

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Lowestoft College

January 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-95

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 04/96

LOWESTOFT COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected April-October 1995

Summary

Lowestoft College is a college of further education situated on the East Anglian coast in North Suffolk. It provides a range of general education and vocational courses which meets most of the needs of the local community. A strength of the provision is the range of highly specialised courses that recruit nationally and internationally. Many of these are for the offshore industries and are supported by exceptional specialist equipment. Students benefit from effective guidance and support. Teachers and support staff are well qualified and there is good teaching in most subjects. The college is served by committed governors but they would welcome more information to assist their decision making and to enable them to monitor and review the performance of the college. The existing quality assurance system is over-elaborate, ineffective and suffers from inadequate statistical data. The college should address: the limited range of foundation programmes; the development of the learning support system; students' poor achievements in some areas; and the poor condition of some accommodation.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Health and community care	2
Construction	2	Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3
Engineering, including maritime	3	Art and design	3
Management, business and secretarial studies	2	Humanities	3
Hospitality and catering, leisure and tourism	2	Basic education, including provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3

INTRODUCTION

1 Lowestoft College, in Suffolk, was inspected between April and October 1995. During a three-week period in April and May 1995 a total of 70 days were spent on assessing specialist subjects. Enrolment and induction were inspected in September 1995. A further 35 days were spent in October 1995 assessing aspects of cross-college provision. In all, 240 teaching sessions were observed involving some 2,230 students. The inspectors examined students' work and held discussions with staff, students, members of the corporation and representatives from local schools, the local community, the Norfolk and Waveney Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and employers. Inspectors also attended college meetings and examined policy documents, minutes of committee meetings, and an extensive range of documents and data relating to the administration of the college.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Lowestoft College is the most easterly college in Britain and traces its origins to evening art classes held in 1874. By 1907, twelve technical classes were available at 'tuppence per week each'. A course in navigation for fishermen began in 1923 and in 1941 the Technical Institute was destroyed by bombing. Lowestoft College of Further Education opened in 1960 but it was not until 1980 that the move to the present site was largely completed.

3 The college is one of four colleges of further education in Suffolk. The nearest alternative providers of further education are Great Yarmouth College, Norwich City College and East Norfolk Sixth Form College, all situated in Norfolk. The college is in the Norfolk and Waveney TEC area. The town is not well served by major roads, motorways or airports and the majority of students are relatively local. There are three high schools near the college, each of which has a sixth form. There are two special schools in the area, one of which offers post-16 provision. In 1994, the post-16 participation rate in education in the Lowestoft area was 66 per cent, slightly less than Norfolk and the rest of Suffolk, and some 16 per cent below the national average.

4 Lowestoft developed originally as a fishing port. More recently, it has been a significant contributor to the offshore gas and oil industries. The town now suffers from a high level of unemployment, over dependence on a limited number of declining industries including fishing and other port-related activities, low wage levels and a high level of seasonal and part-time working. Major job losses in recent years have been concentrated in the town's traditional manufacturing businesses such as shipbuilding, food processing and engineering. The town has a relatively small business service sector and few 'high-tech' growth industries. Some 22 per cent of employees work in the distribution and hotel sector. Suffolk is one of the areas predicted to recover most quickly from the recession but, as yet, there is little evidence of this occurring in Lowestoft. In August 1995, the

unemployment rate in the Lowestoft travel-to-work area was 10.1 per cent. This was significantly higher than the average unemployment rate in the county of 6.3 per cent.

5 The college's main site is in a residential area approximately one mile from the town centre. There has been a significant reduction in the number of annexes in use and, by the end of the inspection, only one remained in use. Much of the accommodation dates from the 1950s and 1960s, although there have been some new additions in the 1980s such as the maritime and offshore building, the survival tank and the special needs unit. The college has received significant financial support from a private sector industry training organisation to develop specialist maritime and offshore training facilities. The college has limited use of a training centre built on the main site in 1988 by Shell Expro Ltd on land leased to them by the college.

6 Target student numbers for 1993-94 were not achieved. The college is anticipating that it will have achieved its Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) unit target for the 1994-95 session when its student data are audited. At the completion of the summer 1995 term there were 1,560 students enrolled on full-time programmes and 15,366 on part-time programmes. Approximately 80 per cent of the students were over 19 years of age although most full-time students were aged 16-18. Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. There were 144 full-time equivalent direct contact teaching staff, 50 full-time equivalent support staff and 106 full-time equivalent staff providing indirect teaching support. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7 The college's mission is to provide quality education and training and to develop links with employers and the community.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The college offers general education and vocational courses which meet the needs of most school leavers and adults in the local area. There are programmes in all of the major curriculum areas at levels ranging from basic to higher education.

9 The college has a good relationship with the three schools in Lowestoft with which it has an informal agreement concerning the provision of post-16 education. The stated purpose of the agreement is to ensure that pupils receive the information necessary for them to make an informed decision on their post-16 education. Less specifically, it provides for General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and intermediate General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) to be taught mainly by the schools, and for advanced GNVQ programmes to be taught at the college. In view of the limited market for post-16 education in Lowestoft, this is a sensible agreement which avoids potentially wasteful competition between schools and the college.

10 School leavers can progress to one of 16 vocational programmes at either Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national or GNVQ advanced level. There are four intermediate GNVQ programmes, but no foundation GNVQ provision. The lack of foundation provision limits progression opportunities for students with few prior achievements and those with learning difficulties. It also restricts the options for students who withdraw from intermediate programmes because they find them too demanding. Some students are accepted onto GNVQ courses without the entry qualifications normally expected. Fifteen GCE A level subjects are offered on a full-time or part-time basis. The relatively small number of GCE A level subjects and GNVQ intermediate programmes complements the provision in local schools and is a planned response, to what is perceived to be a limited market. There is regular formal communication between the college and schools at both management and course team level. There are ample opportunities for college staff to talk to pupils about the education and training opportunities available at the college.

11 The college has responded well to the national targets for education and training by providing a good range of courses leading to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) from level 1 to level 5. The strategic plan includes a commitment to increase lifelong education. Several programmes involve off-site delivery and assessment of NVQs. For example, NVQs in maintenance are provided for a company which operates 24 hours a day and, as all shifts require assessment, college staff are sometimes required to work overnight at the factory. In addition, the college is a member of a local consortium for assessment and accreditation in social care. Consortium members include three National Health Service trusts, two private organisations and the social services department. The college provides training in the workplace, assessor training and tutorial support for both assessors and trainees. It has helped several other organisations, including a local prison, to establish and operate NVQ assessment and verification procedures. Food hygiene training for a local employer's staff has included the provision of notes for trainees, training of assessors and marking candidates' examination papers.

