Hopwood Hall College

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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. Assessments are set out in their reports. They also summarise their judgements on the balance between strengths and weaknesses using a five-point scale. Each grade on the scale has the following descriptor:

- *grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*

- *grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*

- *grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*

- *grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*

- *grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 14/94

HOPWOOD HALL COLLEGE
NORTH WEST REGION
Inspected November-December 1993

Summary

Hopwood Hall in Lancashire was formed as a tertiary college in September 1990. It is the main provider of post-16 education in the Rochdale area. The college has an active and effective governing body. Faculty managers are supportive of the work of the divisions and there are examples of sound leadership at divisional level. Students benefit from well-organised admission and induction procedures and from much good teaching. A high proportion of full-time students achieve their vocational qualifications and students generally perform satisfactorily in their GCE A level examinations. The college has some good specialist accommodation and facilities which provide a strong focus for teaching and learning. Hopwood Hall is still in the process of developing a corporate identity. It is currently reviewing its management structures, developing management information systems and quality assurance procedures, and seeking to establish a strategic-planning process which has the confidence of its staff. The college should strengthen its recruitment procedures to deal with falling enrolments. It should also address the poor performance of students in GCSE examinations, the low retention rates on some courses, the mechanisms for introducing GNVQs, the systematic development of core skills and the deployment of support staff.

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	2
Quality assurance	4
Resources	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Business & administration	3	Science	3
Construction	3	Care, leisure & catering	2
Engineering & technology	2	Art & design	2
Humanities & education	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1   Hopwood Hall College was inspected during November and December 1993. Twenty-eight inspectors took part for a total of 165 inspector days. Aspects of work in all the major areas of provision in the college were inspected, with the exception of adult basic education. Inspectors visited 300 classes, attended by 3,000 students, and examined samples of students' written and practical work. They held discussions with governors, staff, students, parents, local employers, staff of the Rochdale Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and the local education authority (LEA).

2   This report is based on inspections carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. The framework describes a four-year inspection cycle. When this cycle becomes fully established, colleges will have the opportunity to respond to the findings of earlier inspection visits before their quadrennial inspection and the subsequent published report. As this inspection occurred early in the cycle, the opportunity for such a response was not available.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3   Hopwood Hall College was formed as a tertiary institution in September 1990, bringing together seven secondary school sixth forms, three small further education colleges and a centre for skills development. Teachers and other staff from these institutions brought with them differing skills, experience and professional practice. The college still has some way to go in building upon these to form a corporate identity, a process made more difficult by its having to operate on two very different sites. The college's main Hopwood site, formerly that of a teacher-training college, occupies 35 hectares in an attractive semi-rural location. It is five miles from the college's Rochdale site which houses the town-centre buildings of the former technical, art and design and adult education colleges, purpose-built in the 1960s.

4   The college has approximately 9,400 students of whom 2,250 are full-time. The age profile of the student population is shown in figure 1. The college employs 620 staff, of which 330 full-time equivalent staff are teachers and 146 are support staff (figure 2). The college is organised in four teaching faculties. Within each faculty, responsibilities for many aspects of the day-to-day running of courses and the management of resources are devolved to divisions or other identifiable sub-groups.

5   The college is the main provider of post-16 education in the Rochdale area. Since the formation of the college, most secondary schools in the area have not provided post-16 education. Three schools continue to maintain sixth forms and the college competes with these in providing General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education Advanced level (GCE A level) courses. Six colleges in the further education sector are within relatively easy travelling distance of the college's main catchment area.

These are:

Oldham College	4 miles
Oldham Sixth Form College	4 miles
Manchester College of Arts and Technology	6 miles
Bury College	10 miles
Holy Cross College	13 miles
Accrington and Rossendale College	15 miles.

Collectively, they offer a similar range of vocational and other courses and so compete for students with Hopwood Hall College.

6   The proportion of the borough of Rochdale work-force engaged in manufacturing industries is above the national average. Nevertheless, the traditional textile and engineering industries are declining rapidly and now account for only 30 per cent of those in employment. Fifty-nine per cent of the work-force is employed in the service sector. The borough has low levels of new business start-ups and 90 per cent of companies employ less than 25 people. Unemployment in January 1993 stood at 11.2 per cent. Almost a third of the unemployed had been out of work for more than a year, the majority of these under 35 years of age. The ethnic minority population is predominantly of Asian background and accounts for 7.9 per cent of the population of the area. School leavers' overall levels of achievement are low, often considerably lower than the national average in some subjects.

7   Against this background, the college is guided by an appropriate mission statement, set of principles and strategic aims. Key features of the mission statement include a commitment to provide lifelong education and training opportunities in a supportive, caring and environmentally responsive manner. The college intends to achieve this by being a healthy institution which thrives on positive change, which is distinguished through the professionalism of its services to customers, which is committed to constant quality improvement, and which provides a broad portfolio of post-16 education and training designed to meet individual need. The college's strategic aims include: providing a wide range of programmes for all ages, abilities and client groups; enabling academic, vocational and non-vocational programmes; providing progression through clear guidance and counselling; and fostering quality and excellence in all areas of the college. In several important aspects of its provision and organisation, the college is not in a position at present to deliver these stated intentions.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8   Hopwood Hall college offers a wide range of courses at several levels and for different modes of attendance. The range meets the needs of most potential students, employers and other clients. The provision consists of:
- full-time and part-time programmes leading to GCE A level and GCSE awards

- programmes leading to General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) awards in business, care, and leisure and tourism
- full-time and part-time programmes in vocational areas from foundation to advanced level, leading increasingly to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) awards of the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), City and Guilds (C & G) and Royal Society of Arts (RSA)
- programmes in adult education funded by Rochdale LEA
- provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, either on discrete programmes or, with additional support, on mainstream courses
- courses in higher education, some of which are operated in conjunction with local universities.

The enrolments in each of the college's main curriculum areas are shown in figure 3.

