

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Isle College

June 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 45/94

ISLE COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected September – March 1994

Summary

Isle College is a small tertiary college situated in Wisbech in the north Fenland area of Cambridgeshire, close to the county boundaries of Lincolnshire and Norfolk. Its provision is mainly designed for school leavers. There is an extensive range of full-time courses in art and design, substantial provision in business studies and a broad range of GCE A level courses. The college has made limited progress in expanding the range of its provision to meet the requirements of adults, those in employment and those without formal entry qualifications. Whilst the governors and staff are committed to the development of the college, insufficient attention has been given to the systematic review of achievements. There is a complex management structure which has led to confusion over roles and responsibilities. Insufficient support is given to curriculum management and development. The quality of teaching and the learning support provided for students are generally satisfactory. Students' achievements on vocational courses are sound but examination results at GCE A level and GCSE are lower than average for the sector. There is a comprehensive framework for student support services but it is not consistently implemented. The arrangements for quality assurance are not sufficiently rigorous. The college has not yet developed an overall accommodation strategy.

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	3
Quality assurance	4
Resources: staffing	3
equipment/learning resources	3
accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science & mathematics	3	Art & design	3
Engineering	3	Humanities & social science	3
Business & administration	3	Students with learning difficulties	3
Social care	3		
Hairdressing	3		

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INTRODUCTION

1 Isle College, Cambridgeshire, was inspected between September 1993 and March 1994. A team of eight inspectors spent a week in the college from 7-11 March 1994. A further 34 days were used to inspect specialist aspects of college provision. Inspectors visited 116 classes, examined samples of student work and held discussions with college governors, staff and students. Meetings were held with representatives from external organisations including head teachers and teaching staff from local schools, local employers, the careers service, the local education authority, and the Greater Peterborough Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

2 The inspection was carried out according to the framework and guidelines described in Council circular 93/28. The framework describes a four-year 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 report. As the inspection of Isle College occurred early in the cycle, the opportunity for such a response was not available.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 Formerly a general college of further education, Isle College became a tertiary college in 1983. The tertiary college originally included the nearby college of agriculture and horticulture which became a separate institution in 1987. Isle College is situated in Wisbech, in the north Fenland area of Cambridgeshire, close to the county boundaries of Lincolnshire and Norfolk. It operates from one main site, with an outreach centre one mile from the main college.

4 The college's main catchment area is the Fenland district which includes the towns of Chatteris, March and Wisbech and the surrounding villages. The college attracts students mainly from the Fenland area schools. There are some students from Lincolnshire and Norfolk owing to the close proximity of the county borders. The nearest further education colleges are at Kings Lynn, some 12 miles to the east, and Peterborough Regional College about 18 miles to the west. The further education colleges in Lincolnshire are more distant, at Boston to the north and Stamford to the north-west.

5 According to the 1991 census the population of the Fenland district of Cambridgeshire was 74,426, and the population of Wisbech 18,585. Less than 1 per cent of the Fenland population are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Agriculture, manufacturing and service industries are the main sources of employment. There are few large employers, and those in Wisbech are mainly concerned with the food-processing industry. The steady decline in employment in agriculture between 1981 and 1991 has been paralleled by a growth in service sector jobs. In October 1993, the unemployment rate in Cambridgeshire was 7.5 per cent. In the Wisbech travel-to-work area it was 10.4 per cent. The Fenland district council has

been successful in achieving special area status for Wisbech, and has made a successful bid for European structural funds to support its development.

6 There are four main feeder schools: Queens School in Wisbech, and three Cambridgeshire community colleges, Cromwell and Sir Harry Smith, each within about 20 miles, and Neale Wade about 12 miles distant. Although schools in other counties are closer to the college, county borders limit the number of students recruited from these institutions. Of the two secondary schools in Wisbech, Queens School is a grant maintained 11-16 school and the other an independent school with a sixth form. The Neale Wade Community College also has a sixth form. The percentage of young people in the Fenland district remaining in full-time education in 1993 was 69 per cent which included 53 per cent entering further education.

7 At the time of the inspection, the college had 2,092 enrolments. Of these, 1,206 were full-time students and 886 part-time. Enrolments by age and by level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2, respectively. There were 88 full-time equivalent teaching staff and the equivalent of 64 full-time staff supported the work of the college in administrative, technical and clerical positions (figure 3).

8 The college provides further education courses mainly aimed at school-leavers wishing to study full-time. The vocational curriculum of the college includes most areas with the exception of catering and agriculture. There is an extensive provision in art and design and business studies and a broad range of General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) courses. Each of these areas represents about 25 per cent of the college's total enrolment. Engineering, construction, health and social care, and hair and beauty make up the remaining 25 per cent. There is a small higher education provision franchised from Anglia Polytechnic University.

9 The courses are managed through five divisions: art and design; business and leisure studies; engineering and construction; hairdressing, mathematics and science; and humanities and social science. The college's specialist provision in art and design attracts students from all over the county. The college has residential accommodation for 8 per cent of full-time students.

10 The mission of the college is to contribute to the economic and social development of the fens through the provision of high quality education and training accessible to all members of the community. To achieve this mission, the college strategic plan, 1993-96, focuses on the need to bring about curriculum change. These aims have been translated into appropriate strategic objectives by each of the divisions.

11 The present management structure of the college, which is undergoing review, has been in place since September 1992. At the time of the inspection, a number of redundancies had been announced and applications for voluntary redundancy had been sought by the college management. A number of key posts within the college management

structure will disappear. Among these are a vice-principal post (academic planning and development), the head of staff development, the human resources manager and the head of tutorial services.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

12 The college has made progress towards achieving some of its aims through a number of curriculum initiatives including the development of General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses and the extension of part-time provision. Higher national diplomas, franchised from Anglia Polytechnic University, have been introduced in both art and design and business studies. GNVQ programmes have also been introduced in these areas as well as in health and social care.

