. These are often distributed to students. The college issues staff with a guide to good practice in teaching GCE A level and GCSE subjects. In line with commitments made in the college's charter and the college's policy on assessment and recording achievement, students' work is marked thoroughly and returned promptly. Teachers provide their students with constructive guidance on how they may improve their performance. In some cases, marking schemes were given to students and they were encouraged to assess their own work. In the marking of vocational assignments on GNVQ courses, insufficient attention was paid to errors in English. Teachers are sensitive to their students' needs and are determined to help them to improve their educational achievements. In a few instances, however, there was scope for a small number of staff to improve their teaching skills to ensure that they secured the full involvement of all students in lessons and sustained their interest through relevant and imaginative activities.

42 In science classes, teachers used an appropriate variety of teaching methods and ways of presenting information, including group work, use of videos, overhead projectors and worksheets for students to complete to develop their understanding of scientific theory and practice. In a few practical lessons, the theory and basic principles underlying the work being undertaken were not thoroughly explained. Teachers of mathematics and computing presented their lessons in a good-humoured and stimulating way which gained the respect of their students and motivated them to learn. Practical sessions in computing were well managed.

43 The teaching of motor vehicle and welding courses was generally good, especially in practical sessions. In GNVQs, assignments successfully integrated the learning of core skills with vocational skills specific to the course as a whole. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities received appropriate and additional support with their learning, especially on welding courses. A few theory lessons failed to engage the interest of the class and they were delivered in a way which the students found monotonous.

44 The acquisition of appropriate knowledge, theories and techniques is a high priority on all business courses. Teachers used an appropriate variety of teaching methods, made clear links with previous learning and provided adequate opportunities for students to test their understanding of the subject. A lesson on a GNVQ intermediate course in business typified the strengths of this area of the college's work. It concerned making decisions about people in business organisations. The lesson challenged and involved all students through group work, role-play and plenary discussion. The tasks in the lesson enabled the students to draw on their own experience and they were highly motivated to complete them successfully.

45 In health and community studies, much of the teaching was effective and sometimes imaginative. In some lessons, however, group discussion was not well managed. Students were given opportunities to develop language skills through relevant practical assignments, for example, in one lesson students learnt how to write a reasoned argument through an exercise in which they were required to apply for lottery funds for the Childline charity. The teacher had devised graded exercises for students of differing levels of ability and language skills.

46 Teachers of hairdressing made good use of students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds and used an appropriate variety of teaching methods and aids to learning, including practical demonstrations, videos, visits, group work and team-building exercises. Teachers developed some good materials to encourage students to study on their own. In their teaching, they made effective and explicit links between theory and practical work.

47 Teachers of art and design, theatre studies and stage-craft successfully engaged and maintained the enthusiasm of their students. Regular educational visits to a diverse range of galleries and museums, including the Museum of Mankind, the Whitechapel Gallery and the Victoria and Albert Museum, were used as stimulating preparation for assignments. Through their expertise teachers were able to place information technology and computing in a clear vocational context and relate it to commercial needs locally.

48 The teaching of humanities was generally effective and sometimes challenging and imaginative. In a few lessons, the aims and instructions were not clear, and activities did not sufficiently involve all students. A GCSE geography class on urban change used the experience of some of

the students by focusing on London Docklands. Aerial photographs, maps and charts illustrated the dramatic changes in the area. Teachers often had high expectations of their students. Lessons were well planned to build on previous learning. Teachers strengthened learning by providing good summaries at the end of the lesson. Teaching and learning materials were well prepared. Good use was made of audio-visual aids in English, although not always in other subjects.

49 Over 20 per cent of the college's students are on basic education programmes including discrete courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, English as a second language and adult basic education. In general, teachers established good rapport with their students and were able to motivate them to work well and with enthusiasm. Courses were meticulously planned to meet the diverse needs of students, to provide a range of teaching methods and to enable students to progress and experience success. Much of the teaching, especially on adult basic education courses, was stimulating and imaginative. The quality of teaching in other areas was variable. In some less successful lessons, teachers failed to identify and take account of the individual needs of their students; not all students were fully engaged with work or aware of how well they were progressing. On discrete courses for students with learning difficulties, there were instances when teachers provided insufficient opportunity for students to develop the skills of working on their own and there was too much emphasis on supervised reading and writing.

