

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**Ashton-under-
Lyne Sixth Form
College**

May 1994

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

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

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

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 32/94

ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected January – February 1994

Summary

Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College is one of four providers of post-16 education in the borough of Tameside, greater Manchester. It offers a wide range of GCSE and GCE A level subjects together with five intermediate-level vocational courses. The college is committed to recruit a broader range of students and to extend its vocational provision. Students are well taught. They achieve above average examination results, particularly at GCE A level, and have a good record of progress to other forms of further education, higher education and employment. The college has a positive image in the local community but should be seeking to develop more effective links with local employers. Management roles and responsibilities should be defined more clearly and procedures for managing cross-college developments require strengthening. The ability of managers to manage effectively is undermined by the lack of reliable information to inform planning and review. Policies and procedures for quality assurance are also at an early stage of development. The college should improve procedures for enrolment and the initial guidance of students, strengthen systems for identifying and meeting the learning needs of all its students, and improve facilities for information technology.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		3
Governance and management		4
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		4
Quality assurance		4
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	3
	accommodation	4

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	2	Art & design	3
Mathematics & computing	3		
Business studies	2	Humanities	2
Care	3		

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	3
Responsiveness and range of provision	8
Governance and management	17
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	23
Teaching and the promotion of learning	32
Students' achievements	40
Quality assurance	47
Resources	51
Conclusions and issues	55
Figures	

INTRODUCTION

1 Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College was inspected in three phases. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected in September 1993, specialist subject areas during the period 11 January to 4 February 1994 and aspects of cross college provision from 7 to 11 February. Seventeen inspectors took part in the inspection for a total of 58 days. They observed 102 classes, examined a representative sample of students' work and inspected a wide range of documents including policy statements and minutes of major committees. Discussions were held with governors, staff, students, parents, representatives from local schools, the Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), the careers service and the local education authority (LEA).

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

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College is situated on a single five-hectare site some eight miles to the east of Manchester city centre. It was established as a sixth form college in 1980, and became exclusively a post-16 institution from 1984. The college occupies buildings formerly belonging to a grammar school. The accommodation consists of the original building dating from 1928, a science block and a design and technology block, both built in the 1960s, together with seven temporary buildings, a canteen and a students' recreational hall.

4 At the time of the inspection there were 833 full-time students and 20 part-time students, most of whom were between 16 and 19 years of age. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2, respectively. The college employed 79 staff. Fifty-six teachers and 11 support staff were in full-time posts. The numbers of full-time equivalent staff are shown in figure 3. The senior management team, comprises the principal, two vice-principals, and directors of studies, resources, and student support. Academic courses are organised in four faculties, each led by a head of faculty.

5 The college is one of the four providers of post-16 education in the Metropolitan Borough of Tameside. The other three are a large general further education college, whose main site is within half a mile of the college, Hyde-Clarendon Sixth Form College, which is three miles away, and All Saints High School, a voluntary-aided 11-18 school with a small sixth form, situated two miles from the college. Other neighbouring institutions which offer post-16 provision are Oldham Sixth Form College

and Glossopdale Community College which are five and six miles from the college, respectively.

6 The Metropolitan Borough of Tameside covers a conurbation of nine townships, some eight miles east of Manchester. It has a stable population of 218,000. Employment in the area is expected to remain stagnant up to 1998. This is in contrast to the North West generally, which is expected to see a 3 per cent growth in employment over the same period, and to the UK as a whole, which has a predicted growth of 5 per cent. The shift from manufacturing and distribution to service industries, with an accompanying increase in demand for professional and managerial skills, is set to continue. Unemployment levels in the area have risen sharply in recent years and there are higher than average levels of poverty. The current rate of unemployment is 7 per cent. About 6 per cent of the local population is from ethnic minority backgrounds, mainly of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, compared with 10 per cent of students at the college. The school-leaver cohort is currently at its lowest demographic level. A slow increase in the size of this cohort is forecast which will continue to the end of the decade. Twenty-six per cent of school leavers gain five or more GCSE grades A-C which is significantly below the national average. However, the 16+ participation rate has increased rapidly in recent years to 56 per cent, and academic achievements post-16 have improved.

7 The mission of the college is to provide the highest possible standard of post-16 education and training, relevant to community needs, in partnership with high schools, other further education colleges, higher education institutions, parents, industry and commerce. To help achieve its mission the college is currently reviewing its organisation and expanding its curriculum into vocational areas and adult education. The college actively promotes collaborative approaches to post-16 education within the borough and beyond.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The college offers 31 subjects at General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level), six advanced supplementary (AS) subjects, 24 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects and five intermediate level vocational courses. Recruitment is generally healthy, but a few subjects and courses have small student groups. Enrolments by curriculum area and mode of attendance are shown in figure 4.