13 Less progress has been made in meeting the college's aims of establishing a curriculum framework based on modularisation, developing resource-based learning, and extending the range of courses for adults and low-achievers. Although part-time and open-learning provision has been introduced in some areas, it is still a small part of the total work of the college.

14 There has been an overall increase in enrolments but a decrease in the numbers of students attending full-time. The fall in full-time enrolments, together with withdrawals, has restricted the growth to about 2 per cent in weighted full-time equivalent student numbers in the current year. Whilst the number of students, aged 16-18, has decreased, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of adults and part-time enrolments, particularly in health care, hairdressing, engineering and construction. Full-time equivalent enrolments by curriculum area and mode of attendance are shown in figure 4.

15 The college offers GCE A level and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses mainly aimed at school leavers. It provides 19 subjects at GCE A level and 23 subjects at GCSE. Some courses have low numbers and there are students who are retaking some GCSE subjects for a third time. The number of part-time students on the GCE A level programme is small and, overall, few opportunities exist for evening or open-learning study. The curriculum organisation requiring attendance on two separate days, restricts access for adults. There has been limited curricular development within the A level programme. Modular provision is offered only in physics.

16 The range of National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) courses has been expanded and increased flexibility in methods of study introduced, particularly for engineering, business and secretarial courses. NVQ courses in these areas are provided in an effective way to meet the requirements of students and their sponsors. There is significant provision in business administration. Resource-based learning packs have been designed by some tutors to allow students to study at their own pace. There is a smaller range of NVQ courses in hairdressing and beauty.

17 There is limited provision for low achievers and insufficient opportunity for them to progress to NVQ courses. The number of courses for adults wishing to return to education is also limited. The humanities-based access programme provides well-balanced and relevant opportunities for students who are not able to study on a full-time basis. However, the number of options is limited, and the location of the course, in an out-centre, together with the timetable arrangements, impede students wishing to take advantage of other aspects of the college's provision.

18 The college is involved with the Greater Peterborough TEC in a number of areas, including training for young people through work-related further education, training credits, adult guidance and supporting an education business partnership. The TEC has worked closely with the college to develop more flexible course provision. The college has responded readily to demands from youth training organisations for the development of courses with flexible starting dates, particularly in engineering and construction. The college is an effective provider of training for young people but there is no provision in the college for the retraining of adults and few courses are offered to meet the training requirements of employees in business or industry.

19 Although some success has been achieved in meeting training requirements for some companies, less than 1 per cent, an unusually small proportion of the college's work, is concerned with the provision of specific courses for industry. The college has recently decided to appoint an industrial liaison officer whose main role will be to ensure that services are more effectively marketed to local business and industry. The college expects there to be an expansion in full-cost work as a result, though it has not set any income targets for this. The college should also provide a focus for the management and development of short courses, and establish a point of contact for company personnel.

20 The effectiveness of the teaching divisions' links with industry is variable. There are active advisory panels in some areas of work, which enable representatives of industry to influence the content and management of courses. For some courses, particularly those in art and design, involvement with industry benefits students' project work and provides sponsorship for learning materials. The arrangements made for work experience and the visits made by tutors to students whilst on placement provide useful contacts with industry. However, links with industry are not fully utilised to promote awareness of the college's training capability, or to increase staff and students' knowledge of recent technological developments.

21 There is a detailed marketing strategy based on sound market analysis. An annual marketing plan has identified actions and targets for outreach work, improving access, extending the volume and range of services for local industry and commerce, and increasing the learning opportunities for low achievers and adults. The college publicity material

for full-time courses is well produced; the promotional material for part-time courses is less well-presented. When preparing promotional materials, more use could be made of the expertise in art, design and technical illustration within the college. The college has much to do to change community perceptions of the institution as one that caters only for young people.

22 Links with nearby schools are well established. The arrangements for informing local school pupils about opportunities post-16 are effectively co-ordinated and the college plays a full part in attending careers conventions. The school link course in office studies is well regarded, as is the bridging courses for sixteen-year-olds who have been excluded from school or who are long-term school refusers. College staff also meet with teachers in schools as a part of the activities of the Training and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI) consortium. This has facilitated discussion of curriculum developments, including GNVQ in schools, supported the production of school-to-college information and enabled a consistent approach to records of achievement to be developed.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

23 There are 15 members of the corporation, many of whom were governors before incorporation. Ten are drawn from professional and business fields, one from the local community, one from the TEC, and three, including the principal, from the college itself. The governors bring professional and commercial expertise to bear in handling the corporation's business.

24 The governors have reviewed and endorsed the college's aims and proposed developments but have had little feedback on progress. In reviewing the implementation of the strategic plan, governors do not do so on the basis of the information available from the monitoring of the college's activities. Whilst the governors met, prior to incorporation, to consider the new structures, they have yet collectively to review the effectiveness of the corporation and governance processes.

25 The management structure is based upon three tiers. There is a college executive comprising the principal and two vice-principals. There are 15 middle managers, holding curriculum or other administrative responsibilities, such as the heads of curriculum divisions and the marketing and property managers. This is a relatively large number for a college of this size. The third tier comprises the 12 section heads with operational responsibilities for particular curriculum areas and the managers of particular functions such as study support.

26 The five heads of division have substantial teaching commitments and little administrative or secretarial support. Their job descriptions indicate that each head of division has responsibility for planning, monitoring and delivery of the curriculum, student recruitment and the management of staff and other resources. Heads of division have had little

training or professional development to prepare them for managerial responsibilities. Management of the curriculum, at divisional level, is not adequately resourced or supported.