50 Access courses were well planned. The teaching, which made good use of students' experiences, was appropriately geared to the needs of adult students. There was some particularly imaginative work in the development of language skills. The students' first assignment involved writing a history of their own language. It was based on a booklet which included examples of previous students' work, a description of the development of different languages including Bengali, Somali, English, and poetry about language.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

51 Most students speak enthusiastically about the college and value the opportunities their courses provide for entry to careers and progression to higher education. In general, students work well, are attentive in class and take pride in their achievements. Most students learn how to organise their work and manage their time efficiently and they develop good note-making skills which help them to study effectively. Generally, written work is of a good standard and is well presented. Although most courses develop the students' ability to work effectively as members of groups, some courses in computing failed to provide sufficient opportunities for students to work together co-operatively.

52 Most students are acquiring a sound understanding of their subjects, and are able to apply what they have learned to a range of practical

problems. In 1995, two students received national awards for their skills; one was black hairdressing student of the year, and another received the Associated Examining Board's gold award for the best performance in its GCE A level examination in photography.

53 The ability of students to use information technology varies. Students on GNVQ business courses were able to use a range of software, students of art and design were developing good computing skills, and many students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities used information technology effectively to strengthen their skills of presentation. In contrast, information technology skills were not well developed on science, hairdressing, health and social care, psychology and sociology courses. Many science students lacked some of the mathematical skills required by their courses. On some GNVQ courses, there was inadequate liaison between the teachers of core skills and the teachers of vocational units and in some instances students failed to achieve sufficient mastery of core skills in all aspects of their work.

54 Completion rates for courses varied widely in 1994-95. For example, there were completion rates of 94 per cent and 91 per cent on BTEC national diploma courses in science and computing, respectively. By contrast, 53 per cent of students completed their GNVQ intermediate course in leisure and tourism and 50 per cent of those studying for NVQ level 2 in hairdressing completed the first year of their course. Other variations in completion rates were as follows:

- on two-year GCE A level courses, from 84 per cent in sociology to 53 per cent in English language and literature
- on full-time access to higher education courses, from 79 per cent in social sciences and humanities to 48 per cent in business studies
- on GCSE courses, from 80 per cent in sociology to 20 per cent in law; completion rates were below 50 per cent in several subjects.

The college has set a completion rate target of 85 per cent for all courses. In March 1996, 91 per cent of the students who enrolled on courses in 1995-96 were still at the college.

55 There were 474 examination entries for GCE AS/A levels in 1995. The 177 students aged 16 to 18 averaged 3.4 points per subject entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This placed the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the 1995 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Pass rates for individual GCE A level subjects taken by students of all ages varied widely. Pass rates were high and well above the national figures for further education colleges in history, biology and chemistry. In contrast, the pass rates were below national figures in GCE A level accounts, computing, sociology and GCE AS mathematics.

56 The college has done a substantial amount of work to analyse the achievement of GCE A level students by comparing their GCE A level results with their GCSE grades. This analysis indicates that students do better in a number of GCE A level subjects, including politics, history and mathematics, than might have been expected on the basis of their performance in GCSE.

57 In 1995, there were some 714 examination entries for GCSE subjects. Approximately 33 per cent of the 450 entries by students aged 16 to 18 were awarded grades A to C, compared with a national average of 37 per cent for general further education colleges. Results exceeded national averages in geography, Bengali, and art and design, but were below national figures in many other subjects, including biology, physics and chemistry. Of the 264 entries by students aged 19 and over, approximately 37 per cent were awarded grades A to C, well below the national average of 60 per cent. The percentage of students gaining grades A to C in mathematics is close to the national average. Only 24 per cent of all students achieved grades A to C in English, compared with a national average of 44 per cent. Many of these are adult returners who have progressed from adult basic education. About 72 per cent of these students achieved grades A to D.