9   In most areas of work, the college has made arrangements to allow students with non-traditional or minimal entry qualifications to join appropriate courses. These include alternatives to GCSE courses, the diploma in vocational education or VITAL, a college pre-vocational programme. All of these courses help students to further their education, with the possibility of progressing to mainstream, vocational or other courses to improve their qualifications.

10   The diploma in vocational education course in the faculty of care, leisure and catering consists of three levels, each with a clear and appropriate set of objectives. The comprehensive documentation for the course assists the effective integration and teaching of the occupational and other skills which are a feature of the course. The clear rationale ensures that students are guided towards the occupational area and level of course which best meet their interests and abilities. There are sound arrangements to accredit the achievements of students on the course.

11   The cross-college management of the introduction of GNVQs is weak. Many staff are not well prepared to teach the curriculum, nor are they well informed of the arrangements for assessing students. The curriculum content is generally appropriate but lacks sufficient detail to ensure a logical progression from GNVQ intermediate level to advanced level. Although the coverage of information technology in GNVQ courses is adequate, there is no strategy to ensure a sufficient coverage of numeracy and communication skills or to provide additional support for GNVQ students with weaknesses in these areas.

12   The programmes of study of many students taking several GCE A level subjects lack coherence. There is little attempt to provide a balanced curriculum for an individual student which includes skills or topics not specifically covered in their main subject areas.

13   There are relatively few opportunities for students to include both vocational and non-vocational courses in their overall programmes of

study. At present, the college offers a limited range of income-generating, or other, short courses to support local industry and commerce. Staff recognise that there remain potentially fruitful areas where short course provision could be developed.

14   The college has a generally positive image in the local community. Much of the publicity material has a strong identity and is of a good typographical standard.   Even so, the quality and accessibility of information is variable. Information for part-time courses, for example, is less clearly presented than that for full-time courses. The publicity material reflects the college's policy of offering equality of opportunity to all students.

15   Liaison with local secondary schools is good. College and school staff have developed sound arrangements to help students make the transition from school to college. The college has a team of staff who make regular visits to feeder schools to work with school staff and prospective students. Activities jointly undertaken with schools include some good curriculum projects and the development of a common framework within which students' achievements at school and college can be assessed and recorded. School pupils have opportunities to visit the college to meet and work with college students, to visit and use college facilities such as carpentry and joinery workshops and sports facilities. They also visit the college as part of the work being undertaken on specialist vocational projects, for example in construction, which are jointly sponsored by school and college.

16   The college has a good working relationship with Rochdale TEC. It ensures through its participation in the work of the TEC strategy group, that its aims and strategic planning take account of, and relate to, those of the TEC. The college plays a pro-active role in the Partnership Industry Education in Rochdale group and in a TEC-sponsored initiative to introduce courses leading to NVQ awards in secondary schools. The college's involvement is valued by the TEC.

17   There are good arrangements for co-ordinating the work experience placements of students. All full-time students have an entitlement to work experience. Almost all students on vocational courses, and just under half of GCSE and A level students, take part in work experience schemes. The college liaises well with work experience providers. The students' union has also worked to good effect with employers, social services and community groups to contribute to the personal and social development work of the college.

18   In other respects, the college's links with local employers are limited. With the exception of potential employers of art and design students, local employers have a low level of involvement in the development, planning, delivery and evaluation of courses. There are few formal arrangements for employers to contribute to curriculum content and development and those that are in existence are not fully developed.

19   The college's marketing and enterprise function is being re-organised. The collection, collation and analysis of local market information is

underdeveloped and the college intends to employ an external agency to improve this aspect of its work. It is unclear to what extent the marketing and enterprise effort is contributing effectively to the revision of existing courses in the college and the identification of new areas for course development.

20   The college has an appropriate policy on equal opportunities and an efficient system of monitoring. A well-planned policy against racial and sexual harassment is also being developed. Both policies are effectively supported by staff-development activities. The college's equal opportunities unit contributes to the induction of staff and students and the materials used for tutorial sessions are of a high standard. Positive support from senior management is aiding the promotion of equality of opportunity within the college.

21   There are some weaknesses in the college's marketing and recruitment strategies. However, new strategies are being developed to improve the recruitment of students from client groups who are currently under-represented. Crèche provision is available on each site to make it easier for students with young children to attend college during the day. The college does not translate the information in its prospectuses into languages other than English even though the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is now approximately 10 per cent of those attending college.

22   It is possible for many students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to join courses in performing arts, education, business studies, sociology, music, and hair and beauty. The college has provided additional staff and some specialist equipment and ensured satisfactory wheelchair access to classrooms. However, the educational and support needs of some students have not been fully assessed and teachers have not been provided with sufficient guidance on the most effective teaching styles to adopt. Some areas of the college are not easily accessible to wheelchair users and this can sometimes restrict the courses students are able to attend and their overall opportunities to make progress. Some subject sections such as catering and care have either restricted physical access or are not yet offering suitable support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

23   At the time of the inspection, the last appointments to the governing body were being completed. In its final form, the governing body will have fourteen members: six from industry and commerce, one TEC nominee, two co-opted members from Rochdale local authority, two members of staff, one student member, one local community nominee and the principal. The governing body is developing a clear view of its strategic role and it provides sound frameworks within which senior managers can carry out their responsibilities. Governors have a strong sense of ownership of the college and its activities. They are keenly aware of the college's role in the

town and seek appropriate ways to work with the local authority in the interests of the community at large. Mechanisms for supporting the work of the governing body are effective. The governors are in the process of developing criteria for evaluating their activities.

24   Inspectors attended one meeting of the employment and finance sub-committee of the governing body. Agenda items were dealt with in a brisk and purposeful style. Governors were perceptive in their contributions and showed a good grasp of complex problems. Personnel issues were dealt with sensitively.

25   Shortly after its formation, the college adopted a far-ranging and detailed process of strategic planning. This was designed to involve most staff in a two-way consultative process through which a series of inter-dependent college, faculty and divisional strategic plans would be created. It was only partially successful and many staff have become disillusioned with the planning process as a consequence.