27 The college executive and 15 middle managers who comprise the college management team, have a monthly meeting which is chaired and minuted by the principal. There are fortnightly meetings of the resource management team and the academic management team which work to the two vice-principals. The college management team meetings are concerned primarily with operational reports from the vice-principals. It is rare for the heads of division to present papers to the college management team. There is little consideration of alternative policies for development.

28 There are clearly-stated aims and objectives for the development of the college and a comprehensive five-year strategic plan including operational objectives for the current year. Divisional plans were created, for the current academic year, in response to the direction from senior management to translate the aims and objectives into targets for curriculum development. For the next planning period, 1994-99, a more comprehensive planning framework has been created which will strengthen middle managers' participation in the planning process. Whilst the strategic aims and objectives are well understood by senior managers, a number of staff at middle management level and below are uncertain about how they can contribute to the achievement of these.

29 There is no systematic monitoring and review of progress against strategic goals and operational targets. The co-ordination and implementation of a number of important policy initiatives, concerned with organisational and curriculum change, has not been effective. There has been little progress with a number of important projects, including the development of resource-based learning facilities, such as the mathematics workshop. Action in response to the findings from the Investors in People survey of June 1993, and the review of support staff roles has been uneven. Managerial responsibilities for successfully implementing agreed policies are often unclear or have been subject to change because of re-organisation of the management structure.

30 The three re-organisations during the last four years, including the most recent which is due to be fully implemented in September 1994, have contributed to staff uncertainty about the operation of policies and procedures. A recent survey of staff attitudes, based upon written responses from 120 teaching and support staff, indicates that the majority of staff are unclear about the contribution their immediate managers expect from them. They do not feel that their training and development needs have been regularly reviewed. The college executive informs staff about college policies through mechanisms such as the staff information bulletin and monthly staff meetings. Participatory frameworks for consultation over the development of college-wide policies are under-developed.

31 An initial cost analysis has been completed to inform management of the cost of delivering the curriculum. However, unit costs are not available routinely to inform management decisions. The 1993-94 budget process, established revenue income and expenditure targets and capital budgets for curriculum and functional areas. Income and expenditure reports are presented monthly to the corporation, the senior management team and other budget holders. Summaries of the college's income and expenditures for 1993-94 are shown in figures 5 and 6, respectively. The college's unit of funding for 1992-93 was £2,159 per weighed full-time equivalent student. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges was £2,444.

32 Computer-based information systems support college administration and provide management information on student applications, enrolments, examination entries and results. However the college has no effective information systems strategy linked to the development and management of the college. The college has identified some weaknesses in the systems currently in use but, at the time of inspection, the planned review of user requirements had not been completed.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

33 Student services are adequately managed. There is a detailed development plan based on the college's strategic plan and a well-documented framework for the admission, induction and tutorial support of full-time students. However, this framework operates unevenly across the college and strategies for adults and part-time students are more limited. There is insufficient systematic monitoring to ensure a high-quality college-wide service and a significant minority of students receive a less than appropriate level of guidance and support.

34 Students are provided with suitable pre-enrolment guidance. Potential students are offered opportunities to seek advice from college staff at careers conventions and open evenings. All full-time students are interviewed by subject or course specialists. The advice day in September provides a valuable opportunity for further discussion for students whose results are disappointing or who wish to make a late application. The careers service also provides impartial guidance to school students.

35 There is a thoroughly documented induction programme. Students receive a helpful pack when they begin their course which gives information on college services and full details of how records of achievement are completed. A student agreement clearly outlines their rights and responsibilities. In practice, however, students' induction operates unevenly across courses. There are clear procedures for transfer between programmes but a lack of flexibility in the organisation of some courses limits the ability of students to join courses late. The experience of most students is good but a minority of students do not receive the level of information and support which is described in the college entitlement statement.

36 The introduction to the college and subsequent support for part-time students is less systematic than for full-time students. Many part-time students are unaware of the full range of college services. Support given by individual course tutors is good. There is no clear strategy for the guidance of adults and insufficient liaison between the job centre and the college has led to instances where potential adult students have been unable to obtain appropriate information and guidance.

37 A well-equipped advice centre brings together a wide range of services. Although centrally situated behind the college reception it needs clearer signposting to encourage students to find and use it. Some students remain unaware of the full range of information available in the centre. A useful training programme is in place for advice centre staff. A part-time counsellor works from the centre. Her role is valued by students and staff, but the service is overstretched. The provision of administrative or clerical support would enable the guidance staff to work more effectively and to keep more comprehensive records of enquiries.

38 Relationships between tutors and the advice centre staff are good. Proposed changes to their respective roles, intended to increase the involvement of advice centre staff in interviewing and tutorial support, are not clearly understood or agreed. Though some consultation has taken place and a small pilot scheme is operating, there should be opportunity for a fuller discussion of the nature of the changes and their implications.

39 The college has piloted screening tests to assess students' proficiencies in basic skills. The results have been carefully analysed and followed up. There are plans to provide diagnostic testing for all students. Other assessment of prior learning is limited. The communications and mathematics workshop provision should be improved to provide an adequate level of support for initial assessment.

40 Students' entitlement to tutorial time is well defined and the tutorial programme is implemented effectively on most courses. Relationships between tutors and students are good. The tutor support manual and tutorial packs provide a detailed and helpful framework which can be adapted to meet the needs of specific courses. However, practice is not consistent. Some GCE A level students find it difficult to cope with the amount of free time they have and receive insufficient guidance on study skills, the learning support available to them and time management. There is limited monitoring to ensure the delivery and quality of the tutorial system.

41 On some courses, for example the GCSE course, attendance at classes and at tutorials is poor. The withdrawal rate on some courses is also high. Some useful analysis and identification of trends has been undertaken but more detailed information about the reasons for withdrawal would enable interviewers, tutors and division heads to respond more constructively.