58 Overall, pass rates on vocational courses have been satisfactory, although they vary widely from course to course. In 1995, 57 per cent of the 89 students aged 16 to 18 in the final year of study on the advanced vocational courses included in the DfEE's 1995 performance tables were successful. This places the college among the bottom 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. However, the average pass rate on these courses had risen to 73 per cent by the end of 1995, following the final confirmation of results by awarding bodies.

59 The achievements of over 2,000 students who are over 19 and/or on foundation and intermediate level vocational courses are not included in the DfEE's table. These achievements were generally good. Results achieved in 1995 by students on BTEC national diploma courses in design and health and social care were good; pass rates exceeded 90 per cent. On some one-year vocational courses, including the certificates in salon hygiene and the introduction to care course, all students passed. In contrast, pass rates fell below 60 per cent on a few vocational courses, including the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing, with 54 per cent. Pass rates on the BTEC intermediate GNVQs in health and social care and business were close to national averages.

60 The college has commissioned regular, well-documented surveys of its students' destinations from the Tower Hamlets careers service. In 1995, of the 1,899 full-time students surveyed:

- 26 per cent progressed to other further education courses
- 22 per cent went into employment

-
- 13 per cent were unemployed
 - 15 per cent progressed to higher education courses
 - the remaining 24 per cent were classed as 'unknown'.

61 The number of students entering higher education courses rose sharply from 115 in 1994 to 285 in 1995, representing an increase from 6 per cent to 15 per cent. Progression by students who completed access to higher education courses was particularly good. For example, all the eight students who completed their evening course in access to business studies went on to higher education. Students on the BTEC national diploma in business and finance also have a good record of progression to higher education. Eighty-six per cent of the successful students on this diploma course went on to higher education in 1995. Most students of English for speakers of other languages and students with learning difficulties successfully progress to further courses within the college.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

62 The college has a comprehensive quality assurance system which has had some success in raising the quality of the provision. The policy emphasises continuous improvement, the collective responsibility of everyone in the college for quality and a commitment to equality of opportunity. A vice-principal, supported by a team of managers from different parts of the college, is responsible for quality assurance. A comprehensive quality manual for managers describes procedures, which include course reviews, analysis of the value added to the students' achievements based on a comparison of their examination results when they joined the college and those they obtained at the end of their course, self-assessment reports from all schools and services, the setting of targets and service standards, and a whole-college commitment to continuous improvement.

63 There is a well-established course review and evaluation process, which is itself subject to review and improvement. Reviews take account of students' views. Students' comments on the quality of subjects and courses are collected in a variety of appropriate ways, including thorough questionnaires and regular consultation meetings. Reviews also contain data on students' retention rates and achievements and define action to be taken the following year. Some reviews and action plans are thorough and rigorous, others are more superficial or incomplete. An additional in-depth review is carried out for each course once every two years by a panel including members of the quality team and staff from other areas of the college. Examples of improvements, informed at least in part by course reviews, include the remodelling of a students' common room and the provision of two well-resourced work rooms for students at the Arbour Square centre. Issues identified by course reviews were taken into account when the college restructured its GCSE programme.

64 As a result of the reviews, targets for improvement for schools are incorporated in operational plans. For example, one target is to increase the average pass rate of business studies and computing by 2 per cent and another is a common marking scheme in creative arts. Other improvement targets are more general, for example, to improve the retention rates and achievements of students in adult education and on access courses. Support staff are setting standards for their operations. These standards are clearly expressed, quantified in many cases and generally realistic. For example, targets established this year for processing higher education applications have resulted in students making applications earlier and completing and returning forms more promptly. Standards have been set too recently for there yet to have been extensive monitoring of them.

65 There are three surveys each year of students' opinions on the quality of provision across the college. A well-presented summary of each survey goes to the senior management team and the heads of services and schools are informed of issues on which action is needed. A summary of students' views is also published in the college's newsletter. The college has responded to students' views by introducing a no smoking policy and improving facilities for people with disabilities.