26   The college strategic plan, a substantial document of over 200 pages, is ambitious. In spite of its excessive length, the document fails to reflect the priorities and realities of forward planning and the need to establish clear and unambiguous objectives for staff. The plan lacks a clear statement of priorities, defined targets for key aspects of provision and adequate detail of the responsibilities of key post-holders. Some faculty business plans, and many divisional plans, have inherent weaknesses which stem from: weaknesses in the college strategic plan itself, the limited involvement of many staff in the overall college planning process, and insufficient comments from senior managers on the adequacy of these plans. The college is up-dating and re-interpreting the strategic plan as part of its process of continual development. This process has yet to regain the confidence and involvement of the college's staff.

27   The college principal was suspended by the governing body several months before the inspection. The period of the inspection coincided with a decision of the directorate, supported by governors, to carry out a thorough review of the college's management structure which, with minor alterations and additions, has been in place since the college was formed. The view of the directorate and governors is that the present structure is top-heavy and expensive. Several potentially important changes are being considered.

28   At present, the college has an acting director and two deputy directors, one with overall responsibility for the curriculum and one with overall responsibility for strategic planning, financial and external affairs. An assistant director heads each of the college's four teaching faculties. The four faculties are: technology and science; arts, humanities and leisure; personal and caring services; and the Hopwood Business School. There are also six cross-college units performing specialised functions, each headed by an assistant director. These are: student services; financial services; marketing and enterprise; human resource management; central

support services; and systems, audit, performance review and quality. The acting director has retained overall responsibility for human resource management and for systems, audit, performance review and quality.

29   The current management structure of the college is a tiered system made up of the acting director and deputies, forming a directorate of three, a senior management team of 10 key post-holders, and a college management team of about 40 which includes divisional managers. There are also faculty management groups and divisional groups. The structure has long and sometimes unclear lines of communication, imprecise decision-making processes, and a lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities at senior management and other levels. The overlaps in managerial roles lead to tension between individuals, conflicting priorities, frustration and delay. There are underdeveloped links between some cross-college units and the faculties, leading to inconsistent implementation of many cross-college initiatives, including quality assurance and some aspects of resource management and marketing. Insufficient attention has been given to the management of course and curriculum-related developments such as the college-wide provision for mathematics and the introduction of GNVQs.

30   Faculty managers are generally supportive of and responsive to the needs of their divisions but they are not sufficiently active in promoting change and in co-ordinating developments within and across their divisions. There are instances in the business school and the faculty of technology and science where the academic responsibility and accountability for particular areas of work are unclear, and examples in modern foreign languages of counter-productive tensions between staff. Staff teaching courses in care and construction often work in isolation from other staff in the same faculty and consequently lose opportunities to share and develop resources and to discuss areas of curricula where there are common interests.

31   Some progress has been made recently in the development and use of management information systems. The confidence of staff in the outcomes of these systems, particularly those concerned with student records and finance, is increasing. The systems are beginning to inform the college's managerial and administrative processes and forward planning. However, the potential of the systems has yet to be realised. The devolved or distributed model of management information systems now being pursued will require detailed planning and co-ordination to ensure full compatibility. The current systems are too administratively based. Academic staff should be involved more in planning and developing the systems if their potential for supporting academic work is to be fully realised.

32   The college looks at planned student enrolments on the basis of course groups, modes of attendance and funding levels. These college-wide projections take account of historical data and assume an annual growth of 8 per cent in student numbers. The directorate subsequently establishes

broad operational statements on enrolments, for discussion within faculties and divisions. The college has no formal system for setting targets by course. Each course team plans its projected student numbers based on its own historical information, liaison with schools and anticipated future trends in relevant subject areas. Course teams make inadequate use of local labour market intelligence. The degree to which target enrolments are achieved varies across the college. Some areas, such as construction, are experiencing low enrolments. Overall, in 1993-94, the college experienced a reduction of about 8 per cent in enrolments compared with a projected growth of 8 per cent. The college is discussing ways both to improve provision in those areas experiencing reduced enrolments and to increase total enrolments next session.

33   Despite some of the difficulties, the college management has a number of good features. There is sound and effective leadership, together with good management of the curriculum and resources, in the faculty of technology and science, and in the divisions of hair and beauty, science, engineering, sociology and catering. The college has well-defined policies on health and safety, student support and equal opportunities, and the responsibilities for these are clear and well understood. The cross-college provision of student services has many notable features including some effective work conducted in association with the students' union. There is a well-organised and effective central admissions system, and carefully-planned and relevant induction programmes for students.

34   The college's senior management team are aware of, and respond positively to, national aims, policies and targets for further education. The college is working with Rochdale TEC to develop strategies to meet the national targets for education and training. Staff below senior management level are not well informed about national developments, including GNVQs and NVQs, despite events arranged to raise their awareness.

35   The governors and senior managers recognise weaknesses in the strategic planning process and management structure of the college and have a clear intention to rectify them.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

36   Most students have access to impartial guidance from college staff before they embark on programmes of study. The central admissions system involves vocational and subject tutors from the faculties in the interviewing of candidates. In most cases, the initial guidance provided for students is satisfactory. In other areas where the college has already identified a need for better guidance, for instance for students who want only to repeat GCSE courses, significant efforts are being made to improve the quality of the guidance provided. Low entry requirements or poor guidance from tutors have led a few students to enrol on courses which were inappropriate given their previous levels of achievement or their future ambitions.

37   The college has made effective use of an externally-funded project to help develop clear procedures for the accreditation of students' prior learning. The work is well co-ordinated by college staff. Support is available for divisional course tutors and other teachers who need to accredit prior learning as part of their students' progression towards an NVQ award.

38   The college has clear, comprehensive guidelines for the induction of new students and most tutors are implementing these effectively. There are appropriate tests available in the college to assess students' skills in numeracy and literacy when they begin their courses. Not all students are asked to take the tests and, even for those students who do, the results are not always used to identify weaknesses in numeracy and to provide for additional help. Literacy and language support for many students also lacks co-ordination. Overall, the college is not as effective as it might be in meeting the additional needs of students with weaknesses in literacy and numeracy.