42 Tutors monitor employment and higher education applications effectively. Careers and higher education information is easily accessible

in the library and careers room. The programme of talks and visits to universities or higher education conferences is a fairly small one. The college's relationship with the county careers service is good but it does not make full use of the services offered. More detailed planning and monitoring is needed to ensure that all tutors and divisions are aware of the potential contribution of the service.

43 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on separate specialist courses are well supported. There are clear routes for progression and adequate accreditation for the courses. The college is moderately successful in promoting access to full-time courses but the number of students on mainstream courses remains low. The college should secure more effective links with social services and the community to assist in the development of this work. There is insufficient co-ordination of support arrangements to ensure that the college's responsibilities for all students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are being met. Access to many areas of the college is difficult for students who use wheelchairs.

44 Residential students are well cared for. The wardens treat students sensitively and achieve a reasonable balance in providing supervision and allowing students to assume some independence. Students can arrange their own social activities in the common rooms. Residents and other students have access to a nurse and doctor on site. There are regular checks on students in lodgings.

45 Beyond the courses they study, the college provides few opportunities for students to extend their cultural interests or to participate in sports. There is no timetabled period for recreation and this limits the opportunity for most students to be involved in the activities offered. The students' association organises social and charitable events including a freshers' fair. The students value the support of the staff representative. There is a separate association for adult students.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

46 The table below summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE A level		1	4	17	2	0	24
GNVQ		1	3	4	1	0	9
BTEC		2	7	12	3	1	25
NVQ		0	6	10	0	0	16
GCSE		0	5	8	3	0	16
Other		2	8	14	2	0	26
Total		6	33	65	11	1	116

47 The standard of teaching is generally satisfactory and there is effective support for learning. The majority of staff work to planned schemes of work. Many lessons have a written description outlining their content and the skills to be developed. Teaching staff keep careful records of the work done. However, class contact time is not always used effectively. Students are given little opportunity to work by themselves and there is limited use of audio-visual aids. Very little student work is displayed in baserooms and there are few signs about the college of work produced by students in art and design courses.

48 Some of the work in engineering and physics was well planned and well organised. Engineering activities were matched to students' abilities and most students were highly motivated. The modular GCE A level physics course provided appropriately challenging work for students of differing ability through projects and a wide variety of other styles of teaching and learning.

49 Teaching on the access to higher education courses was at a suitably adult level. Lessons were well structured. Teachers encouraged contributions to discussion by drawing on students' own experiences. Links with the Open University were evident in the materials and methods designed to support independent learning.

50 There were examples of sound practice in the business studies courses. On one of the BTEC national diploma options, students worked through a structured set of assessed tasks, all based in a well-equipped electronic office. The student group was divided into a team of supervisors and clerical assistants and these roles were rotated each week. Assessment outcomes were clearly defined. Students demonstrated great enthusiasm for this approach. The competencies of manual and electronic office systems were of a high order.

51 In classes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, teachers are well informed about individuals' learning difficulties and teaching. There were examples of students helping one another and of being able to rearrange tasks independently. A simple but useful log is kept for students and teaching staff to monitor progress. Teachers provide good feedback on students' written work for the vocational access certificate. Staff assisting the class teacher are well informed and work sensitively in supporting roles. An improvement in the quality of teaching materials, and further investment in the resources in the new communications workshop, should further enhance students' learning opportunities.

52 In less satisfactory classes, the teacher's delivery was dull and repetitive, the work was unchallenging or activities were conducted at too slow a pace. On GCE A level and GCSE programmes, much of the teaching was dominated by the examination requirements even in the early stages of courses. There was insufficient variety in the teaching methods and students were not given much opportunity to become engaged in their learning activities.

53 In some areas of work, insufficient attention is given to the development of core skills. On GCE A level courses, teachers expect students to apply skills of argument and discussion in their work but do not always provide them with sufficient opportunities to acquire such skills. On vocational programmes, a greater sense of urgency and more references to commercial practices in terms of costing would also improve learning experiences and help prepare students for employment.

54 Assessed work is set regularly. Some students' work is marked meticulously with extensive and helpful comments. Assessment criteria are clear and assessments are fair. Tutors keep good records of students' attendance, progress and achievement but these records are rarely used to identify future targets or to modify teaching approaches.

55 Written work is generally satisfactory but there is considerable variation in the style of report and assignment writing. Students who were successful in the access to higher education courses achieved an excellent standard of written work. Other students' notes are generally well organised and show good coverage of syllabuses. In hairdressing, engineering, social care and business programmes, students speak enthusiastically about their studies and the opportunities for developing their practical skills. In sciences, students were able to carry out practical work safely and competently.

56 The college has a good record of achievement scheme. Students are encouraged to use a computer programme to keep their record up to date. All reporting procedures include students' comments on their own progress, enabling them to develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning. The record of achievement is used effectively to provide students and their parents with information on progress.

57 Work experience offers students on vocational programmes valuable opportunities to learn about the work environment. Some students are offered permanent jobs as a result of successful work placement experience. Employers see work placement links as an important means of establishing a dialogue with the college staff and of influencing teaching. Few students on GCE A level courses benefit from contact with industry or the community as part of their study programmes.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

58 Students' work on vocational programmes is competent and the standards achieved are sufficient to enable them to gain the relevant qualifications. In 1993, 86 per cent of the 188 students, age 16-18, on the final year of Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) or City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI) national diplomas achieved their awards, placing the college in the top 40 per cent of institutions within the further education sector. Students who failed to achieve the full award obtained credits for units or received a certificate of achievement.