12 Despite the decline in shipbuilding locally, the college has maintained a full-time course for boat builders which leads to a level 2 NVQ and which attracts students from across the country and abroad. The college has also identified new market opportunities. For example, a BTEC first diploma in public services has been introduced recently for young people considering a career in one of the uniformed services. In some areas there is potential to extend the range of courses. For example, there are no professional courses in accountancy or marketing and no foundation or intermediate courses in art and design. The range of provision is also limited in hairdressing, beauty therapy and catering.

13 Strong links with a local special school facilitate the progression of students to full-time pre-vocational courses at the college. In 1995, the college started a new 'towards independence' course for adults. It focuses on the attainment of personal and life skills within a framework devised by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network. Students work towards a nationally-recognised bronze award. Links with the local Centre for Independent Living identified a demand for a part-time course in Braille communications which started in September 1995. There are few students with learning difficulties on mainstream academic or vocational programmes.

14 The college is an associate college of Anglia Polytechnic University and has links with the University of East Anglia. Although higher education only accounts for 2 per cent of enrolments, the college is well regarded by the two universities. It has a range of BTEC higher national certificate and diploma courses, a science degree foundation course, a part-time certificate of education course and part-time psychology modules. A particular strength is the full-time higher national diploma in ceramics and design, which has enrolled 63 students.

15 The college is committed to maximising participation in college programmes and to providing more flexible and accessible types of delivery. To achieve this it has divided the entire curriculum into modules. This facilitates access to additional qualifications. For example, GNVQ travel and leisure students can also take an NVQ in travel services, the community sports leader award or first-aid and life-saving certificates. GCE A level students can study GNVQ units and vice versa, although few have taken the opportunity to do so. Independent learning workshops for mathematics, communications, information technology and foreign languages have been established and enable students to study at their own pace, with tutor support. Both modular provision and learning workshops are at an early stage of development and have not yet achieved their full potential. Other methods of flexible delivery and assessment, particularly open learning and the accreditation of prior learning, have yet to make a significant impact on the provision. The potential to widen access by outreach work in the rural community is also underdeveloped.

16 Adults comprise 80 per cent of total enrolments, although most full-time students are aged 16 to 18. Programmes which are particularly attractive to adults include secretarial courses with flexible starting dates and access to higher education courses in science, humanities and social science, and technology. The college offers a range of courses to help adults sample academic or vocational courses and to return to study. A variety of modes of attendance are available and account is taken of the needs of adults with childcare responsibilities. Many adults also enrol on the college's leisure courses. These are located in Lowestoft and in several outreach centres.

17 Full-cost work is a major strength of the college. It generated over £1,250,000 of income in 1994-95. Much of this came from highly-specialised training relating to survival and emergency management and control for offshore industries. The work often takes place at unsocial times and in North Sea locations. There are also full-cost courses and consultancy in other vocational areas, particularly business and management. Teaching staff are well supported by the college's business development and marketing teams. Marketing literature for full-cost courses is of a high standard and the college presents a very professional image to its commercial customers. The college also has strong links with Waveney District Council, the chamber of commerce and other local industry groups. The college has several contracts with Norfolk and Waveney TEC. The increasingly competitive environment and new funding arrangements have resulted in difficult negotiations and some concerns regarding targets. However, both the TEC and the college are keen to establish improved working relationships. Lowestoft has recently been designated as an area suffering from severe socio-economic disadvantage and is therefore eligible for support from the European Social Fund. With the aid of this funding, the college is planning to provide staff training for an overseas multi-national company, which intends to locate part of their operation in Lowestoft.

18 The college's marketing unit is well resourced. Staff have clear roles which cover marketing, market research and design. Marketing objectives are set out in the strategic plan but are not supported by a comprehensive marketing plan based on needs analysis, the setting of operational targets, resource estimates, or the means of evaluating the effectiveness of marketing activities. The college obtains good coverage in the local press and produces some attractive publicity material. In June 1995, the college launched a new logo that has been well received; the work on the logo was overseen by a task group chaired by a member of the corporation.

19 The college has an equal opportunities policy and supporting procedures such as those to combat the harassment of students and staff. Staff volunteer for membership of the equal opportunities committee and meetings are well attended. Course team and centre reviews are required to report on equal opportunities concerns and to highlight good practice. At the time of the inspection, the committee was working on the development of standards against which to judge the college's performance in relation to equal opportunities.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 The corporation has 15 members including the principal and the president of the students' union. There are two members nominated by the college staff, one of whom is a member of the academic board. Eleven are business members, including a nominee of Norfolk and Waveney TEC. Most of the business members hold senior management positions in local commerce and industry. They have a wide range of backgrounds and

expertise which is relevant to the work of the college. Three of the members are women. As a result of a recent resignation there is no one from higher education. At the time of the inspection there were vacancies for two business and one staff member. A search committee has been established to fill the vacancies. Expertise is being sought in accountancy and legal matters. Members of the board have agreed and adopted a code of conduct.

21 Members of the corporation are committed to the work of the college. There is a clear understanding of the different roles of the managers of the college and the members of the corporation. The chairman of the corporation and another member appraise the principal and establish personal targets to be achieved in relation to the strategic plan.

22 Meetings of the corporation take place bi-monthly and are attended by the five assistant principals. Several board members consider that the presence of assistant principals at meetings inhibits free discussion of some issues. The corporation has established two committees: audit and remuneration. There are also three advisory groups which cover personnel, finance and asset management matters. All board members are members of one or more committees or advisory groups. Much of the detailed work of the corporation is appropriately conducted through these committees and advisory groups. The corporation has set up a task group to investigate ways of making it easier for governors to attend meetings. The chair of the corporation is also chair of the college company, Lowestoft and Waveney Education Services Ltd. The income generated by the company is covenanted back to the corporation.

23 Some members of the corporation do not feel they are adequately informed about developments in the college. They are aware of the need to have more detailed information regarding progress in implementing corporation policies. They are also aware that there is a lack of routine reporting of performance indicators which would enable board members to monitor the achievements of the college against its objectives. The corporation has not yet determined criteria to review its own performance and measure achievements. There is no formal procedure for the induction of new members.

24 The framework for the current management structure was established in 1991. It was reviewed during the spring and summer of 1995 and minor modifications made for the start of the autumn term 1995. The principal and five assistant principals form the strategic planning group. Although the need for a deputy principal was identified some time ago, no one has been appointed. The five assistant principals work well together and have appropriate job descriptions and designated responsibilities.

25 The college is organised into five groups, each headed by an assistant principal. Within each group there are a number of centres, each with a head of centre, responsible for an aspect of curriculum delivery or a cross-college

function. In total there are 13 heads of centre who, together with the strategic planning group, form the college management group. The organisational structure does not differentiate between teaching and support staff and this has helped to establish parity of esteem amongst staff.