66 The college's charter is explained to students during their induction. It is summarised in the students' handbook, displayed as a wall poster and is available in the three major languages used by students. A simplified version is available for students with learning difficulties. There is a detailed commentary in the quality manual on the standards of teaching to which students are entitled. The college has reviewed the extent to which it has achieved the commitments made in its charter. An action plan has been developed to ensure the commitments are met and targets for improvement have been set. The students' complaints procedure is well publicised in three languages and complaints are carefully logged and monitored.

67 In 1995, a cycle of producing annual self-assessment reports for each school and service, together with plans for the action to be taken was started. These reports are written under the headings in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*, with action plans. Heads of school used the findings of the course reviews in compiling their self-assessment reports, which are generally thorough and honest, although they vary in the amount of detail they include. The college's self-assessment report for the inspection builds on reports written by each school and service. Strengths and weaknesses are identified and actions are proposed to secure the improvement of provision. Inspectors found the report useful and refreshingly frank. The findings of the report generally accorded with those of the inspection team.

68 There is a thorough system for monitoring the performance of the two training organisations in the community to which the college subcontracts some courses. The college's system for monitoring includes

regular visits by college staff to the organisations. These are required to produce documentary evidence, such as evaluation of programmes by students and staff, and records of team meetings.

69 Full-time staff meet their line managers for a support and supervision interview every term. Part-time staff are offered two such interviews each year. The interviews are conducted according to guidelines, recorded to a standard format and they generate individual training and development plans. The support and supervision interviews perform some of the functions of an appraisal process. Appraisal for teaching staff has been introduced this year following a pilot scheme. It requires one appraisal, including classroom observation, every two years. Managers have been appraised. Appraisal for services staff was being negotiated at the time of the inspection.

70 The budget for staff development of £195,000 is approximately 1.4 per cent of the college's total expenditure. The comprehensive staff-development programme is supported by a detailed operational plan. Training is closely related both to college priorities and to the individual needs of staff. Current priorities include management training and training in information technology. Part-time teachers are paid for attendance at in-house events and at a minimum number of staff meetings each year so that they are able to contribute to the process of course reviews. Individual training events are evaluated by those taking part, and the manager responsible for staff development produces an annual report which summarises and evaluates all the year's activities. An enthusiastic teaching and learning forum meets regularly to identify and share good practice among its members. Some teachers in the forum have given one another support by observing each other's classes. Teachers without a teaching qualification are encouraged to study for one. Nine teachers were engaged in teacher training courses in 1995-96. Some staff have received support from the college to undertake degree and higher degree studies. The college is aiming to achieve the Investors in People award before the end of 1996. There has been an initial staff survey and a positive audit report.

RESOURCES

Staffing

71 At the time of the inspection, the college employed a total of 429 teachers of whom 127 were on full-time contracts, 62 were on fractional contracts and the remainder were part time. Most teachers are well qualified, enthusiastic, adaptable and work well together to understand the educational needs of their students. Seventy-five per cent of teaching staff have degrees, 33 per cent have higher degrees and 84 per cent are qualified teachers. Many teachers, especially those of hair and beauty, and art and design, have current experience of their industries. The industrial experience of some teachers of business, and science, is less recent. Thirteen teachers and managers have so far taken advantage of

an industrial placement scheme to update their industrial and commercial experience and three more will do so before the end of the academic year. Overall, 20 per cent of teachers have vocational assessor awards; many are teachers of leisure and tourism, and motor vehicle engineering.

72 Fifty-eight per cent of full-time and 74 per cent of part-time teachers are women. Eight of the senior management team of 13 are women, including the principal and all three vice-principals. Over 20 per cent of full-time staff are from minority ethnic groups, including three of the 15 middle managers.

73 Staff are well deployed to deliver the college's courses. Heads of schools are allowed to adjust their staffing structure, subject to monitoring by the assistant principals. A number of part-time posts have been converted to established fractional posts. Holders of these posts play a full part in course teams and many, such as artists and designers, are current practitioners of vocational skills. However, the large number of teachers of English for speakers of other languages who are part time makes this programme difficult to co-ordinate and monitor. The need for support staff is carefully monitored and, in the light of changing needs, their deployment is adjusted. For example, the level of support for information technology has been increased to meet expansion.