59 Achievement in GCE A level courses are slightly below the average

for the sector. Pass rates, grades A-E, were 61 per cent in 1993, 66 per cent in 1992 and 62 per cent in 1991. In 1993, the national average pass rate for further education colleges, excluding sixth form colleges, was 66 per cent. Fourteen per cent of college students gained grades A or B. A significant number were ungraded. Success rates in chemistry, French, German, psychology, pure and applied mathematics and statistics were particularly weak with pass rates well below 50 per cent. In 1993, the published average score for GCE A level students, age 16-18, taking two or more A levels, was 7.9 (where A=10, E=2). This performance placed the college in the lower half of institutions within the sector. Examination results at GCSE are similarly lower than the national average for the sector. In 1993, 41.5 per cent of students gained grades A to C compared with an average of 50 per cent for the sector.

60 Analysis of students' entry qualifications indicate the potential for better results at GCE A level than those achieved. The 1993 GCE A level results show that, on average, actual grades gained are below those predicted from GCSE achievements in most subjects, except in English, physics, geology and law. Significant improvement in students achievements have been gained by the introduction of a modular programme for GCE A/AS level physics where a pass rate of 100 per cent was achieved.

61 Destinations of all students are closely monitored. For students completing GCE A level courses, 45 per cent were successful in gaining places in higher education. For vocational programmes, an analysis of students' destinations for 1993 shows that 30 per cent progressed to higher education, 25 per cent continued in further education and 22 per cent proceeded to employment. The destinations of the remaining 25 per cent were unknown. Over 65 per cent of those on art and design courses go on to higher education, 15 per cent remain in further education and 5 per cent enter employment.

62 The proportion of students completing courses is generally satisfactory. In 1992-93, 81 per cent of students completed their courses. This compares satisfactorily with available national figures such as those provided in *Unfinished Business*, published by the Office for Standards in Education and the Audit Commission. The college has attempted to analyse the completion rates on all its programmes. The main reasons for not staying to complete a course are stated by students as their inability to cope with the work or the inappropriateness of the chosen course. Some students also leave to take up full-time employment.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

63 The quality assessment report produced by the college for the inspection team indicates that progress in this area has been slow. The report states that some of the measures taken so far have served to highlight the magnitude of the changes required. It also draws attention to the lack of staff understanding of corporate aims and objectives.

64 There is strategy for measuring and developing quality across the college, but all the mechanisms and procedures for this framework are not yet in place. A number of aspects are being operated including programme reviews, and document audits. A quality manager is in post and considerable effort has been invested in developing a large number of policy statements, part of a quality manual and quality project groups. Continuous improvement teams have been introduced to look at ways of improving quality within particular areas of work.

65 There is a lack of rigour and evaluation within programme review reports. The views of students and employers are not regularly collected and used when preparing these reports. Although systems for the collection and dissemination of performance-indicators are developing, such information is not systematically analysed, subjected to comparison with external measures or used by programme teams to inform review and development. The college is a member of the Advanced Level Information System project (ALIS) but has not effectively used the data from the system to review its activities. A document audit procedure provides a method of checking the existence and location of course documentation but there is no analysis of the quality or relevance of these materials.

66 The academic board has recently been reconstituted. Its major functions are to review the divisional reports, which are syntheses of the programme reviews, and to sanction and monitor agreed actions. This process has identified aspects of the review procedures that are not being effective in monitoring or providing direction for quality improvements. Some changes are being made to develop better systems for the collection of students' views, and for the review of GCSE and GCE A level courses.

67 The overall strategy for quality assurance was framed when the college intended to proceed towards British Standards 5750 for quality accreditation. That philosophy has remained, although there is now no immediate aim to achieve the award. Many of the administrative processes involved have been retained even though they are not appropriate for a college of this size. Procedures which are more readily understood and focused could be devised which would speed up the introduction of effective quality management. Targets are set at divisional and programme levels for the recruitment of students, but as yet there are no other standards established against which to measure quality.

68 The college has begun implementation of the Investors in People programme and produced a schedule of activity and responsibilities towards that goal. The process has been slow and, partly as a result of an imminent reorganisation, the scheduled target for achieving the award in 1994 has been delayed, necessitating the negotiation of a new deadline.

69 Staff development activities are managed centrally. Over £70,000 was allocated to support staff development in 1993. Requests for staff development are referenced to college or divisional plans but they are not systematically prioritised, and there is no overall plan to ensure that the budget is spent in the most effective way to cover the respective

requirements of both individuals and the college. The needs of some staff teaching GCE A level and some aspects of GNVQ and of support staff in general have not been met.

70 A staff appraisal scheme is gradually being introduced but the college has not met its target of including all members of staff by the end of 1993. Although most people have been trained, appraisal sessions have only reached middle management levels, and have not yet included non-teaching staff. There has not been an evaluation of the outcomes achieved so far. Links between quality assurance, staff development, appraisal and the Investors in People programme are not in place.

71 Work has begun on the production of a college charter in response to the requirements of the Charter for Further Education.

RESOURCES

Staffing

72 The staff are suitably qualified and experienced to deliver the current course provision. The majority of teaching staff have a formal teaching qualification. A small proportion of teaching hours are taught by part-time staff.

73 The level of administrative and technical support to divisions varies. The college recognises that a redistribution of support effort is required. It is college policy to encourage suitably-qualified members of the support staff to be involved in teaching but the degree to which this is practised is variable.

74 All new staff are given a common induction from their line manager and the human resources manager. A skills audit of teaching and support staff was carried out last year but not all staff were involved and there has been no staff development follow up. The college operates an equal opportunities policy. Implementation is the responsibility of the heads of division. There is no nominated equal opportunities officer and any issues are resolved by the vice-principal (planning). No concerns over equal opportunities were raised with members of the inspection team.

75 The college intends to reduce the proportion of expenditure attributed to staff costs from 70 per cent to around 62 per cent in order to release funds for improvements to facilities. To achieve this applications have been invited for voluntary redundancy and seven posts withdrawn from the management structure of the college. A review of technician and support staff responsibilities which commenced in February 1992 has been postponed pending the resolution of the management re-organisation.