9 The recent growth in enrolments has been achieved mainly by increasing the numbers on existing programmes, partly by lowering entry qualifications in some of the programme areas. The commitment in the college's mission to recruit more adult students has had limited success. Twenty adults have been enrolled against a target of 30. The limited length of the college day, the timetabling of subjects and the restricted range of methods of study are factors which tend to discourage potential adult students.

10 The college plans to extend its range of provision, but to maintain the present balance of academic and vocational courses and to continue to concentrate mainly on full time students. The college has received approval from the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) to run courses leading to its national diploma in information technology and is developing General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) intermediate courses in business and finance, and caring. It has responded effectively to the demand for courses in local community languages and is planning to offer more of these.

11 Senior staff are aware of general developments and initiatives within further education and are well informed about FEFC requirements. Staff below senior management level are aware of the college's strategic aims, they are less clear about their role in helping to achieve these and what the implications are for their work.

12 The image of the college in the local community is a positive one. The college participates in a common admissions system for further education colleges in the borough. It liaises effectively with local schools to support careers education programmes and to support students in the transition from school to college. It maintains links with a variety of education establishments through its pro-active role in the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative. Students are encouraged to become involved in projects supported by higher education. There is close contact with parents who are well informed about the life of the college and the progress of their sons and daughters.

13 The college maintains a link with Manchester Training and Enterprise Council through its TEC representative on the governing body. In addition, it is involved in a development project sponsored by the TEC. Local employers are helpful in arranging work experience and providing speakers, but they have very little impact on the design, delivery and monitoring of the curriculum. This is a significant weakness, particularly in relation to the recently-introduced vocational courses.

14 The college has yet to develop an effective marketing strategy. It is addressing market research, data collection, image control, analysis of present and future trends and needs, and public relations, but these issues are not always being tackled systematically. Some of the developments proposed in the strategic plan have not been researched fully and may be unrealistic. The college is piloting a more thorough approach in its development of courses for mature students.

15 Information produced by the college has a uniformity of style and is easy to read and understand. Some materials are produced in the languages of the local minority communities. Care is taken to inform prospective students not only of the college and its courses, but also the characteristics of individual subjects and the routes students can follow to progress in their studies.

16 The college has a policy on anti-racism, but not on equal opportunities. It is making efforts to redress some of the traditional imbalances of male and female students in certain areas of work and it is successfully providing for two students with hearing impairments.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

17 The governing body has 18 members, including the principal and two staff nominees. It is broadly representative of the local community. There are 12 governors representing business and commerce, one from the TEC and two from the LEA. Governors speak with enthusiasm of their work and demonstrate great commitment. They bring experience in the areas of finance, personnel and management and the college uses this to good effect. There are frequent meetings of the corporation and its four subcommittees, which are well attended. Governors who were members of the governing body before incorporation appreciate their increased involvement in strategic planning.

18 Whilst the college has made some progress in meeting the demands of the new further education sector, there are major weaknesses in planning, policy and management. Strategic planning is at an early stage of development. Existing plans are inadequately researched and limited in scope. Some faculty and subject development plans lack clear objectives, designation of responsibilities for their implementation, and criteria for monitoring and costing. There are significant gaps in the college's policies relating to quality assurance, staff development, equal opportunities, student services and learning support, although the college has realistic proposals to address some of these.

19 There are weaknesses in the management structure of the college which are impeding progress. The faculty heads have had little impact on the development and implementation of cross-college initiatives. The respective roles of faculty heads and senior managers and their responsibilities for the implementation and monitoring of policy are not clear. Faculty heads do not always receive effective guidance from the senior management team, particularly in responding to the outcomes of subject reviews. Documentation of procedures, outcomes and actions is lacking or of poor quality and this weakens the monitoring and control functions of managers and committees. The management structure is currently under review and there is a commitment to implement changes.

20 Subject leadership is strong and day-to-day organisation and management of the curriculum are generally effective. The small size of subject teams and their close working relationships mean that much is achieved on an informal basis.

21 The college's unit of funding for 1992-93, as recorded in the FEFC report *Funding Allocations, 1993-94* was £2,390 per weighted full-time equivalent student. The median for sixth form colleges was £2,647. Summaries of the college's recurrent income and estimated expenditure

are shown in figures 5 and 6. Some practical steps have been taken recently to improve procedures for the deployment of resources and financial monitoring and these are beginning to have a positive impact. Regular reports on expenditure are produced for governors and managers. A system was introduced two years ago for allocating resources to cost centres, based on weighted student numbers and historical factors. It is currently under review, with the intention of ensuring that resource allocations are more closely linked to strategic planning. A college task group is currently working with the director of finance on unit costing and this is expected to report in the near future.