26 The six programme centres each have a number of teams, each with a team leader. There are generic job descriptions for centre heads and team leaders but in practice they have wide and varied duties and workloads. Heads of centre have devolved responsibility for part-time staff and consumable resources budgets. In turn, most heads of centre delegate these responsibilities to team leaders, many of whom lack appropriate training to enable them to cope with the demands of their role. Curriculum team leaders have a significant workload, including a teaching commitment of 14 hours each week. There are no formal arrangements for them to meet as a group to help them develop their role and share good practice. Heads of centres and team leaders have no targets against which to measure their performance in relation to the college's objectives.

27 There has been some effective strategic and operational planning. The strategic plan is based on a review of the previous plan and contributions from programme and service centres. Agreed developments to support the delivery of the planned provision are clearly set out in the form of operating statements. These include completion targets, resource requirements, and assigned responsibilities. There is no indication of how the achievement of corporate objectives will be measured and the link between the corporate objectives and the operating statements is not explicit. In addition many of the resource requirements are not fully costed. The establishment, monitoring and review of strategic and operational targets needs to be formalised.

28 There has been a thorough development and implementation of a number of policies and operational practices, for example on health and safety, financial control, costing and pricing. The policy requirements have been well researched and discussed within the management team and across the college. Appropriate procedures to support, monitor, and review the implementation of such policies have been developed.

29 The academic board is the major forum for the review of curriculum quality. It receives reports and informs decision making. Arrangements for the administration of the academic board and boards of study are effective. Staff members welcome the opportunity to learn about college developments and to contribute to discussion. There are parallel arrangements for service quality review with the establishment of a service board and supporting service review groups.

30 Effective use has been made of task groups to consider issues such as the modularisation of the curriculum and fees policy. The groups have clear terms of reference and a timetable for reporting back to the strategic

planning group. Members of staff from across the college are able to volunteer as task group members.

31 The strategic planning group, the college management group and most centre heads and team leaders meet weekly. The strategic planning group and college management group meetings are not formally minuted. Action points are circulated but they are not systematically followed up to ensure that action has been taken. Practice regarding the recording of meetings at group and centre level is variable. There is a useful weekly college newsletter supplemented by bulletins and occasional briefing sheets, for example on health and safety and on inspection. However, overall, staff have a limited awareness of the direction of the college and of the work of the corporation. There has been little analysis of the effectiveness of communications or the extent to which these have contributed to the establishment of a whole college ethos.

32 The college's budget is determined in consultation with budget holders. Allocations to programme centres are decided on a historical basis and modified to take account of planned changes in provision. The curriculum resources and part-time staffing budgets are controlled by centre managers. Capital allocations are bid for and assessed by the strategic planning group. Allocations are clear and understood by the staff who need to be involved. Some steps have been taken to refine the management of resources but there are no efficiency targets or guidelines on minimum class sizes, apart from those used at enrolment. An effective system for costing activities is used which informs the costing and pricing of commercial courses. Staff-development sessions have been provided to help staff understand financial information. In 1994-95 the college's average level of funding was £21.14 per unit. This was above the median for general further education colleges of £18.17 per unit. In 1995-96 the college's average level of funding per unit is £20.55 compared with an average of £17.84. The corporation is provided with monthly reports on expenditure and income, the resulting balance sheet position and a forecast of cash flow. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

33 A range of manual and computer-based systems is used to support administration and provide management information. Data on applications, enrolment, attendance, retention, destinations and part-time staff contracts are recorded on the college management information system. The system has been updated recently to support individualised student records and a number of further developments are planned, for example to support the effective timetabling of staff. However, more attention needs to be paid to the collection, collation, analysis, use and application of management information. There is inconsistent information in some programme areas on enrolment and outcomes and no analysis of trends in students' achievements. Data on the destinations of students are unsophisticated and often unreliable. Most staff do not have direct access to student information held on the system but have to make specific

requests to the central support team. A directory of standard reports has been produced to assist in this. Procedures have been established to audit and improve the quality of data. The college is implementing plans to aid access to, and analysis of, student information.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

34 There is a strong pastoral ethos in the college and students feel well supported. Initial responsibility for students' recruitment, guidance and support rests with staff within the guidance and registry centre rather than with academic staff. All enquiries, applications, first interviews and enrolment of students take place in the information centre, which is conveniently sited near the college entrance. In response to the aim in the strategic plan to maximise participation in college programmes, the college has recently made a number of internal appointments including a learning support co-ordinator, a learning support development officer and a student liaison officer to support students. Although there is a strong commitment to providing services for students within the guidance and registry centre, the roles of its staff are not clear to other staff within the college.

35 Students receive adequate general information before they arrive at the college, but the programme directory contains insufficient detail about course organisation. Some course information literature is unattractive and needs further development. A central admissions process is operated through the information centre which is staffed by seven college client liaison officers and associated staff who answer enquiries and give advice. Each client liaison officer is assigned to a programme centre. They visit schools to inform pupils of courses on offer at the college and they participate in careers lessons for year 11 pupils. Client liaison officers are beginning to develop other ways of working with school pupils but they require training in presentational skills. Recruitment also involves the client liaison officers in using an information kiosk in the town centre and a mobile information unit at which students may enrol. College taster days are popular with students and, together with open evenings and other pre-course visits, are an effective means of providing information about available courses.

36 The guidance and registry staff are flexible, well trained and form a cohesive team. Procedures for giving guidance and advice to students are effective. Students are allocated to an academic adviser who becomes their guidance tutor when they enrol. In the information centre, students receive help with grant applications and advice on travel arrangements, loans and the support available from educational charities. Client liaison officers co-ordinate the process of enrolment and spend much of their time within their programme centres. The enrolment form is complex, and little account has been taken of the needs of client liaison officers and staff in its design. The process of entering enrolment data into the database is time consuming and distracts client liaison officers from their work with

students. The client liaison officers provide an effective means of guiding students through enrolment but they do not have a uniform practice regarding interviews, and some students have had to return to college for a second interview with a member of the teaching staff. Client liaison officers try to tailor interviews to fit in with students' travel arrangements. There is an appropriate policy statement which sets out what guidance students are entitled to. The complaints procedure mentioned in this statement is not yet in place.

37 All full-time and part-time students on courses of six or more hours per week have tutorials with their guidance tutors. There is particularly effective tutorial support for gateway, 'return-to-learn' and access course students and those undertaking four-year degree courses, the first year of which is franchised to the college. There is a booklet which provides tutors with suggested topics and materials to assist them in fulfilling their role. Guidance tutors have received some staff development but there has been insufficient training for some staff in this role and few opportunities for them to meet. The time allocated to group and individual tutorials is variable. There are not enough rooms allocated for individual discussions with students. Staff in the maritime, offshore, construction and engineering centre have developed their own mentoring system alongside the guidance tutor role, which is both effective and welcomed by students. Full-time students are allocated time to maintain their national records of achievement. A log book is used which ensures that students review their progress on a termly basis, and receive accreditation for their national records of achievement. The college is now piloting national records of achievements with some part-time students. Course tutors monitor the attendance of students. Absentees are followed up by tutors and client liaison officers, but the procedures employed are not consistent across the college.