Equipment/learning resources

74 Equipment and learning resources are generally of suitable quality and sufficient quantity. Specialist equipment in sciences is good, with ample provision of demonstration models in physics and a large stock of electronic devices. The model office for business enables a wide range of skills to be assessed in a realistic work setting. Specialist photography equipment is good and the hairdressing salons are well appointed with modern, specialist equipment and stocked with commercial hair preparations. The motor vehicle service and body repair workshops have equipment which matches that used in the motor industry. There are, however, insufficient newer vehicles to exemplify modern engine technology to students. Childcare courses lack some basic equipment such as toys and books. Video, television, flip charts and overhead projectors are widely available in classrooms and frequently used. The media resources team uses modern graphics equipment to produce printed materials to support teaching. Relevant and well-presented displays on the walls of the English classrooms provided a stimulus to learning. There is insufficient development of learning materials for English for speakers of other languages, sciences and health and community studies, which students can use on their own.

75 The college has good library and learning resources. There are learning centres at three of the five main sites, co-ordinated by a manager. These are attractively furnished and well equipped. There are 210 places for private study, a ratio of one study space to 16 full-time equivalent students, but the provision is unevenly spread across the sites. There is

ample provision of up-to-date books and periodicals. Textbooks are issued to GCE A level students on payment of a £16 deposit. There is also a large collection of video tapes, compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases and audio tapes. The budget for the current year is £79,500 which amounts to about £23 for each full-time equivalent student.

76 Equipment for information technology is modern and of high quality. There are 424 computer workstations, one for every eight full-time equivalent students. Many machines have the latest types of micro-processors and software appropriate to the relevant subject or industry and these are of particular benefit to those studying computing, science, and art and design. In addition, the learning centres have 69 computers, including 27 of the latest multi-media type, which are available to students on a booking system. Full-time students are entitled to a minimum of two hours a week of computer time. There are special machines for use by students with visual or hearing difficulties.

Accommodation

77 The college has generally good accommodation in a mixture of new and old buildings on five different sites. Most classrooms are well suited to their current use. The main site at Poplar, an attractive new building, blends well with the building of the former nautical engineering college which is now part of Tower Hamlets College. At Arbour Square, an elegant former school building has been imaginatively restored. Students at both these sites benefit from gymnasias with fitness suites, subsidised canteens with halal food, common rooms (including some only for female students), Islamic prayer rooms and attractive, well-equipped creches. There are social and study areas specifically for adult students on access courses. The college plans to participate in a borough scheme for a sports and leisure complex on vacant land adjacent to the main building, to provide indoor and outdoor facilities.

78 In other college buildings, specialist accommodation has been upgraded but some space is difficult to use effectively for teaching and facilities are not as good. At East India Dock Road, where there are good facilities for sciences, there is limited recreational and private study space. Jubilee Road has good specialist facilities for art and design, but also has a considerable amount of space which is difficult to use and expensive to maintain. The college has decided to relinquish its use of a site owned by the borough in Bethnal Green Road which is in poor repair.

79 The facilities for students with physical disabilities are good. These include lifts at Poplar and Arbour Square with both information and voice buttons, modern changing rooms and adapted showers and lavatories. Most buildings and sports facilities are accessible to wheelchair users. On some sites, however, accessibility is confined to the ground floor of premises where ramps and wide doors are provided. Classes with students who have restricted mobility are timetabled in rooms on the ground floor.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

80 The strengths of the college are:

- its vigorous promotion of equality of opportunity
- its responsiveness to the needs of its local community
- highly effective governance
- management characterised by consultation and firm leadership
- good communication throughout the college
- good policies on, and practice in, guidance and support for students
- careful planning of courses
- much good teaching
- some good examination results
- sound systems of quality assurance
- well-qualified and committed staff
- generally high-quality equipment, learning resources and accommodation.