Equipment

76 There is a well-organised library and learning resources centre. The communication centre is located nearby and this provides support for students in basic and study skills. A similar centre to provide mathematics

support has not been decorated, furnished or equipped yet and it is located in another part of the college buildings. The opportunity has not been taken to bring together in one area all aspects of learning support.

77 The book stock in the library is insufficient to support current courses. For 1993-94 the library received a budget of £40,000. Of this, £19,000 was allocated for the purchase of books to support the relatively small number of higher national diploma courses in art and design and business studies.

78 Most areas of the college are adequately equipped. A college-wide replacement policy has not been developed. The organisation and layout of the main engineering workshop should be reviewed to ensure that it conforms with safety regulations. Out-dated equipment should be replaced. There is a lack of equipment to support teaching and learning in beauty therapy and insufficient print-making facilities for students on art and design courses. The gymnasium equipment and facilities are dated and inadequate.

79 The college is in process of developing an information technology policy and some work has been done to identify the information technology requirements of teaching divisions. The college is unable to measure how far progress has been made in developments because adequate reporting and consultative arrangements are not in place. The college should identify clear targets for information technology resource development, replace old and out-dated equipment and agree with divisions a deployment strategy which will enable a suitable level of access for all students.

80 The overall number of computers is adequate. There are about 140 computers distributed between central resource areas and teaching divisions. However, many of these are insufficiently up-to-date to support the curriculum. There are good up-to-date facilities provided centrally as part of the library, in the electronic office and also for art and design. Other areas such as engineering are less well provided and students following general education courses do not have ready access to information technology facilities.

81 Administrative, photocopying and word-processing support for teaching staff is inadequate. The cost of photocopying to individual sections is high. As a consequence, some handout material is reproduced in other ways and is of variable quality.

Accommodation

82 The college benefits from having most of its activities concentrated on a single site which is close to the town centre. Some adult education provision is provided in a large house which is located one mile from the main site. The college has use of playing fields which are close to the main site but the ownership of these is the subject of consideration by the Educational Assets board. There is limited access to some areas of the college for those with restricted mobility. The library and the learning-resource centre pose particular difficulties.

83 There is residential accommodation for 50 students on the main college site. Two houses close to the college are also used to accommodate older students. A further 20 students are in lodgings in the town of Wisbech. Students are provided with adequate accommodation in single and double rooms with facilities for studying. In the main hall of residence there is a lounge, television and recreational facilities. The accommodation requires decoration and refurbishment.

84 In most cases, there is adequate and sufficient accommodation to support teaching and learning. There are some good facilities in hairdressing and beauty and in business and secretarial studies. The electronic office provides a well-resourced and stimulating learning environment. There is a good standard of decoration and maintenance in science laboratories.

85 The college has no accommodation strategy, or programme of planned maintenance and redecoration. The teaching accommodation for some curriculum areas, and particularly for art and design, is dispersed throughout the college. The grouping together of accommodation within subject areas would enable staff teaching in the same subjects to work more closely together.

86 Some classrooms are poorly decorated and furnished. In some rooms the acoustics are poor; others are badly lit. A number of areas of the college, including classrooms and workshops, are untidy and shabby. Some public spaces are litter strewn, depressing and unwelcoming. Accommodation for students' social activities is small and untidy.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

87 The college is moving slowly towards the achievement of its mission. Particular strengths are:

- the broad range of well-established full-time courses including extensive provision in art and design
- well-established links with schools and effective pre-enrolment guidance for students
- good management of student services and a comprehensive framework for student support
- satisfactory teaching and conscientious organisation of teaching programmes
- suitably-qualified and experienced staff
- the well-organised library and well-equipped learning resource centre
- the availability of residential accommodation.

88 If the college is to achieve its stated aims and to raise standards it should address the following issues:

- the limited range of education and training for those with no formal entry qualifications, adult returners and those in employment

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- the complex management structure which leads to confusion and dilution of responsibility
 - the lack of systematic monitoring and review of progress against strategic goals and operational targets
 - the lack of an institutional focus to facilitate development of the curriculum and promote student learning
 - GCE A level and GCSE examination results which are lower than average for the sector
 - the limited advice and guidance for adults and part-time students
 - the slow development of effective quality assurance procedures
 - the absence of a coherent strategy for staff development
 - the absence of an accommodation strategy
 - the inadequate stock of books and periodicals in the library.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (at November 1993)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (at November 1993)

 - 3 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)

 - 4 Enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)

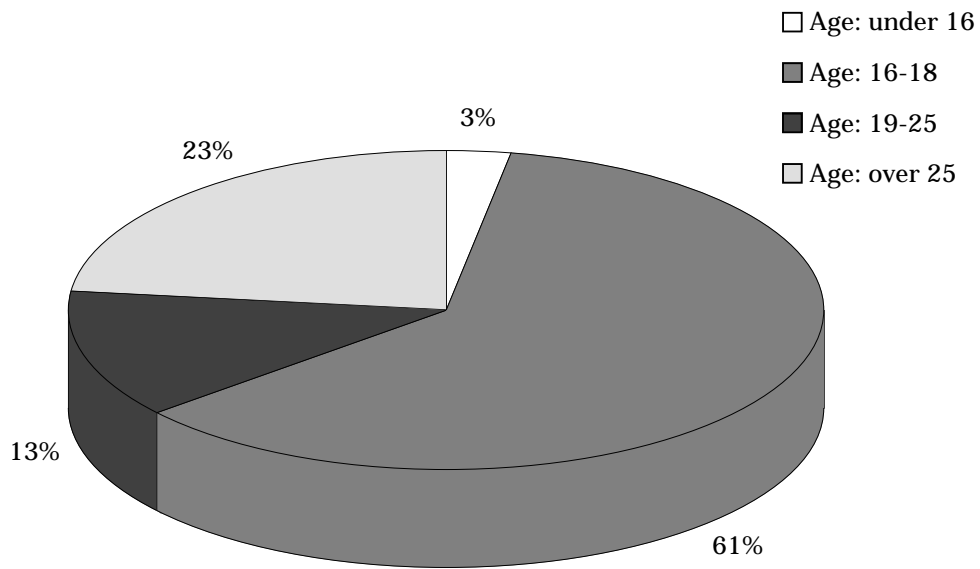
 - 5 Estimated income (16 months to July 1994)