38 Induction programmes are generally well organised and effective, enabling students to get to know their course and the college. The programmes have an agreed common core and are particularly effective where activities are specifically related to the curriculum. Students interviewed at induction felt that there was insufficient signposting to classrooms. The use of accreditation of prior learning to assist those students with non-standard entry qualifications to gain access to courses is underdeveloped.

39 Students are able to change courses with relative ease and are supported in this by client liaison officers and course tutors, particularly in the early stages of their course. Students withdrawing from their course are followed up by a course tutor or client liaison officer and a form is completed but this process is not standardised across the college. There is no routine follow-up of all leavers to obtain information on the effectiveness of the college's programmes.

40 Students are able to make appointments to see a careers officer, the chaplain or counsellor. The college counselling service provides support

to staff and students, is flexible in response to urgent need, has good links with external agencies and is reviewed monthly with the manager for services to students. The counsellor works to a clear ethical code, is properly supervised and provides a confidential service. The room available for counselling requires some improvement to protect confidentiality. There has been no full evaluation of the service. Although students have access to the Suffolk Careers Service on two days per week there is no agreed programme of careers education. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities use the services of the specialist careers officer but his visits to the college are infrequent. The time allocated to careers advice is insufficient at certain times of the year. For example, students sometimes have to wait for three weeks to see a careers officer. The careers library for students wishing to go into employment is poor, although there is access to careers information on a compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database operating on a slow computer. The college chaplain spends 25 per cent of his time at the college and contributes to the Christian Union and other college activities.

41 Cross-college learning support arrangements have improved with the appointment of a co-ordinator, a clerical assistant and a part-time development officer. Some teaching hours are available to support course teams. There are mathematics and communications workshops available to students who need to develop their basic skills, but these are not well advertised and have limited resources. In addition there is a foreign languages workshop and an information technology workshop. The workshop co-ordinator arranges individual assessments and tuition to meet students' needs. A screening test to determine literacy and numeracy ability has been introduced for all students this year and at the time of the inspection, some 200 students had been identified as needing help with basic skills. However, there has been considerable delay in processing the test results and in allocating support. Overall, the cross-college learning support system is at an early stage of development, with poor office accommodation, no development plan, and limited provision for students.

42 The assessment and review arrangements for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who need learning support on vocational and academic courses lack rigour. However, construction staff have been successful in ensuring that students with particular difficulties are well supported. Support across the college for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities draws on expertise within the learning support team in the centre for community studies. However, the new post of curriculum team leader for learning support does not formally link to the cross-college learning centre.

43 There is a well-used 20-place college nursery which is subsidised by the college. Students' children are given priority when places are allocated. The provision of subsidised childcare has enabled some students to attend the college who would not otherwise have been able to do so. The students'

union has a growing role in encouraging participation in social and other activities and is well supported by the college through the appointment of a sabbatical president and a student liaison officer.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

44 The strengths outweighed the weaknesses in 66 per cent of the 240 sessions inspected. Less than 6 per cent of the classes had weaknesses that outweighed the strengths. The grades awarded for the teaching sessions inspected are summarised in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		3	11	9	4	0	27
GCSE		3	8	5	2	0	18
GNVQ		1	10	7	1	1	20
NVQ		7	22	10	2	0	41
Access		0	4	2	0	0	6
Basic education		0	6	6	0	0	12
BTEC		9	24	12	1	0	46
C&G		4	8	4	2	0	18
Other vocational		17	17	13	1	0	48
Other		0	4	0	0	0	4
Total		44	114	68	13	1	240

45 In many of the programme areas inspected there were a number of common features in the sessions seen. Generally, teachers had appropriate schemes of work for their courses. Most classes were well planned and managed. Teachers displayed a sound knowledge of their subject but often employed an insufficient range of teaching and learning strategies. Rapport between staff and students was generally good and this encouraged students to ask questions in order to clarify uncertainties. Arrangements to assess students' work were usually satisfactory but there was considerable variation in the frequency with which work was set and in the detail of the feedback given to students on how they could improve their performance. Overall, there was a lack of planned support to help students develop their core skills.

46 The teaching in science was particularly well planned. In formal lessons there was clear exposition and concepts were illustrated with appropriate examples. Good use was made of questions to test students' understanding. Students enrolled on the GNVQ science course without the usual entry requirements received insufficient additional support to help bring them to the required level. In mathematics, schemes of work were reviewed regularly in the light of progress made by the students. Course

booklets have been produced for students together with helpful lesson guides to assist teachers in the delivery of the curriculum. Policies for assessment and for teaching and learning strategies to be used in the mathematics workshop were underdeveloped. There has been insufficient planning and staff development for the introduction of GNVQ programmes in information technology. In computing, students received tuition according to their individual needs and abilities. Teachers were particularly sensitive and supportive to the needs of adult students. For example, in a class on the use of spreadsheets, a student with his own engineering business was encouraged to use his own costing data to prepare a model for generating quotations for customers. The calculations and final presentation were checked by the lecturer and used during the class as examples to help other students. Students were encouraged to work at their own pace but within a controlled timescale for assignments and assessments. In some lessons, the work set was insufficiently demanding.

47 In classes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities there was evidence of effective learning in practical situations. The pace of learning was appropriate and students' understanding was checked regularly. A range of teaching and learning activities were employed and this helped to maintain the interest of students. There were some effective exchanges between teachers and students and the teaching was positive, sensitive and supportive. On a number of occasions, however, staff undertook the work for particular students rather than facilitating and supporting their learning. Some learning materials were inappropriate for the work taking place and some contained spelling errors. A pre-vocational group for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities contained students with a wide range of abilities but, whilst those who needed specific attention received conscientious and caring support, there was evidence that the more able students were not always being challenged. Insufficient attention was paid to recording the progress individual students were making.

48 In art and design, there was a difference in the quality of teaching and learning between the vocational courses taught on the main site and the pre-degree courses which, at the time of the inspection, were accommodated in an annexe in another part of the town. Students and staff in the different locations had little opportunity for sharing ideas and good practice. Some very good examples of teaching were observed on the pre-degree courses. Teachers expected high standards of work from students. The work was thoroughly assessed and comments on written work were sensitive and constructive. Students' progress was carefully monitored. However, there was considerable variation in the quality of teaching and learning on the vocational courses. In performing arts it was often excellent. In the best classes, teachers' expectations were high, students responded well and the pace of the lessons was brisk. Practical sessions enabled skills to be developed through group work. For example,

second-year students on the national diploma course in performing arts were involved in the rehearsal of a play. The session was introduced clearly and the aims shared with the students. Very good technical skills were shown both by the staff and by the students and the level of intellectual challenge was high. Students' responses were lively, they contributed to the discussion and made very good progress through constant reinforcement of their learning. In the national diplomas in graphic design and design communications, teachers' expectations of students were lower, particularly in terms of their individual creative development. Some teaching and learning in photography, computer-aided design and film technology was limited by insufficient equipment.