39   The co-ordination of tutorial activities is undertaken by the student services unit. The unit offers a wide range of services, some in association with the students' union, and provides effective support for students. The tutorial system is well structured and provides full-time and some part-time students with a clear and comprehensive programme. Good features include the arrangements made for some part-time students of engineering and education. The unit makes good use of the local careers service and health education unit as part of the tutorial programme. Arrangements to monitor the quality of tutorial provision are underdeveloped. The role of tutors in monitoring students' progress is not clear: for example, in humanities there is some uncertainty between subject and personal tutors about who takes overall responsibility for this monitoring. In construction, the monitoring of students' progress in practical work is much better than in other aspects of the curriculum. The attendance of students at classes is usually checked by subject teachers who seek the reasons for any persistent absences. There are some exceptions. In GCSE mathematics classes, students' attendance is erratic and absences are not monitored systematically. Late arrivals to the first lessons of the morning, often the result of delays in public transport, are a continuing problem at the Hopwood site.

40   The college encourages the use of student records of achievement. In general, these records are used constructively as part of the students' tutorial programme. The extent to which individual students evaluate and record their achievements in a formative way differs between subject areas, but there is, for example, good practice in education courses. Some of the art and design students interviewed considered that their records of achievement were of little practical use.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

41   Course documents are comprehensive. Aims and objectives are clearly specified. Most lecturers are well informed about the overall structure and requirements of the courses on which they teach. Some course teams, in psychology and in art and design for example, openly discuss course requirements with their students. Many of the course handbooks are well produced and provide students with useful information on the structure and content of their courses.

42   Fifty-two per cent of the sessions inspected clearly had more strengths than weaknesses, including more than 10 per cent of sessions which had many strengths. In a further 33 per cent the strengths of the work were balanced by weaknesses. The following table shows the grades awarded for the teaching sessions inspected:

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
A/AS level	9	40	30	6	0	85
GCSE	3	11	13	6	0	33
GNVQ	0	8	5	5	0	18
NVQ	1	12	14	7	0	34
Other	21	48	35	15	3	122
Totals	34	119	97	39	3	292

43   Most of the teaching is based on well-prepared lesson plans. Teachers ensure that the context for the work is clearly established. The majority of teaching schemes provide an effective link between related elements of the curriculum and ensure a comprehensive coverage of topics. However, the practical work and related knowledge elements in the NVQ programmes in construction and the BTEC first diploma course in motor vehicle engineering are not sufficiently integrated and some students have difficulty relating theory to practice.

44   Some courses have developed effective schemes of work and lesson plans for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but in many courses these are insufficiently developed. There are examples of good practice where methods of teaching and the use of resources are appropriate and where learning outcomes are recorded at the end of each session. However, there are more examples of poor practice.

45   In practical classes, teachers generally cope well with the differing levels of student experience and ability. In engineering, construction, hairdressing and catering, well-designed worksheets and learning aids are used to enable the students to work at their own pace, while teachers provide effective individual guidance. During practical work in construction, teachers' discussions with students helped to develop their knowledge and understanding.

46   In courses in music, computing, psychology, hairdressing, humanities and care, teachers use a variety of techniques both to involve the whole student group and to encourage individuals to develop skills of independent learning. To varying degrees, classroom teaching in mathematics and construction takes too little account of the needs of the individual student. In science, the range of teaching methods is often too narrow. In care, construction, psychology, art and design, and mathematics lessons, teachers sometimes fail to gauge the levels at which work should be pitched and this leads either to a lack of challenge for students or their inability to understand fully the topic being discussed.

47   Worksheets and other learning aids are used to good effect in about three-quarters of the subject areas. For a minority of programmes in computing, business and administration, and for classroom teaching in construction, such aids are not available, not effectively deployed or of poor quality. In mathematics, hairdressing, catering and science, opportunities to assist students' learning by using information technology or visual aids are missed.   In most subject areas, the briefing sheets provided for coursework give sufficient detail on content and assessment requirements.

48   Much of the teaching, particularly in practical classes, supports students' personal development and helps to improve their general skills, including study skills, oral and written communication, problem solving and the ability to work effectively as members of a group.   In about a quarter of the programmes, including those in humanities, education and care, core skills are included as an integral part of the curriculum. In most areas of the college, however, the inclusion of these skills is neither systematic nor comprehensive, and course documentation is often insufficiently detailed in defining the place of core skills in the curriculum.

49   Art and design is the only area in which information technology skills are integrated effectively in the curriculum. Although discrete modules of information technology are frequently added to courses, as for example, in business studies, engineering and humanities, the links between these modules and aspects of the specialist curriculum are sometimes weak. Consequently, many students fail to see the relevance of information technology for their mainstream studies. In many GCE A level and GCSE courses, and in construction courses, there is altogether too little work in information technology.   Students in these areas are not prepared adequately to deal with the applications of information technology they may meet subsequently in educational courses or in employment.

50   Teachers display a sound knowledge and understanding of their subject. In practical classes in engineering and construction, they demonstrate a high level of expertise and knowledge of best industrial practice and this is respected by the students.   The teachers' enthusiasm and commitment to their work promote a positive attitude to learning. In almost all classes, good working relationships are evident.

51   In the majority of the programmes, students are given sufficient opportunity in tutorials to review their progress. On courses in humanities and education, care, and art and design, this includes opportunities for students and tutors to agree and set appropriate targets. On courses in business studies, the feedback provided to students on their course work is insufficiently detailed or too late to help them improve their performance.

52   With few exceptions, teachers maintain records of students' progress although some of these are neither comprehensive nor fully up-to-date. Examples of good practice were evident in hairdressing, catering, humanities, engineering and construction. The development of students' practical competence is closely monitored in many intermediate level vocational programmes but this is not the case for all programmes. In engineering, for example, records showing the progress of individual students are not always shared with all the teachers involved in a course. Although comprehensive records are maintained for cross-college foundation programmes, such as the diploma in vocational education, some teachers responsible for subject areas are inadequately briefed on the overall learning needs of individual students.