22 The college is not meeting its post-incorporation information needs. A limited range of statistical information is recorded and this is not best used to monitor performance and inform planning. Student attendance and premature departure are not monitored centrally; programme changes and destinations are. Some of these indicators, for example destinations and retention rates, require clearer, agreed definitions to ensure that the data is reliable. Individual managers are clear about their information requirements but these have not been fully analysed or documented. The subject heads make effective use of indicators and comparators to analyse examination performance, including value-added analysis, which is a method of measuring students' achievements at college by comparing their qualifications on entry with their final examination results. However, the general level of information is inadequate to support effective evaluation and the setting of performance targets. The college is in the process of setting up a comprehensive management information system but the planning, development and initial operation of the system is heavily dependent on one individual member of staff.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

23 Tutors visit the schools in the borough and hold open evenings at the college to provide potential applicants with information on the college and its courses. The admissions system works effectively for students within the borough, less so for other students or late applicants. Many students who meet the entry requirements and appear confident about their choice of courses are enrolled without further discussion. Not all students receive information about the full range of courses open to them. Some also remain unaware that careers teachers and careers officers are available to help them in making their decisions. GCE A level students are offered the chance to 'taste' subjects at the beginning of their course, but not all of them appear to appreciate this.

24 Students transferring from one course to another receive strong support and counselling. However, given the high level of transfer during the first term, the college should review its arrangements for providing guidance on entry and lend weight to the views of heads of subject on students' suitability for courses.

25 The arrangements for inducting students into vocational courses are

comprehensive and effective. The college-wide induction programme is more varied in quality; there is too much emphasis on information giving and not enough on dealing with the individual needs of students. There is a cross-college system for the identification and assessment of students who need learning support in literacy and numeracy, which results mainly in students being encouraged to resit GCSE English or mathematics. On vocational courses in caring, teachers themselves provide additional support for students requiring help to develop their numeracy and literacy skills, and a number of staff, across a range of subjects, have set up their own informal systems to offer students extra subject support outside teaching periods.

26 There is a clear framework for formal tutorial support both within subjects and for personal development. However, there are inconsistencies in the delivery of the programmes and no systems to monitor their effectiveness. Many subject tutorials are used for extra teaching rather than for meeting the stated aims of allowing students time for reflecting, reviewing and planning. The procedures for informing personal tutors about students' academic progress are less than thorough, and students' records of achievement are often thin. Thus, some of the one-to-one interviews between students and their personal tutors are not as effective as they might be. Some personal tutorial sessions are not structured well: students who are not being interviewed are given nothing to occupy them and this results in distraction for the students being interviewed. Students do not value the formal personal tutorial systems and this is reflected in low attendance rates. In contrast, they speak highly of the support and care they receive on an individual basis from both subject and personal tutors.

27 The college operates an externally-accredited national record of achievement. Students do not receive consistent support from personal tutors in completing their records of achievement and the records have little impact on subject work. Students find it difficult to see the relevance of records of achievement to their academic work or the achievement of their career goals. The college is running a pilot project on action planning under which students are encouraged to set their own learning objectives, plan their courses of action, and evaluate their progress.

28 The complementary studies programme includes opportunities for students to undertake work experience or community service, to develop information technology skills, or to follow the GCE A level general studies course. Not all students choose the options which would be most beneficial in developing their knowledge, experience and skills. Some are excluded from particular options because of timetable clashes.

29 There are appropriate arrangements for careers education and guidance. Some students are unable to attend careers education sessions because of timetable restrictions while others choose not to attend. However, many of those who do attend find these sessions helpful,

informative and supportive. The careers provision is heavily biased towards support for students entering higher education. In 1993, 9 per cent of students completing two-year courses went into employment, 12 per cent continued in further education and 71 per cent entered higher education. Of those following one-year courses, 20 per cent entered employment and 77 per cent continued in further education. The college and the careers service do not work as closely together as each would like.

30 Information on attendance is not available centrally and the college does not have uniform systems for recording individual and course attendance figures. There is a standard procedure for following up student absences but teachers apply it in different ways. Rates of absence are sometimes high, especially for personal tutorials, complementary studies and careers education where both staff and students appear unclear as to whether these are compulsory elements of a student's programme or not.

31 The students have a student council to represent their views. The college is in the process of introducing a students' complaints procedure. Students are not well informed on the content of the Charter for Further Education and feel that their views are not always as valued as they would like. They are content with the social facilities that are available to them and like the fact that there are many quiet places in the college where they can study. Many of the students commented that they would recommend the college to others.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

32 Fifty-one per cent of the teaching sessions inspected had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses. The distribution of inspection grades is shown in the table below.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE A/AS level	11	29	28	2	0	70
GCSE	0	8	8	3	0	19
Other	3	4	5	1	0	13
Total	14	41	41	6	0	102

33 Teachers used a wide and appropriate range of teaching methods, including lectures, tutorials, practicals, group work, classwork exercises and assignments. In many classes, the variety of learning experiences maintained students' interest and frequent opportunities were provided for students to work productively on their own or in groups. In psychology, English and business studies, teachers' contributions, discussion, group work and individual tasks provided an effective balance. For GCE A level and GCSE students, the extent to which they experienced a suitable range of activities depended on the combination of subjects studied. In some subjects there was too much reliance on one learning style. For example,

in some mathematics and economics classes, teachers allowed few opportunities for the students to participate actively and individuals' learning needs were not always identified or met.