49 Most teaching in engineering was of high quality. Schemes of work were up to date and well matched to syllabus objectives. Teachers generally used a variety of teaching strategies including the effective use of simulation and computer assisted learning. Where teachers identified that students were having difficulty understanding a topic they used alternative explanations. Assessment policies matched the curriculum objectives but tasks sometimes made insufficient demands on students. Coursework was marked regularly, returned with supportive comments and students' progress was carefully monitored. In a minority of classes students became bored because of a lack of variety in teaching strategies, or because the pace of teaching was too slow.

50 In construction, a significant proportion of the teaching took place in the workshops and was of high quality. Underpinning knowledge was taught using well-designed learning materials and textbooks, but maximum benefit was not obtained from this development because students had not been taught the study skills required for independent learning. Working relationships between students and teachers were excellent due partly to the respect that students had for the expertise displayed by their teachers. Students were carefully tutored in the correct and safe use of tools, and were given opportunities to display competence and work without unduly close supervision. Assignments were marked and returned to students promptly. There was appropriate follow-up discussion, sometimes on a one-to-one basis. Records of achievement were being maintained and students were clear about their progress. Within the section there was a caring ethos. One of the teachers has learned to sign to the deaf students.

51 Teaching in English and communication studies was of a high standard. Students' analytical and creative skills were developed by good classroom teaching, structured discussions and imaginative handouts. Staff had produced well-written resource materials which greatly assisted students. The GCSE course has been modularised and this helps students to chart their progress more easily. A variety of teaching methods were used to vary the pace of lessons and maintain the interest of students. Students' work was marked thoroughly but GCE A level marking schemes

were not as well structured as those for GCSE. There was some lively teaching in history, especially to access students, and on the further and adult education teachers' certificate course. GCE A level and GCSE history teaching were based on good preparation and analysis of historical source material. However, teachers used a limited range of teaching strategies. There was a high level of participation by adult students in all aspects of their learning. The good teaching by part-time staff contributed to the overall success of teaching and learning. Marking was generally thorough with some careful analytical and supportive comments. In psychology and sociology, some schemes of work and lesson plans lacked detail. In classes containing adults, teachers made good use of students' prior knowledge and experience. In some classes students were unclear about the assessment criteria for their course and there was a lack of consistency in the extent of written feedback to students. In a few lessons, small class sizes inhibited student participation and interaction.

52 In management, business and secretarial studies most teaching sessions were effective and achieved their aims. In one particularly good lesson the lecturer had developed an individual plan of work for each student. In most sessions students were presented with challenging activities on which they worked enthusiastically. The workshop sessions for typewriting, wordprocessing and business administration which allow students to enrol at any time throughout the year are a good development. They are effective due to the excellent workpacks and support offered by administrative staff. Teachers made effective use of the work experience gained by students on BTEC national and part-time NVQ courses. NVQs at all levels are effectively assessed by experienced and qualified staff. The development of core skills on GNVQ and BTEC national programmes is systematic, and effectively mapped and assessed. Adult students on a BTEC national certificate programme were observed making a presentation on a business they planned to start. The presentational skills of the students and their grasp of the business researched were impressive and the session totally absorbed the attention of all who were involved. Student work is appropriately graded and promptly returned with detailed feedback comments. However, some work had been returned to students without the correction of confused concepts or serious spelling errors. Advanced GNVQ students complained of uneven assignment scheduling.

53 Health and community care teaching programmes had been carefully planned, but the aims and objectives were not always shared with students. Teaching was of a good standard although students' interest was not always maintained. The learning process was well supported by the use of a range of teaching techniques and visual aids. Work was marked on time and some second marking had been carried out in order to ensure consistent grading. Records were kept of assignment results and used to inform tutors of the progress being made by students. Core skills were developed through assignment work, work experience and specific lessons dedicated to information technology and application of number.

54 Teaching in hairdressing and beauty therapy was generally of a good standard and at an appropriate level. A variety of teaching strategies were used in both practical and theory sessions. All overhead transparencies seen were of a high standard. Schemes of work in hairdressing need further development to ensure that there are clear links between theory and practical sessions. Teachers had developed some good independent learning materials for students but the use of these had not been built into schemes of work. The quality of the teaching programme was enhanced by visiting tutors and external visits including international links. The beauty salons had many clients so that students were able to gain a realistic insight into the pressures of working in a commercial salon. This was not the case in hairdressing. In addition to work in the college salons, all students have the opportunity of work experience which is evaluated and monitored carefully. Documentation used as part of the assessment process had been well designed and was readily understood by students. However, students were not always sufficiently challenged by the tasks they were set.

55 Leisure and tourism classes were enhanced by enthusiastic teaching. Assignment tasks had a clear brief, specified performance criteria, and contained a balance of description and evaluation. Marking was fair, and encouraging feedback was provided. Careful consideration had been given to the teaching and assessment of core skills. The majority of sessions in hotel and catering were of a high standard. Students were motivated and their interest maintained by their involvement in a variety of relevant activities. Work experience was used to supplement the tasks carried out in the realistic work environments. The motivation of students was particularly high in the practical kitchen and restaurant sessions. Teachers made good use of open-ended questions to encourage self-assessment by students. Individual learning programmes had been developed for NVQ students to accelerate their readiness for assessment. NVQ students had few opportunities to develop good written communication and presentation skills. Oral feedback given on an individual basis was particularly thorough but there was insufficient written feedback on assessed work. More attention was required to correction of spelling and presentation of work. GNVQ students were dissatisfied with frequent changes to assessments, lecturers and the structure of their programme.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

56 Most students were positive about their learning experiences and were enjoying their course. The majority of students were attentive and adult students made valuable contributions to lessons through discussions or sharing knowledge of current business or commercial practice. Practical activities were generally carried out safely and competently. Some younger students lacked enthusiasm and commitment, and did not take part readily in class discussion. In several subject areas students had developed little competence in the use of information technology and other core skills.

57 In 1994, the college entered 92 students aged 16-18 for GCE AS or A level examinations. Students scored, on average, 3.2 points per examination entry. Based on this performance measure the college is among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector in the 1994 tables published by the Department for Education (now Department for Education and Employment). The GCE A level pass rate at grades A-E was 75 per cent and is slightly better than the national average (72 per cent) for candidates aged 16-18 in further education colleges. Of the 125 students in this age group entered in 1994 for certain vocational qualifications, 92 per cent were successful. This places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure.