 - 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

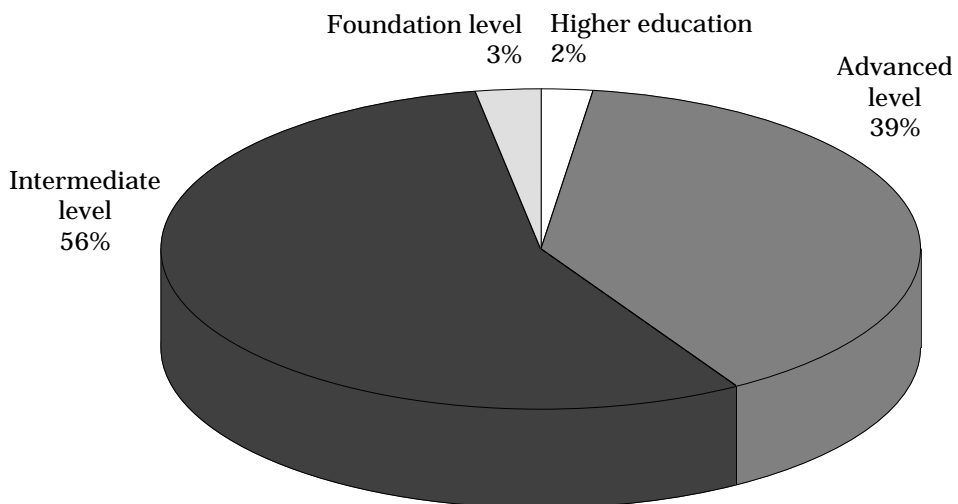
Isle College: percentage enrolments by age (at November 1993)



Enrolments: 2,092

Figure 2

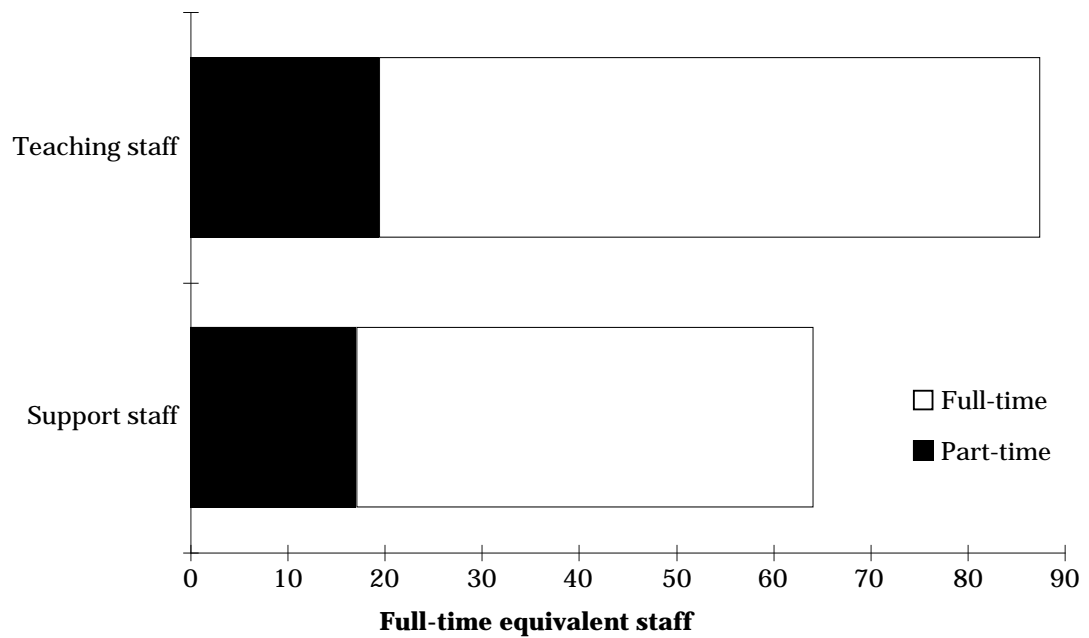
Isle College: percentage enrolments by level of study (at November 1993)