34 Most lessons were well planned and well prepared. Geography and science lessons had clearly-defined aims and objectives. The structure and content of lessons were often made clear to students before they began. In the best examples, the information was sufficiently detailed to allow the students to plan their work effectively with expected outcomes in mind. Geography students were provided with a useful booklet containing syllabus details, reading lists and guidelines for writing reports. In business studies and science lessons, there was a judicious mix of written notes, informative handouts and classwork exercises. Lessons normally had a logical development and there were appropriate references to work previously undertaken. In law classes, legal arguments were formulated clearly and logically.

35 With few exceptions, teachers displayed a sound knowledge of their subject. Many have a good rapport with their students and much of the work is lively and enthusiastic. In business studies, psychology and geography, teachers use questions skilfully to promote discussion and check students' levels of understanding. In well over half of the lessons inspected, the pace of work and the level of challenge accurately matched students' abilities. Many teachers had a sound knowledge of individual students' learning needs. In business studies, geography and science classes students' levels of understanding are closely monitored and individual support is provided where required.

36 In some classes, the students are given opportunities to develop personal skills: problem solving, data interpretation and independent working. Many of the assignments for first diploma students have comprehensive, detailed written briefs that clearly identify opportunities for such skill development. In other areas, teachers pay insufficient attention to skills.

37 In a minority of classes, the teaching methodology takes too little account of the individual learning needs of students. Opportunities to provide activities matched to the students' abilities and needs are missed; as a result, able students are not always challenged and weaker students receive insufficient guidance and support. Occasionally, reticent students are not given sufficient encouragement to contribute in discussion. There are inconsistencies between subject areas in the level of briefing and the approach to study skills. In psychology and geography, there is occasionally too much reliance on handouts which discourage students from practising their note-taking skills or reading more widely.

38 Most course documentation provides clear statements of the aims and objectives of the programme as well as assessment methods. The best teaching schemes show clearly the relationship of different elements of the course and are helpful to teachers in the organisation of their work.

For the BTEC programmes, skills such as communication, numeracy, information technology and problem solving are built into the curriculum design. Rarely is explicit reference made to these skills in GCSE and A level documentation other than where they are a syllabus requirement. The extent to which information technology has been integrated into GCE and GCSE subjects is limited. The college provides no guidance on the skills which students should develop in information technology. Although students are able to opt for an introduction to information technology as part of the complementary studies programme it is also possible for a student to have no exposure to information technology whilst at college. A system for assessing and accrediting prior learning in information technology is being developed for introduction in September 1994.

39 Most students receive regular assessments. English assignments are varied and stimulating, challenging the students in relation to their level of experience. The standards set are appropriate and marking is consistent and fair. High standards are set in law where the assessment of legal understanding is accurate and helpful. In a small minority of cases, insufficient attention is given to correcting errors of language in written coursework. Most students receive useful comments on their work from teachers, often including clear feedback on progress and attainment.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

40 Much written course work is of a high standard. English written assignments are lively and varied; students have a good knowledge of texts and understanding of concepts. Geography field work projects are well constructed, based on analysis and hypothesis. There are some weaknesses in the students' extended writing. In a few subjects, for example computing and psychology, the standard of students' work varies widely. Some of the weaker work demonstrated lack of knowledge or understanding and there were also major weaknesses in presentation and standards of literacy. Art and design students have sound technical ability, but the level of diagnostic and evaluative work is not as high. In theatre studies, although students have a good grasp of theory and practice, they do not always develop their ideas effectively and some written work is insufficiently analytical.

41 Students' files and notes are generally of a reasonable standard. They provide an accurate basis for reference and revision. In psychology, the students' course work files are well organised. English students' note-taking is thorough and shows progressive consolidation of understanding. In a minority of subjects, the revision notes are poor or there is little evidence of students recording their own learning. In a few subjects, some students' numeracy skills are inadequate to cope with the level of the work. The lack of opportunities for students to practise information technology means that their skills are under-developed.

42 The overall pass rate for GCE A level students has improved over the last three years. In 1993, eighty-three per cent of students achieved grades

A to E, 10 per cent more than in 1992. Forty-five per cent of the students achieved grades A to C which is similar to the national average for sixth form colleges. In some subjects all students entered for the examination achieved grades A-E: theatre studies, economics, English literature, pure mathematics and statistics. Low pass rates were recorded for French (54 per cent), German (50 per cent) and Spanish (54 per cent). The pass rate in computing was also low: 48 per cent in 1993, compared with 70 per cent in 1992. The 241 students entered for two or more GCE A levels in 1993 achieved an average points score of 13.1 (where A=10, E=2) which places the college in the top 25 per cent of all institutions in the further education sector.