58 Since the specialist inspections were carried out, the results of the 1995 summer examinations have been announced. Figures for GCE A levels show that in 12 of the 17 subjects offered the pass rate was equal to or better than the average pass rates for all further education institutions. In subjects where at least 10 or more students sat the examinations, GCE A level A-E grade pass rates were generally above the national average. In business studies they were 35 per cent higher, in human biology 25 per cent higher and philosophy 13 per cent higher. Some small groups, such as that for mathematics, had good results but the small groups for chemistry and physics had poor results. The recent introduction of value-added analysis of GCE A level results is becoming a useful tool. Early indications show that many students are achieving better results than might be expected from their GCSE results. Results in 15 of the 18 GCSE subjects offered were equal to or better than the average pass rates for all further education institutions. The number of examination entries in some subjects was small, making statistical comparisons with national pass rates unreliable. However, where there were significant entry numbers some results have been excellent. For example, 74 of the 86 English language candidates gained a pass at grades A-C, and all 24 students who took GCSE sociology gained grades A-C. Results in mathematics were significantly below the national average.

59 Science access course results were good. For example, in 1994 on the access to life sciences course, all 16 students who enrolled passed, with 64 per cent gaining a distinction and 29 per cent a merit. However, retention rates on some science courses have been poor. For example, in the 1993-94 session of 55 students enrolled for the GCSE in human biology only 21 completed the course. Retention rates on GCE A levels were significantly better. In 1993-94 it varied between 77 per cent for human biology and 91 per cent for physics. In computing, students' command of English grammar and spelling was poor and often undermined otherwise good-quality work. The pass rate on the national diploma in computing has declined from 90 per cent in 1992 to 62.5 per cent (the national average) in 1994. The introduction of mathematics GCSEs in which the subject matter is divided into modules has improved student performance in the 1994-95 session. Although the percentage of GCE A level mathematics

students progressing to higher education has fallen over the past two years, some 30 per cent progressed to higher education in 1994.

60 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities participate in the youth award scheme which offers recognition of achievements in a structured way. A range of other achievements were also obtained and received appropriate accreditation. For example, of 24 first and second-year students in 1994-95, 11 obtained the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) wordpower award at foundation level and 11 the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) practical skills profile. Ten students obtained the food and hygiene certificate. National records of achievement were valued by students who regularly reviewed and updated their records. There were some notable achievements by individual students who had progressed from the learning support section to vocational courses. Nevertheless, some important elements of the programme are not accredited or do not provide the opportunity to gain a full award, and on some programmes students were unclear about the qualification that they were undertaking.

61 Art and design students displayed a very positive attitude to their work in the studios and approached set tasks with a strong sense of purpose. Students on pre-degree courses demonstrated their progress in the skills learnt and developed during the academic year. Portfolios contained many examples of high standards being attained, for example, in visual research, colour, surface pattern and texture. The achievements of some students on vocational courses did not display the same high standards. For example, although the work of some BTEC national diploma students adequately met the technical requirements of the brief set, the responses lacked evidence of the research required to produce successful designs. Students' work arising from a visit to Berlin was of a good standard. Almost all second-year students successfully complete their course. There is a high rate of progression to higher education from some courses. For example, 86 per cent of those leaving the pre-degree courses in 1994 progressed to higher education. In 1995, the percentage progressing to higher education increased on a number of courses, for example, on the BTEC national diploma in graphic design from 76 to 100 per cent and on the BTEC national diploma in performing arts from 22 per cent to 67 per cent.

62 Engineering and maritime students worked safely and competently, on their own and in groups, in laboratories and workshops. The use of an assessment schedule resulted in a uniform workload. Students made little use of information technology in the production of their coursework and they commented on the difficulty in gaining access to information technology facilities. There was considerable variation in the standards of projects and other assessed work. In the best examples, teachers set high standards which students achieved but some teachers make relatively low demands on students. Student achievements in examinations on some courses were poor. For example, only 40 per cent of students completing

their BTEC national diploma in engineering in 1994 achieved passes in all subjects, even allowing for reassessments. The percentage of successful students on the national certificate in engineering (33 per cent) was below the national average.

63 Construction students have consistently won prizes at regional building crafts competitions. Students were proud of their achievements, particularly where something they had made had been put to use in the college. Despite the close proximity of the computer centre to the construction workshops, students' information technology skills were underdeveloped. Overall, students had a realistic understanding of their progress. Pass rates for examinations and for practical assessments on most courses were good. For example, in 1994-95 all students on the NVQ level 3 carpentry and joinery and on the NVQ level 3 brickwork courses were successful. A dyslexic student who had been rejected by another training provider, but accepted by the college on a full-time diploma course, had obtained his NVQ level 2 in painting and decorating and had progressed to NVQ level 3.

64 Students on English courses enjoyed their lessons. Most had well-presented course notes. They worked hard on their assessments and had a clear idea of the progress they were making. In history, oral communication skills varied significantly between student groups. There was some particularly good-quality written work by access and GCE A level students. Some students had made good use of information technology to access historical source material on CD-ROMs in the library. In sociology and psychology, students were enthusiastic about their studies. Some students' work was of a high standard and mature students demonstrated exceptional achievement and understanding. The number of students failing to complete GCSE sociology and psychology courses has been high although the examination results of those who complete the course are good. Retention rates on some GCE A level courses have been low. There was outstanding course work on the access courses and a pass rate of 100 per cent in 1994. Access students attending a rural outreach centre achieved well in spite of an austere environment and lack of resources. However, a significant number of access students fail to complete their course; completion rates in 1994 varied between 50 per cent in humanities and 88 per cent in life sciences. In 1994-95 all students except one in social sciences were offered a place in higher education.

65 In management, business administration and secretarial studies the standard of students' work ranged from satisfactory to excellent. Students understood the tasks they were doing and spoke confidently about them. There were some particularly good portfolios of work from employed students. Typewriting and wordprocessing skills were well developed. NVQ students at all levels showed a good understanding of their progress and the programme requirements. On management NVQs, student portfolios were well presented and included practical evidence from employment. Overall, success rates across most of the programmes offered

have been good. On BTEC national courses retention and success rates have been satisfactory over the last three years and some have improved significantly. For example, on the first diploma in business and finance the retention rate increased from 57 per cent in 1992 to 75 per cent for 1994. On GNVQ business studies at intermediate and advanced levels, results in external tests have been satisfactory but retention rates have been as low as 33 per cent. There were high rates of absenteeism in some of the advanced GNVQ classes observed.

66 In health and community care, students worked particularly well in groups. Assignments were carefully scheduled and some of the work was imaginative and well produced. For example, students made 'feely boxes' designed to enable young children to sample a variety of surface textures which they then used during their work placements. Retention rates on most courses were good. In the 1993-94 session, 86 per cent of students on the first year of the BTEC national diploma in nursery nursing completed their year and 84 per cent of second-year students completed and passed the examinations. Overall, students' achievements in examinations are similar to national averages.