53   With few exceptions, students are regularly assessed in accordance with the objectives and requirements of their programmes of study. Teachers' marking is consistent and fair, and in most areas the assessment criteria and weighting for coursework are sufficiently well defined to support the satisfactory moderation of the marks and grades awarded. Humanities, education and engineering programmes have developed particularly good arrangements for assessing work and moderating standards.

54   The learning support division recognises the importance of ensuring that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have the opportunity to gain nationally recognised accreditation and some progress has been made in providing suitable courses. The incentive for students of being able to gain external accreditation enhances the teaching and learning. Systems which enable students to comment on their assessments have been developed but are not yet used consistently across the division. There is only occasional evidence of students developing the skills of self assessment. For many part-time students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities there is little evidence of progression. Some of these students have repeated modules several times.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

55   In class, and in their written assignments, students' achievements generally fall within a range appropriate to the levels at which they are studying.   Most students on vocational courses also demonstrate appropriate levels of practical competence. In about a quarter of the subject areas, including engineering and catering, some students have difficulty in relating their knowledge effectively to practical applications and in a few vocational areas, such as construction, the technical

knowledge of some students is insufficient to support their related practical activities. For students in motor vehicle engineering, too little is done to co-ordinate their experience in college with what they experience at work. The practical activities provided in a few full-time courses, including catering, lacked sufficient realism so that although the students become appropriately skilled in terms of the overall requirements of their programme of study, they are not always fully competent to a commercial level. Most students show an appropriate level of safety awareness.

56   On many programmes, the standard of coursework is high. Students have good writing skills. In general, their work is well structured and presented clearly and concisely. Assignment work in art and design, history and engineering provides evidence of genuine effort and sound levels of knowledge on the part of the students. In general, written assignments are well presented and of a good standard. In a minority of part-time intermediate level vocational programmes, such as those in construction and engineering, some students' notes are poorly recorded and of little value for later reference.

57   The numeracy skills of students are generally adequate although there are significant variations in standards. On some courses in construction and motor vehicle engineering, for instance, the numeracy skills of a minority of students are significantly lower than for others in the group. The progress of these students, and sometimes that of the whole group, is held back in those aspects of work which have a high numeracy content. On other vocational courses, students' lack of numeracy occasionally limits the progress which can be made in technical aspects of the work.

58   Most of the students are able to speak with confidence about their work. In class, they speak fluently and are able to contribute effectively to discussion. They appear to enjoy their studies and are generally responsive and enthusiastic. Where students are less well motivated it is usually because they have failed to appreciate the relevance of a topic being presented or discussed. Students are mutually supportive and work well together. There are some good examples of more experienced, mature students helping their younger colleagues.

59   Many students on full-time vocational courses achieve their target qualification. In 1993, 85 per cent of 16-18 years entered for BTEC and C & G examinations achieved awards. Overall, the college's results in vocational courses are in the mid-range of those for all colleges in the further education sector. In most subject areas there are programmes of study where students achieve high pass rates. In 1993, 90 per cent or more of the students who were entered satisfied the requirements for an award on almost 40 of the college's courses. There are also instances of low pass rates. On just over 20 courses, 50 per cent or more of the students who entered for an award failed to satisfy the requirements. By far the majority of these, however, were part-time students and almost a half were on intermediate level courses in technology.

60   The low pass rates for part-time intermediate level vocational courses are often associated with the written component of the external examinations. Some first year part-time intermediate level programmes in motor vehicle engineering have flexible entry arrangements which permit students to enrol at any stage of the academic year. Because of their late start, however, these students are often not able to complete sufficient units to gain the overall award within that academic year and this lowers the recorded overall success rate for the course. Pass rates, on a unit basis, are generally comparable with other institutions offering similar courses.

61   In about one quarter of the subject areas, including computing, business studies, engineering and construction, retention rates on vocational programmes are low. Some of the reasons for students not completing courses are outside the programme team's control. Nevertheless, the analyses carried out by course teams to identify the causes of low retention rates are inadequate.

62   In 1993, the 280 candidates entering for two or more GCE A level examinations scored an average 11.6 points (where A=10; E=2). This performance places the college in the top 40 per cent of all colleges in the further education sector. The overall pass rate was approximately 68 per cent, a steady improvement from 63.3 per cent three years ago. Over 33 per cent of students gained awards at grades A, B or C. There was a 90 per cent or better pass rate in nine subjects although six of these subjects had low entry numbers. By contrast, the pass rate in seven subjects was 50 per cent or lower.   Some of the students with poor results had been accepted onto GCE A level programmes even though they had relatively low levels of previous achievement on entry. An analysis of examination results has led the college to require higher levels of qualification for entry to such courses. In some predominantly vocational areas, such as business studies and computing, the GCE A level results are poor.

63   GCSE examination results are generally poor. Over the last three years the overall pass rate for the college has declined. In 1993, less than 50 per cent of the GCSE examinations taken by students led to awards of grades A-C. Many students re-taking GCSE examinations show little improvement on their previous results in the same subject. Almost 40 per cent of the students taking GCSE examinations did not achieve grades A, B or C in any of their subjects. By comparison with the performances of 16-18 year old students, the pass rates of mature students in GCSE examinations are good.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

64   Following a recent revision of its quality assurance strategies, the college has clear and achievable aims and objectives in its strategic plan for developing and monitoring the quality of its provision. The quality assurance strategy takes due account of the requirements of examination and validating bodies including, for instance, the accreditation of staff

involved in assessing students' achievements on NVQ and GNVQ programmes. The strategic plan also covers the need for development and use of performance indicators though very few are currently in operation.

65   The college has worked out the major features of its revised quality assurance procedures, but is only beginning to put them into practice. Aspects of the process yet to be fully implemented include: the formation of programme teams in all subject areas; the operation of a college-wide system for the regular monitoring and review of courses, including review visits; and procedures for the audit and review of the quality assurance process itself. Opportunities to draw on the views of examiners, validators and employers are under-exploited. Some staff remain sceptical of efforts to introduce a college-wide quality assurance system because of their unsatisfactory experience of the earlier attempt to introduce such a system.