81 To make further progress, the college should address the following:

- the few instances of poor teaching in some curriculum areas
- poor examination results and retention rates of students on some courses
- the lack of up-to-date industrial experience of a few teachers
- limited provision in some programme areas
- limited opportunities for part-time study
- course planning that is not sufficiently informed by employers' views
- lack of rigour in some course reviews.

FIGURES

-
- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)

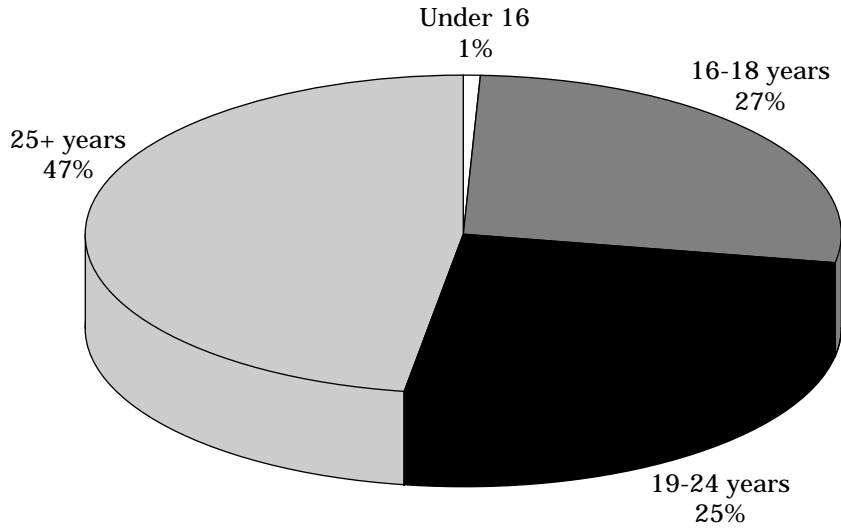
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

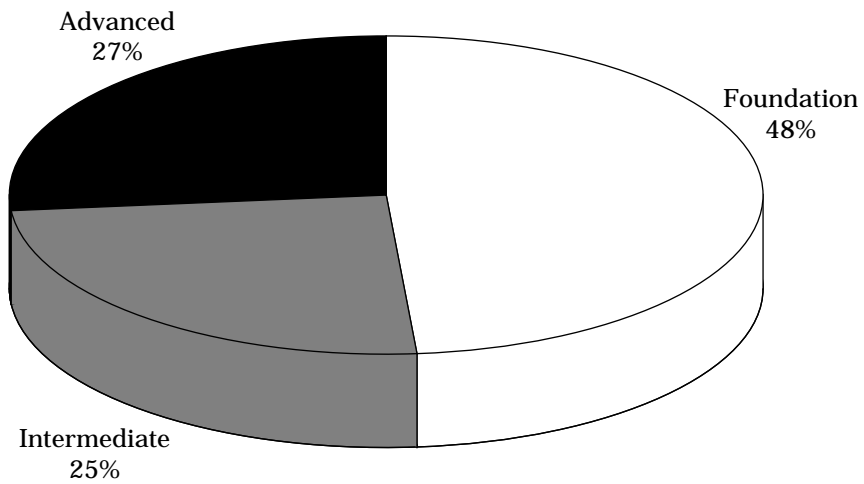
Tower Hamlets College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 5,417