43 In 1993, 46 per cent of the students entered for the four AS subjects achieved grades A-E. This was 33 per cent lower than in the previous year and 26 per cent lower than the national average for sixth form colleges.

44 The proportion of GCSE students achieving grades A-C has remained relatively stable over the last two years, but has risen significantly compared with the 1991 rate. In 1993, 54 per cent of the 433 entries gained grades A-C. In some subjects, the percentage of students achieving these grades was well above the college's overall rate: art and design (80 per cent), technology (100 per cent), French (75 per cent), law in society (95 per cent), and sociology (87 per cent). Low pass rates were recorded for science (18 per cent) chemistry (31 per cent) and physics (38 per cent). Fifty-two per cent of the 93 students taking the examination in English, and 38 per cent of the 111 students taking mathematics, achieved grades A-C. Most of these students were re-taking the exam and an analysis by the college shows that a high proportion improved their previous performance by at least one grade. In 1993, 83 per cent of GCSE mathematics students and 72 per cent of GCSE English students raised their grades.

45 In 1993, the first year they were offered, a high proportion of students completing the college's two first diplomas gained the award for which they were studying. In business and finance, 11 of the 12 students and in caring 12 of the 14 students completed the course successfully. Twenty-six of the 30 students completing the certificate of pre-vocational education gained the award.

46 In 1993, 87 per cent of students enrolled on GCE A level courses completed their programmes. Eighty-three per cent of those enrolled on GCSE programmes completed their course, compared with 89 per cent in 1992.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

47 There is currently no policy for quality assurance. The monitoring and evaluation of key activities are generally weak. The college recognises the need to develop a strategy and procedures for quality assurance as a

matter of priority. Proposals have been formulated and a timescale for developing a policy has been established. Senior and middle managers are committed to the concept of improving quality monitoring. The development phase of the current proposals is successfully raising awareness of all staff and discussions in the faculties have resulted in some useful initial groundwork. One faculty is establishing criteria for standardising teaching schemes and some subject teams are reviewing methods of gathering student perceptions of their programme. However, the faculties continue to lack formal guidance. The absence of an effective set of procedures is a significant impediment to the development of a strategy for monitoring and evaluating provision. The roles and responsibilities of managers and committees are not clearly defined in terms of academic accountability. Whilst the aims of the present proposals for quality assurance are reasonable, they are unlikely to be fully achievable without significant developments in other aspects of the college's work.

48 The heads of subjects discuss areas of concern arising from their annual analysis of examination results with a member of the senior management team. Actions are identified, but these are not always clearly documented and subsequent monitoring is too informal. Weaknesses common to several programme areas, for example GCSE students' course selection and on-programme support, require a cross-college response, but procedures are not in place for achieving this. There is no college policy on moderation and validation, although informal reviews of the curriculum are carried out by the subject teams. Within most subject areas there are appropriate arrangements for agreeing assessment standards. Outline procedures for the evaluation of BTEC courses have been proposed, but these have yet to be established.

49 There is no formal college policy for staff development. Although some activity has been linked to curriculum developments, particularly for GNVQ and BTEC courses, staff development is not related systematically to the college's strategic priorities. Areas where further staff development is required include information technology, quality assurance and tutorial work. In about a quarter of subject areas there are unmet needs. The college recognises many of the weaknesses in the current arrangements and is seeking to improve the planning and evaluation of staff development. Improvements have recently been introduced. The flexible use of some of the non-teaching days allocated to staff has enabled the faculty heads to provide some in-house training related to faculty, curricular and individual teacher's needs. The college's appraisal system, which includes classroom observation, has been introduced sensitively and is beginning to provide a developmental function appreciated by many staff.

50 Responsibilities for the induction of new teachers are unclear and there is no programme to ensure that new staff are made aware of college procedures and structures. Following a review by recently-appointed teachers, some weaknesses have been identified and proposals for a more structured induction are being considered.

RESOURCES

Staffing

51 The academic staff account for over 71 per cent of expenditure. Teachers are well qualified. Most have appropriate experience in their subject area. Staff turnover is low. On some of the vocational courses, staff lack relevant industrial and commercial experience. Steps are being taken to recruit the extra administrative staff required to deal with the increased demands arising from incorporation. A detailed analysis is under way of the provision of support staff and their utilisation.

Equipment/learning resources

52 The resources and materials used to support teaching and learning are good in most subject areas. For example, in English and modern foreign languages, there is a wide range of high-quality audio, visual and printed material. Of the 68 computers available, only 43 are able to use the latest software which effectively lowers the ratio of computers to students to 1:19. There are no computers in the maths rooms, owing to security problems, and an insufficient number in the science block. Library facilities are being improved in a number of ways. There is now a computerised catalogue of both printed and audio/visual material. A CD-ROM machine has been installed and students are using it extensively. Network links with other parts of the college are under consideration, as are links with other libraries. Library staff have responded well to incorporation and have a sound understanding of the financial aspects of running the library. The librarian has established good, informal links with most teaching staff which enable the library to respond effectively to the curriculum demands.