Enrolments: 2,092

Figure 3

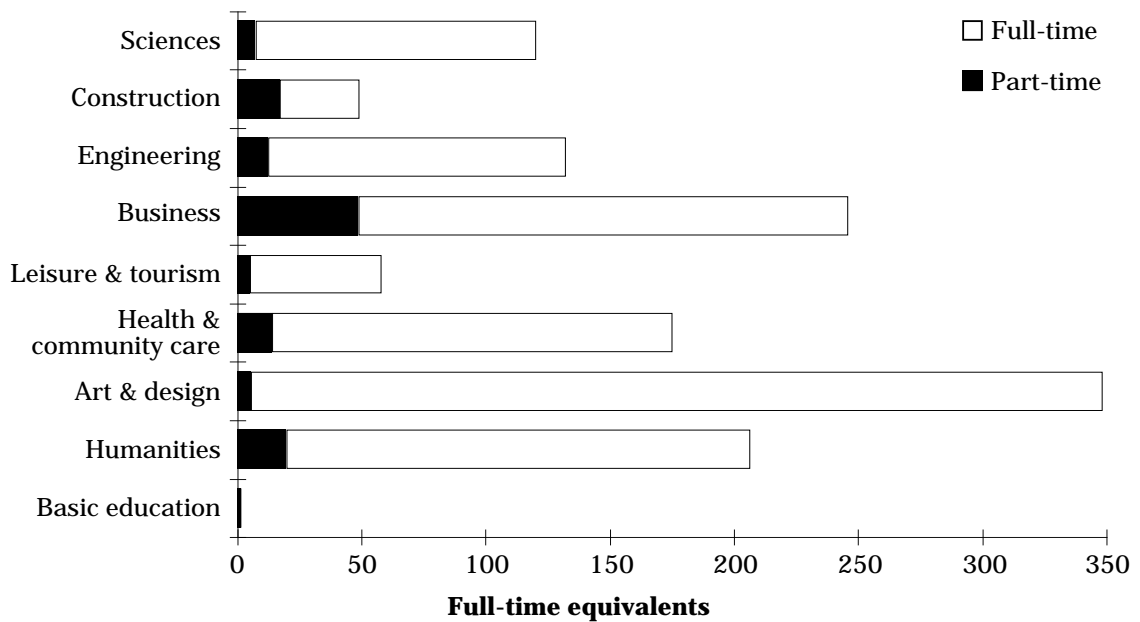
Isle College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)



Full-time equivalent staff: 152

Figure 4

Isle College: enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)



Full-time equivalent enrolments: 1,338

Figure 5

Isle College: estimated income (16 months to July 1994)

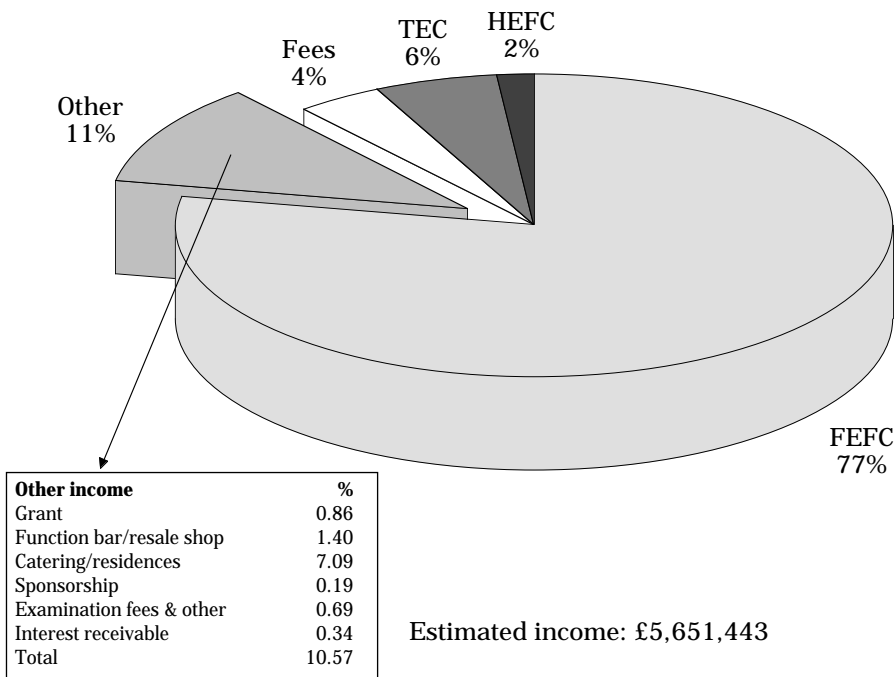
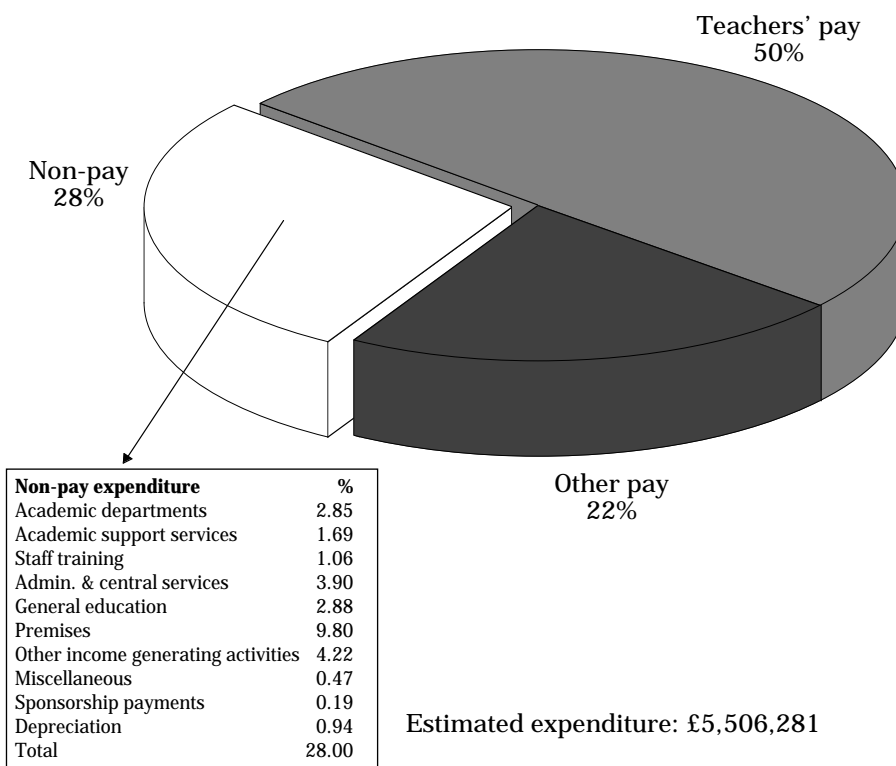


Figure 6

Isle College: estimated expenditure (16 months to July 1994)



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