66   A well-staffed quality unit has been formed to manage and lead the introduction of the college's quality assurance system. Already it has provided guidance to faculty, divisional and course managers on quality issues. As yet, the role of the unit's middle managers is insufficiently well defined, and the unit's relationship with senior management is not clear. Links are not well established between the college's quality assurance strategy and the management of its human resources, including staff deployment and staff development. The college has produced an action plan with clear targets for achieving Investor in People status under the scheme introduced by the Department of Employment. The plan requires clear lines of communication between management and staff but responsibility for communication is jointly shared between the college's quality unit, the marketing unit, the human resources unit and the four teaching faculties.

67   The course reviews recently produced are of limited value: the quality of the self-evaluation by members of course teams is generally poor; the setting of targets for the improvement of courses is often inadequate; and the information on student progression and achievement is seldom used effectively to evaluate at subject and course level. Responses to student questionnaires, though available, are regarded by a few staff as being of little value in the evaluation of quality at course level.

68   An appraisal system has recently been introduced for teaching staff and one is soon to be introduced for support staff. Appropriate training courses have been provided for the staff involved in conducting appraisals. At the time of the inspection, few staff had had their individual staff development needs identified and assessed. Induction for new, full-time staff is well planned, but neither the induction nor appraisal processes yet apply to part-time staff.

69   The funding of staff-development activities in the college is generous. There is an allocation of almost £250,000 for the period April 1993 to July 1994. The current staff-development programme is linked to the college's strategic objectives but there are relatively few opportunities for teachers

either to update their subject knowledge or to develop new curriculum initiatives. Insufficient attention is given to the management of the staff-development programme and to the evaluation and dissemination of the experiences of participating staff to ensure that development activities meet the needs of both the college and of the individuals concerned.

RESOURCES

70   In 1992-93, the college's unit of funding for each full-time equivalent student was £3,443, a figure which places the college in the top 25 per cent of institutions within the further education sector. Figures 4 and 5 summarise the college's income and expenditure for the 16 month period to July 1994. The allocation of funds to faculties and divisions is generally accepted as being fair and equitable. There is a limited understanding by staff below senior management level of the financial implication of falling enrolments and poor retention rates.

71   The college's human resources unit is responsible for personnel management, the deployment of staff, staff development and appraisal. Although senior managers of the unit are aware of a need to achieve greater flexibility in the deployment of staff, little progress has been made to date in defining the overall staffing requirements of particular curricular areas and in identifying areas where the deployment of teaching, technician and administrative staff could be improved. The unit has no clear strategy to ensure that the deployment of technicians sensibly supports students and teachers. There are curricular areas, such as construction, where the level of technician support is relatively generous, and others such as computing and art and design, where the support is insufficient. There are inadequate levels of clerical and administrative support in many areas of work.

72   The college has a sufficient number of well-qualified teachers to cover most of the courses and programmes of study offered. An exception is the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, where a shortage of suitably experienced staff is causing difficulties. There is a degree of over-staffing in some subject areas. A number of teachers have become more heavily involved in the management of cross-college aspects of provision. Others have been re-deployed within the college.

73   Although the college is acquiring an increasing number of good quality resources for information technology, it remains under-resourced for information technology in relation to the number of students enrolled. There is a particular shortage of computer workstations available on open access. The main college computer network is unreliable: breakdowns and restrictions on its use frequently have an adverse effect on the quality of the students' experience. The range and quality of other teaching and learning aids available in the college are adequate. Teachers generally have good access to appropriate audio-visual facilities to support their work but some experience delays in the processing of their requests for reprographic materials.

74   The specialist facilities available to support teaching are generally adequate and in some areas they are good. High quality provision includes the computer-aided design facilities in engineering, and the studios for art and design. The college has been extending the number and range of its learning resource bases to encourage students further to develop their study skills, improve their self-motivation and acquire the habit of independent learning. These facilities are of variable quality. Some are little more than private study rooms with a few additional resources. The college lacks a coherent overview of learning resources to ensure that the learning resource bases effectively complement other college resources, including the libraries.

75   The library provision at Hopwood is inadequate. Much of the bookstock is a legacy of the former teacher training college, previously based on the site, and is ill suited to the further education courses now being provided. Some additional funding has been devoted to under-represented areas but gaps in coverage remain. Study spaces are also inadequate in number. At the Rochdale site, the library layout has been rearranged to provide more study space. Some of the bookstock on this site is dated and improvements are now taking place. Differing periodicals in the two libraries create problems for some students, for example those studying sociology. The computerised re-cataloguing of the library stock on both sites is making slow progress.

76   The college has a generous level of accommodation for its student numbers (13 square metres per full-time equivalent student) although this includes the inherited chapel and the old hall which are large spaces of little use to the college. The college is developing an accommodation strategy which includes plans for the more systematic utilisation of accommodation on both sites. A resource utilisation manager has been appointed to plan, monitor and deploy college space more effectively. Although the process is still embryonic, it is already helping to bring space allocation, recruitment targets and the college's business plans into closer alignment.

77   The accommodation is of variable quality and suitability but is generally appropriate for the work of the college. The allocation of rooms, sometimes based on historical precedent, can lead to a mismatch between the size of rooms and the number of students in a group. This occurs regularly in humanities and social science classes.   Some of the specialist accommodation for construction, art and design, hair and beauty, and the classrooms used for mathematics teaching provide a strong focus for the work. Other teaching areas, including rooms used for computing, modern foreign languages, sociology and psychology, are less well fitted to the purposes for which they are used. The mathematics workshop, a potentially useful facility, is under-utilised.

78   At the Rochdale site, most of the accommodation is accessible to students with wheelchairs. At Hopwood, the former residential nature of

some buildings, and the structure and layout of other buildings, make it difficult to provide adequate access for wheelchairs. Both sites lack facilities for students with impaired vision or hearing.