Accommodation

53 Pedestrian and vehicular access to the college is difficult. Car-parking space is limited and some of it is on rough ground. Access to the buildings is particularly difficult for students with restricted mobility because of the narrow doorways and staircases. There is little signposting and the reception area has an unwelcoming appearance. The buildings are spacious but have many disadvantages owing to their age and condition. The multi-storey buildings have no lifts, making the upper floors inaccessible to wheelchair users. Detailed repair and maintenance plans have been produced and a review of the college assets is in progress.

54 The classrooms are adequate for most courses in terms of their size and layout, but there are a number of problems, some of which have an adverse effect on teaching and learning. Some rooms are cold. Many are bleak in appearance or in need of substantial refurbishment. Some rooms are becoming cramped as a result of increasing student numbers, although action is being taken to convert small adjacent rooms into larger classrooms where possible. The noise levels are high due to the hard floors and this

sometimes disturbs classes. The use of information technology rooms for general teaching reduces the opportunities students have for using computers.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

55 The particular strengths of the college are:

- its positive and well-established image in the local community
- sound day-to-day management at subject and course level
- successful methods of teaching
- good GCE A level examination results
- the improving library services for staff and students.

56 If it is to continue its planned growth, while maintaining and improving the present standards of teaching and student achievement, the college should address the following issues:

- clear definitions of management roles and responsibilities
- the effective management of cross-college initiatives
- the development of a management information system which can provide up-to-date and accurate information for planning and monitoring
- the development and effective implementation of a quality assurance policy
- improved procedures for the enrolment and the initial guidance of students
- the development of more extensive links with local employers
- improved facilities for information technology.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (January 1994)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (January 1994)

 - 3 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (January 1994)

 - 4 Enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents by mode of attendance and curriculum area (January 1994)

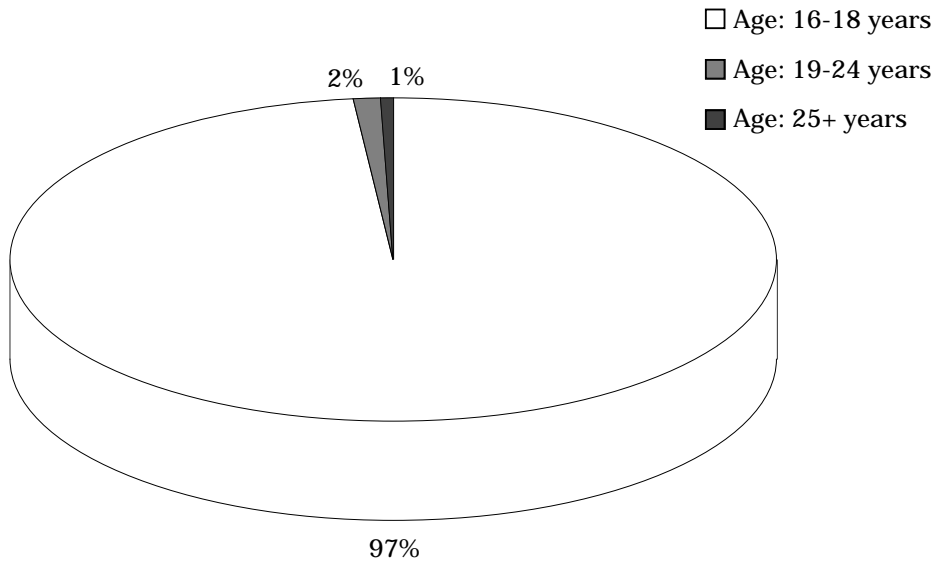
 - 5 Recurrent income (16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Estimated expenditure (16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

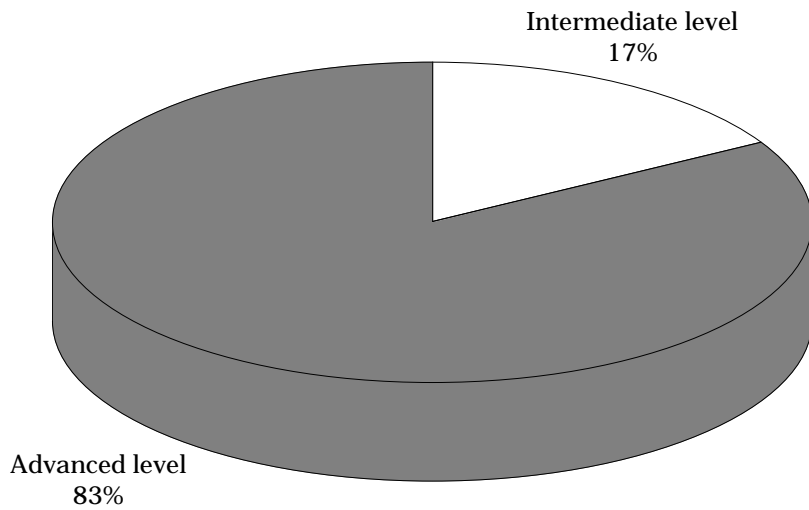
Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College: percentage enrolments by age (January 1994)