67 Hairdressing and beauty therapy students acquired appropriate practical skills, particularly in beauty therapy. Written work was of a good standard. However, students were not always challenged as fully as they might have been. Achievements in the 1993-94 session were variable. For example on the NVQ level 2 in beauty therapy, 33 per cent of the students were successful in all modules and the success rate on the NVQ level 2 in hairdressing was 64 per cent. Similarly, retention rates varied between 48 and 79 per cent. Attendance was poor in many of the classes observed. The destinations of students were not always effectively monitored.

68 In leisure and tourism, second-year students on the national diploma in travel and tourism displayed exceptionally high standards of effort and achievement. Most of the students had produced work of distinction or merit standard. The work carried out for the national diploma in leisure studies, in producing a 16-page A4 newspaper three times during the year, was of a high standard and helped develop teamwork and a high level of individual skill. Retention rates on the two national diploma courses were good and the average pass rate was 76 per cent. Results were also good on NVQ level 1 travel services with a 100 per cent pass rate. There were high levels of motivation and interest shown by C&G recreation and leisure studies students during practical sessions in the leisure centre, but the pass rate on this course was only 50 per cent. Overall retention on full-time courses in 1994-95 was only 71 per cent. Some of the students failed to complete their course because they had taken up related employment as a result of work completed during their course. The overall success rate on the intermediate GNVQ course was low with just 24 per cent of the students originally enrolled successfully completing their course.

69 In catering, students demonstrated appropriate practical skills in the kitchens and restaurant areas. Students worked well together in groups. NVQ students were able to comment accurately on their own progress. Success rates were generally good. Excellent results were achieved on the basic food hygiene certificate with 131 of the 133 students successful in 1993-94. NVQ level 2 students achieved a 100 per cent success rate in the food preparation and cooking unit. The average success rate across all three level 2 qualifications: food preparation and cooking, food and drink service and bar service was 85 per cent. On the part-time C&G second-year course in sugarcraft, all 10 students were successful. The standard of assessment tasks set for the advanced GNVQ did not adequately challenge all students. Some assessment tasks contained too much repetition and insufficient research and evaluation was required of the students.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

70 The mission statement commits the college to provide quality education and training. The revised corporate objectives (1995-98) devised as part of the strategic plan, identified the need to establish a total quality culture. In order to achieve this the college has established a quality forum, called the quality assurance group, which has defined systems to assist in developing the quality of both curriculum and services.

71 The quality assurance system devised by the college is a complex hybrid of total quality management, Investors in People, the quality standard BS 5750/ISO 9001 and academic review. This elaborate system involves both academic and support staff in a process of continuous review, utilising standardised documentation. The system has not been fully implemented. Most staff do not understand the system and have no empathy with it. As a result they do not appreciate the consequence of failing to comply with it. For example, there is a document management system which attempts to keep control over the circulation of important documents. One of its purposes is to ensure that users are working from the most recent issue. The system states which documents are to be controlled and the process for managing their distribution. However, staff are unclear about what constitutes a controlled document, and how the system works.

72 The quality system has not made a significant impact on improving the students' experience. It does not involve setting standards and targets based on performance indicators such as student retention, achievement, attendance and student satisfaction. Consequently it is difficult to monitor quality improvement. The quality assurance group has established three quality initiative groups to undertake and manage important quality assurance processes. They are: standards and performance indicators; review, evaluation and audit; and programme validation. At the time of inspection the standards and performance group had met only once. Their remit on performance indicators was to encourage an approach to target setting using tutor self-report as the main method of feedback. This

approach is unsatisfactory since it does not require the systematic recording of key performance indicators, such as pass rates, and their comparison with national standards.

73 The college has inadequate systems for the collection of accurate statistics about enrolment, retention and achievement. There is a general lack of ownership regarding the accuracy of centrally-held data. For example, statistics relating to students' achievements in 1993-94 were derived both from tutor reports, required as part of the academic course review process, and also from data collected centrally by the examinations section from student certificates. The information was not checked and contained errors, for example, in the compilation of NVQ results. The lack of checks and the relative independence of centres from the central collection of information has resulted in the review of students' achievements by the academic board being too anecdotal and lacking in rigour. This is disappointing in view of the wealth of detailed information held by many course tutors on the reasons why individual students fail to complete or achieve their main qualification.

74 Internal validation and review systems are developing well. The programme validation group has met regularly and provides an internal validation service for course teams prior to validation with external validating bodies such as universities and the open college network. This process is valued by heads of centre and by representatives of higher education who feel that useful preparatory work is conducted prior to formal validation. Records relating to the pre-validation of the BTEC higher national certificate in childhood studies with Anglia Polytechnic University indicated that the process had been rigorous and challenging and enabled the course team to enter the formal validation process confidently.

75 The college undertakes student perception surveys of full-time students at three times during the year: on entry, mid-year and at the end of year. They are carried out by the marketing team who collect, collate and analyse the data. During 1994-95, a mid-year survey carried out in February 1995 involved 844 full-time students. Centres were provided with course and centre-level analysis reports with a list of anonymous comments to the open-ended questions. Although the survey collection was administered efficiently, the analysis of the survey was weak. Consequently, the information did not highlight key areas for improvement making it difficult for both course teams and heads of centre to identify and take action on critical issues.

76 The college's self-assessment report was based on Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The process of compiling the report started well in advance of the inspection and was carried out by the quality assurance group using evidence collected by group members. Early versions of the report indicate action points that concur with the findings of the inspection team. The final version of the report is descriptive rather

than analytical, insufficiently self-critical and understates some strengths and many key weaknesses. The recording of inspectors' feedback following the specialist inspections was well documented and each centre has produced an action plan to address issues identified.

77 An amended college charter has been circulated to all students in the 1995-96 session as part of the student induction pack. The charter is comprehensive but sets few measurable standards that can be monitored and reviewed. New students indicated that they had received a copy of the charter but most had not read it and did not understand that it represented the college's commitment to standards of service. The charter has not been distributed to employers or parents. Whilst the charter encourages students to have their say, the college does not have a clear complaints policy. A task group has been established to address this issue. At present, complaints are handled by various sections of the college and there is no central logging of their incidence or the response to them.

78 Systems for internal verification of student assessments are at early stages of development and vary across programme areas. There has been relatively slow progress on the implementation of Training and Development Lead Body assessor training to support the increasing number of competence-based curricula. The college has recently appointed a Training and Development Lead Body development co-ordinator. Some teaching staff expressed reluctance to undertake internal verification and some programme areas have few staff trained and accredited to Training and Development Lead Body standards.

79 There is a commitment to the professional development of staff. The staff-development system is well managed and has an allocation of £45,000 for staff training. Extensive computerised staff-development records are maintained. Procedures are in place to identify staff-development needs at individual and at programme area level. There are sound induction programmes for all new teaching and support staff. Areas of weakness include the need for professional updating of staff in certain specialist areas such as engineering and art and design, assessor training and the need for more systematic management training to underpin the ongoing informal professional development of centre heads and team leaders.