Figure 2

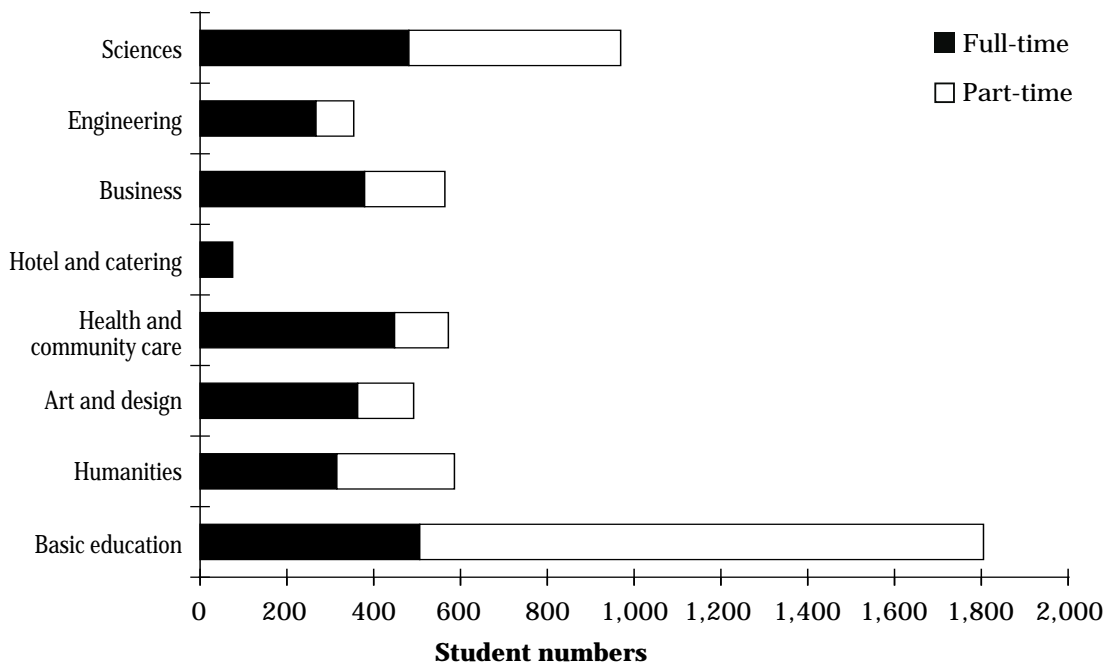
Tower Hamlets College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 5,417

Figure 3

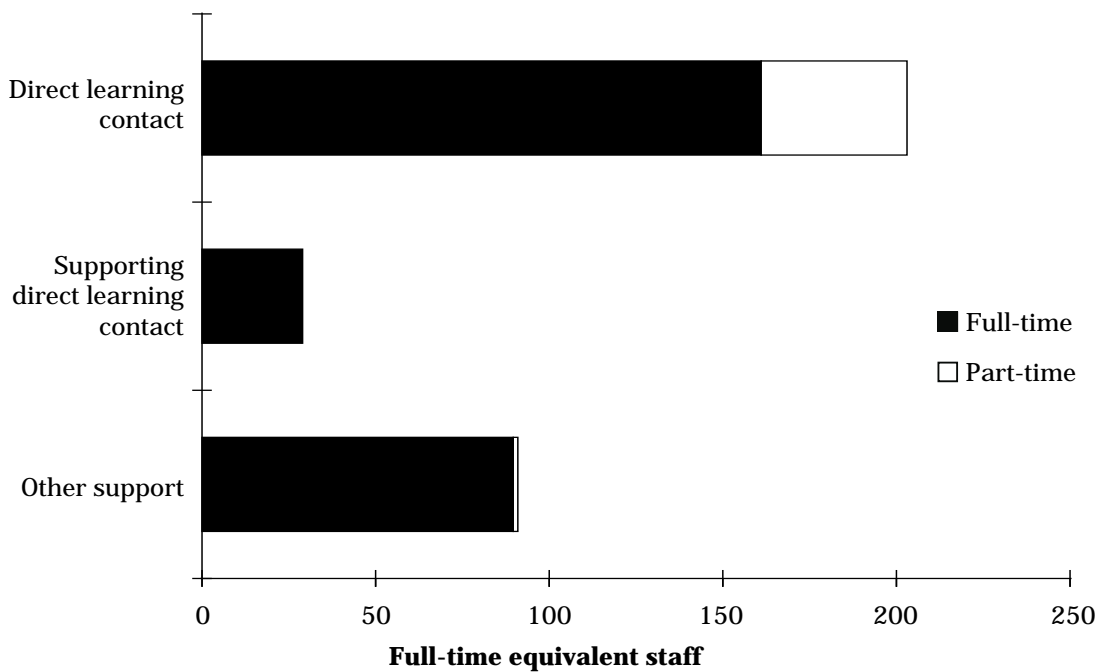
Tower Hamlets College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 5,417