Enrolments: 856

Figure 2

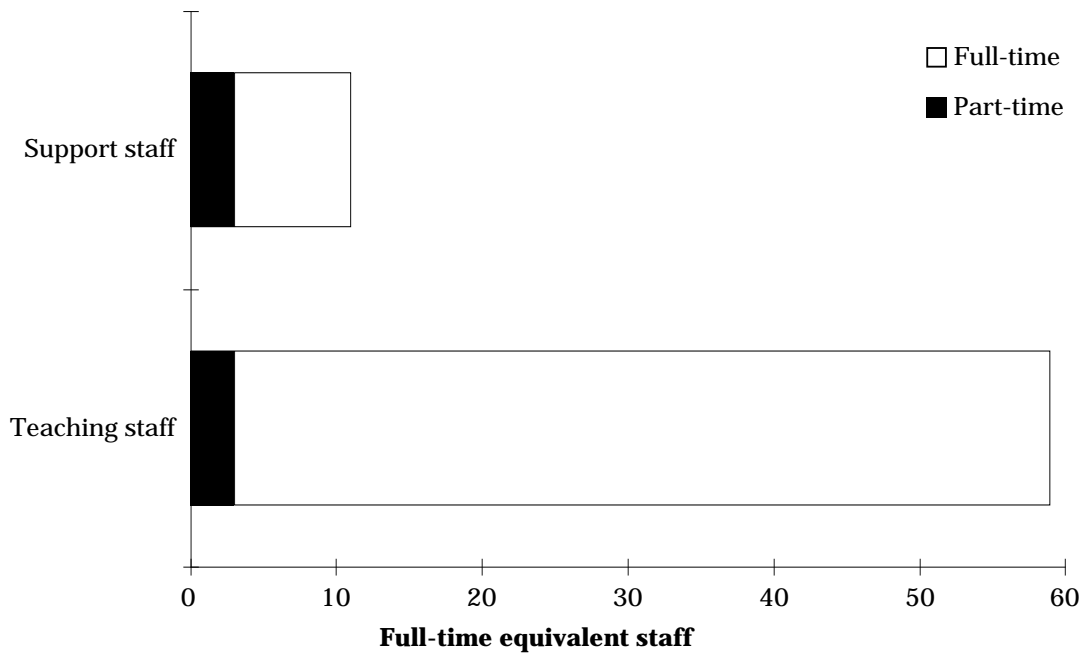
Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College: percentage enrolments by level of study (January 1994)



Enrolments: 856

Figure 3

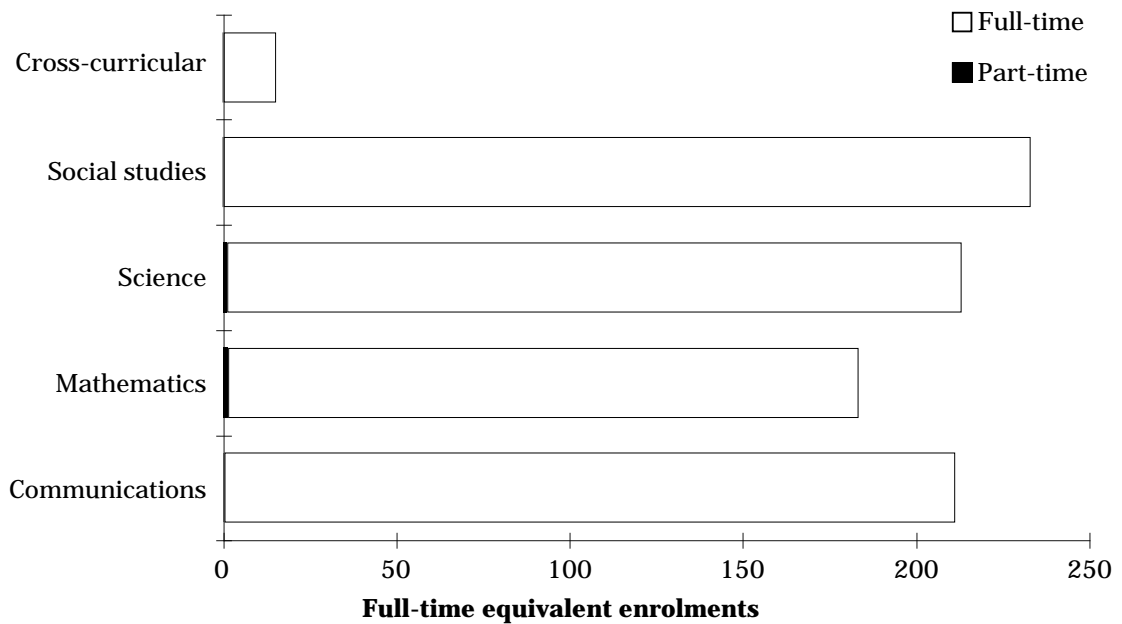
Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (January 1994)