79   There has been a programme of refurbishment at both sites. In most cases the accommodation is in good decorative order and the general standard of cleanliness and maintenance is good. However, in some subject areas, such as English, sociology and education, opportunities to enliven the learning environment by creating subject-related wall displays are not considered possible because rooms are also used by students studying other subjects.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

80   The college is still in the process of developing a corporate identity and is working towards the aims expressed in its mission statement. The strengths of the college are:
•   an effective and pro-active governing body
•   supportive faculty managers and examples of effective divisional leadership and operational management of curriculum and resources
•   clearly defined policies on student support and equal opportunities
•   a well-organised central admissions system and induction programme
•   good teaching, particularly in practical sessions
•   the high proportion of students on full-time vocational courses who achieve their target qualifications
•   well-qualified and experienced teachers
•   satisfactory accommodation, including some good specialist facilities.

81   If the college is to build upon existing strengths and develop successfully as a single institution, it should:
•   bring its existing review of management to a successful conclusion
•   re-establish a strategic planning process which has the confidence of the college's staff
•   develop a management information system which can inform management processes at college, faculty and divisional levels
•   strengthen quality assurance, including the course review process
•   improve student recruitment procedures
•   analyse the reasons for poor performances at GCSE
•   monitor and seek action to remedy the low retention rates on some courses
•   ensure effective management of the introduction of GNVQ
•   provide more systematic support for the development of core skills
•   review the deployment of support staff.

FIGURES

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

Figure 1

Hopwood Hall College: student profile – full-time equivalent enrolments by age group (1993-1994)

Age 16-19
Age 19-25
Age 25+

22%

15%

63%
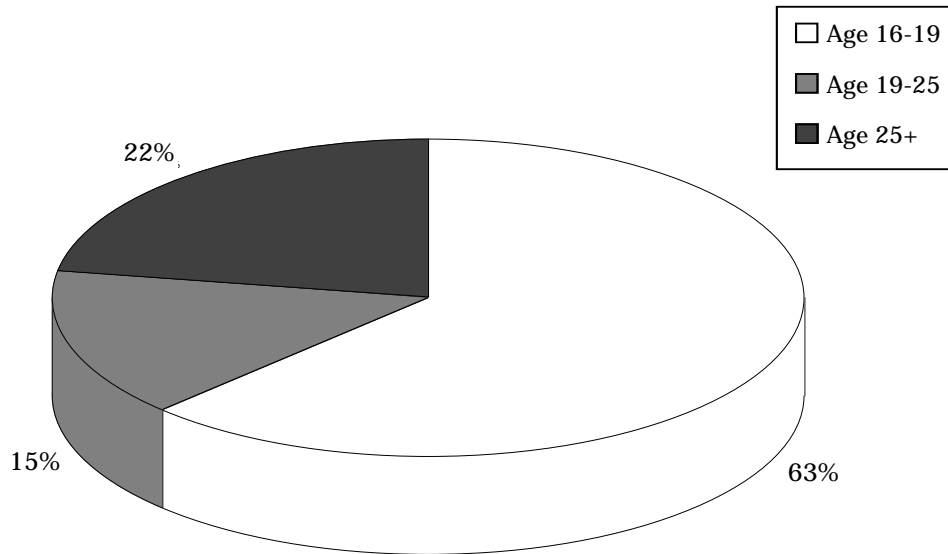
Total full-time equivalent enrolments: 3,347

Figure 2

Hopwood Hall College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-1994)

Technician support 57

Administration
support
89

Part-time teachers 75

Full-time
teachers
255
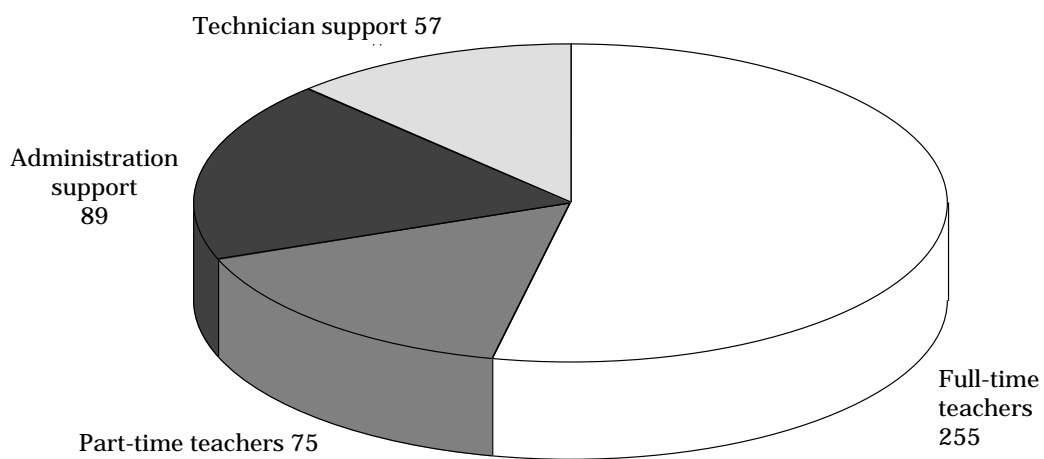
Total full-time equivalent staff: 476