Figure 4

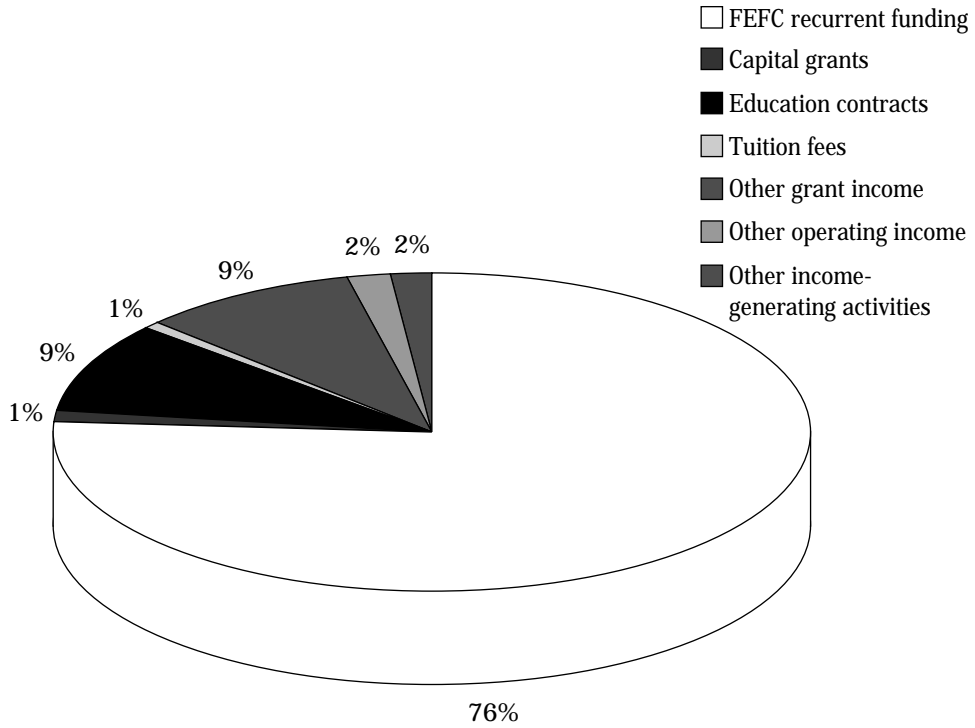
Tower Hamlets College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 323

Figure 5

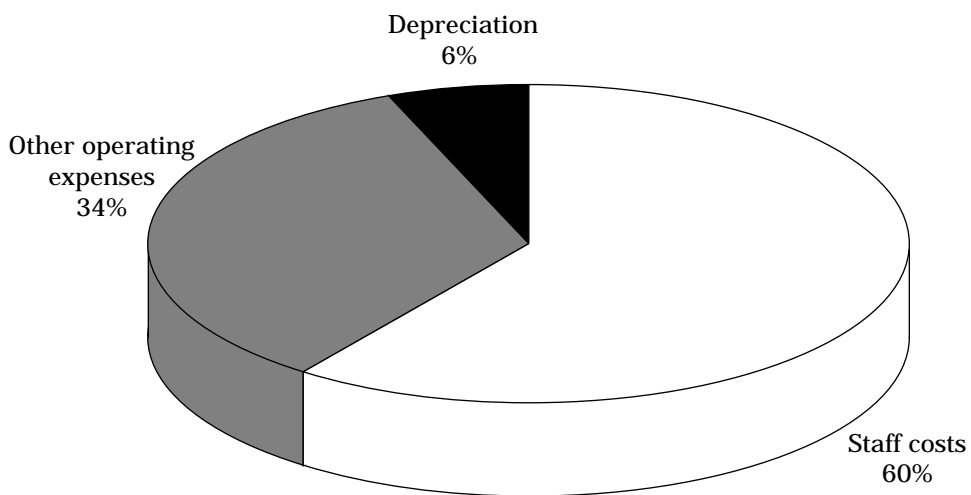
Tower Hamlets College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £14,906,000

Figure 6

Tower Hamlets College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £14,313,000

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