Full-time equivalent staff: 70

Figure 4

Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College: enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents by mode of attendance and curriculum area (January 1994)



Full-time equivalent enrolments: 856

Figure 5

Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College: recurrent income (16 months to July 1994)

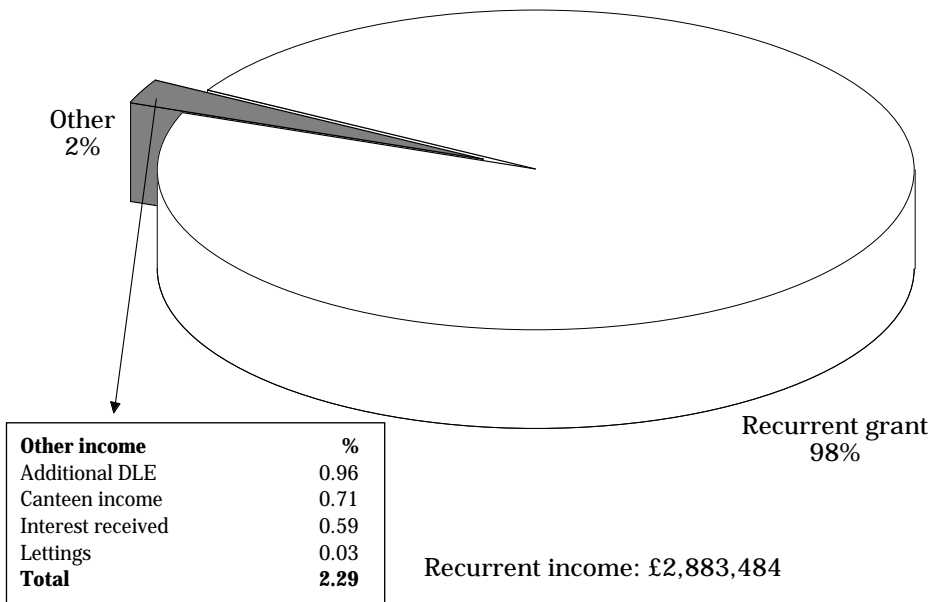
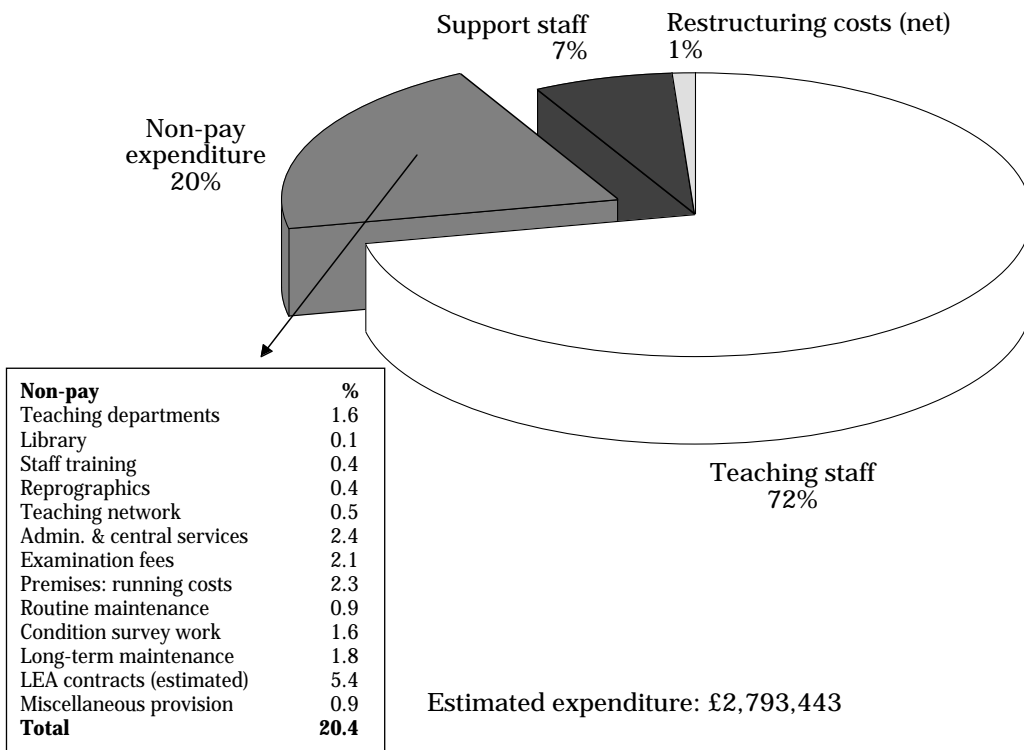


Figure 6

Ashton-under-Lyne Sixth Form College: estimated expenditure (16 months to July 1994)



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