Figure 3

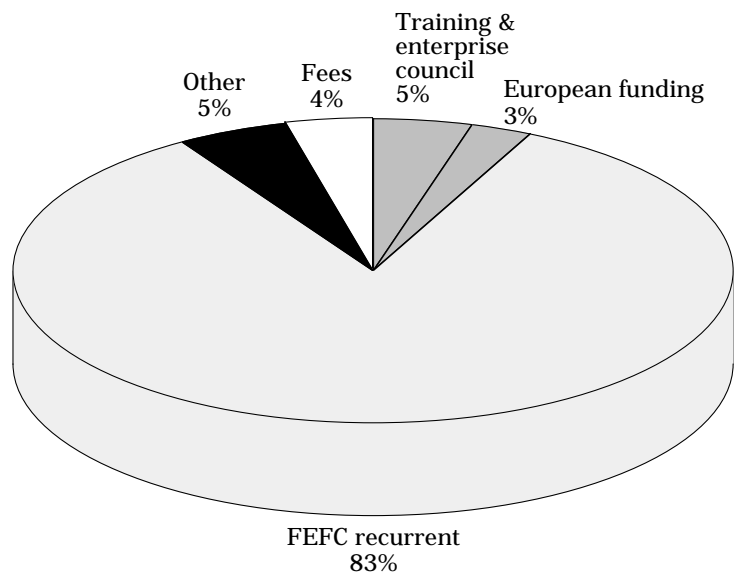**Hopwood Hall College: enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents by curriculum area and mode of attendance (1993-1994)**
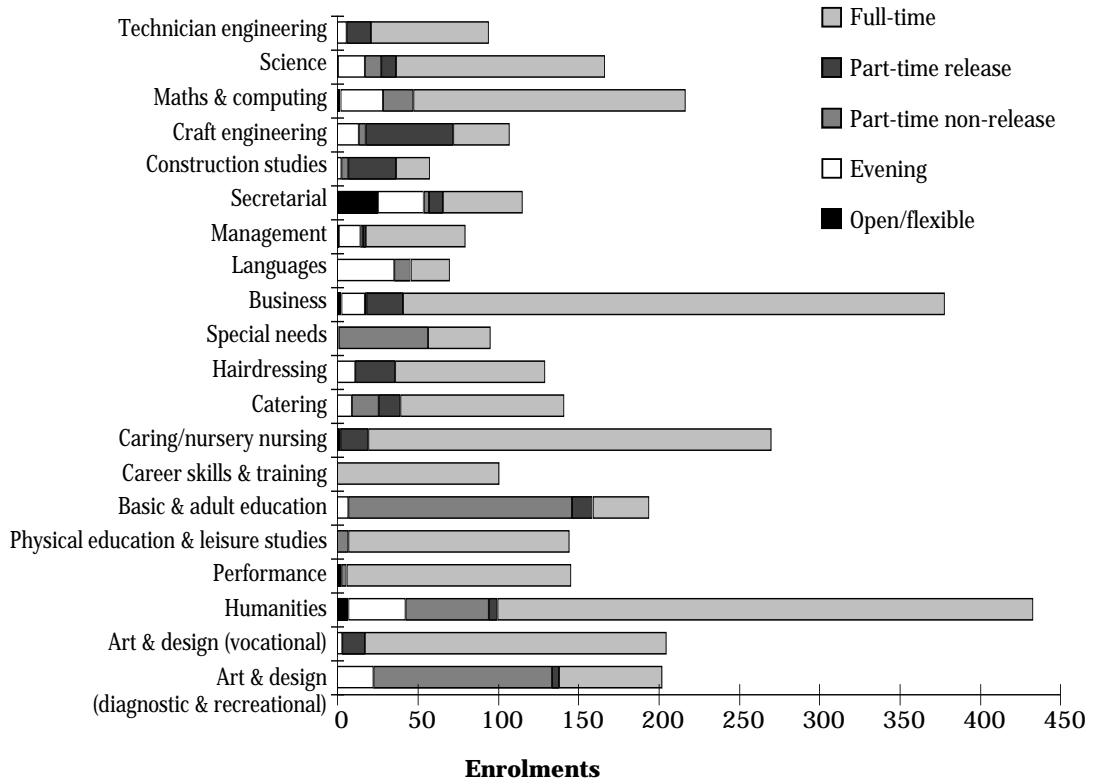
Enrolments

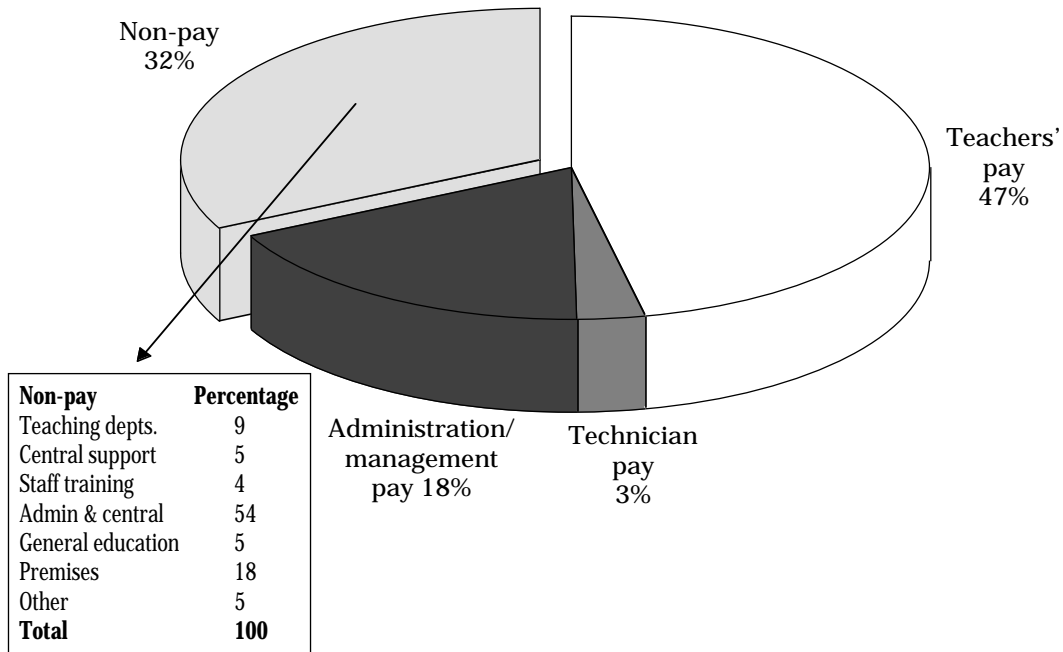Total full-time equivalent enrolments: 3,347

Figure 4

Hopwood Hall College: projected income (16 months to July 1994)

Total projected income: £18,482,000

Figure 5

Hopwood Hall College: projected expenditure (16 months to July 1994)

Non-pay	Percentage
Teaching depts.	9
Central support	5
Staff training	4
Admin & central	54
General education	5
Premises	18
Other	5
Total	**100**

Total projected expenditure: £17,578,000