80 The staff-appraisal system has been in operation for over two years for all permanent teaching staff and on a voluntary basis for business support staff. The system is welcomed by business support staff and many have taken the opportunity to be appraised. Progress in introducing appraisal for teaching staff has been variable due to the large number of appraisees for each head of centre. A new initiative to involve curriculum team leaders has been introduced and appraiser training has started. The staff-appraisal system is linked to staff development, but it is not integrated into the strategy for the monitoring and enhancement of quality.

RESOURCES

Staffing

81 The college has the equivalent of 300 full-time staff. Most are well qualified and have appropriate expertise and experience for the work they undertake. Just under a half of the staff are teachers. A substantial majority of teachers are qualified to degree or equivalent level and have a teaching qualification. Overall, there is a good mix of full-time and part-time staff. The college recognises that part-time teachers, who make up 25 per cent of the total full-time equivalent, make an important contribution to the teaching and learning by extending the range of specialisms and through their current industrial and commercial experience. In some specialist areas the ratio of part-time to full-time staff has been high. A number of recent appointments have gone some way towards correcting the imbalance. Recently, many part-time teachers have been offered a more permanent form of contract. This provides improved security and flexibility of deployment with increased opportunities to participate in staff and curriculum development.

82 There are well-documented procedures and helpful notes of guidance for the recruitment, selection and appointment of staff. Arrangements for the implementation of the staff-appraisal system have led to greater delegation of duties to team leaders. The college has identified an expanding and developing role for them which requires an enhanced contribution to curriculum planning, budgetary control and operational management, as well as appraisal.

83 The role of technician and support staff has been reviewed to facilitate flexible working, increase opportunities for training and career development, and provide better support for teaching staff. There are good examples of the flexible use of support staff to enhance the learning experience of students, especially in the learning support team and in the centre for business and management where the use of administrative staff in a support capacity has helped the teaching and learning of large groups to be both more effective as well as more efficient. The college is aware that if the changing role of technician staff is to be successfully implemented, there will need to be a continued commitment to their staff development.

Equipment/learning resources

84 Courses are well supported by good library and computing provision. The college library/learning resources centre is in a prominent position near the entrance to the college. It is well used and the service offered is appreciated by students. It meets current needs in terms of study spaces, bookstock, videos and other resources. In response to requests from students, additional space has been made available for a quiet study area. There is also a designated area for project and group work. Audio-visual materials can be used by individuals or groups and information is available

on CD-ROM databases. There are four computer workstations with software for accessing information via the Internet.

85 Computing facilities have recently been reorganised and concentrated in a dedicated computer centre which has improved access to computers for students. There are additional computing facilities in specialist areas. In total there are 220 computers for students' use. This gives a ratio of one computer to every 10 full-time equivalent students. Some machines are dated and cannot run the most appropriate software. There is a rolling programme to replace computing equipment and to extend the access to the Internet for both staff and students. At present there is access to the Internet on 32 terminals within the computer centre and at two senior managers' terminals.

86 As part of the college's commitment to the development of resource-based learning, open access workshops with good facilities have been established in languages, mathematics and communications. Further investment in materials and in technology will be required to sustain the extension of resource-based learning across the college. The area used to support students with learning difficulties is generally well resourced. Materials are well organised to enable students to work independently and students' work is attractively displayed. However, some of the equipment is inadequate for its purpose and lacking any link to vocational areas. Resources to support access to the curriculum for visually and hearing impaired students are limited and out of date.

87 Some programme areas have excellent specialist equipment, for example that used to support full-cost and other courses in the maritime, offshore and survival areas. The maritime section manages two survival tanks which are assets of national importance in the provision of safety training. They complement other simulation facilities which provide realistic, controlled environments for the development of effective responses to emergency situations both on and offshore. Computer-assisted learning and computer simulation are particularly well deployed in these areas. In catering, equipment is particularly good in the kitchens used for assessment purposes. Students on leisure and tourism courses have access to a small but well-equipped travel office and there is easy access to sport and leisure facilities adjacent to the college. Facilities for beauty therapy and hairdressing have recently been upgraded. In some other areas there are significant amounts of dated equipment, for example in science, and in art and design where there is a lack of computers and video and film equipment.

Accommodation

88 The college has an accommodation strategy which is leading to a concentration of provision on the main site. The college has already vacated three of its four annexes and the role of the remaining annexe is subject to review. A detailed space-utilisation survey has been undertaken and the

information now exists to achieve further rationalisation in the interests of both students and staff. For example, since the subject inspections, the concentration of art and design work on the main site has taken place. This has allowed the art students to become more involved in the life of the college, improved the access they have to specialist facilities and enhanced the efficiency of course delivery. There are further plans for rationalising the accommodation, and reviewing of the location of specialist facilities in order to achieve the best possible configuration and use of space on the campus, including increasing the number of car parking places.

89 Much of the accommodation dates from the 1950s and 1960s with some later specialist additions in the 1970s and 1980s such as the technology block, the maritime and offshore building, the survival tank and the special needs unit. There are a large number of relocatable classrooms, many of them over 30 years old, in poor condition, and in need of replacement. They detract from the ambience of the site and create difficult working conditions for students and staff.

90 Some areas have been effectively refurbished. These include the refectory and specialist areas used by beauty, art and design, and computing students. The learning support section is well placed in a central position in the college with a good range of well-decorated rooms. Some teaching and learning still takes place in inappropriate environments. The construction provision, for example, is housed currently in an inappropriate fabrication workshop which acts as a thoroughfare and contains redundant machinery. A student common room has been provided recently but it is small. Access for students with restricted mobility has been improved by the provision of chair lifts and ramps. This has made access possible, through the main entrance, to central resource areas such as the library, computer centre and refectory. A lift in the main building provides access to many teaching rooms but access to the relocatable classrooms is difficult.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

91 The strengths of the college are:

- a broad range of vocational and recreational provision for school leavers, adults and commercial customers
- substantial commercial course provision, particularly for the offshore industry
- strong links with local secondary and special schools
- a cohesive, effective team of assistant principals
- a thorough approach to the development and implementation of some policies
- effective student guidance and support
- good standards of teaching in most subjects

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- well-qualified teaching and support staff
 - exceptional equipment for maritime, offshore and survival training.
- 92 If the college is to continue to improve the quality of its provision, it should address the following issues:
- the limited range of foundation programmes in some curriculum areas
 - insufficient information about the college provided to the members of the corporation
 - the lack of a rigorous and analytical approach to monitoring and reviewing performance
 - the need for further development of the cross-college learning support system
 - the poor quality and availability of statistical data on students
 - an over-elaborate, ineffective quality assurance system
 - the poor student achievements in some areas
 - the slow progress in staff obtaining assessor and verifier qualifications
 - those parts of the accommodation which are inappropriate or in poor condition.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at July 1995)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (as at July 1995)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1995)

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

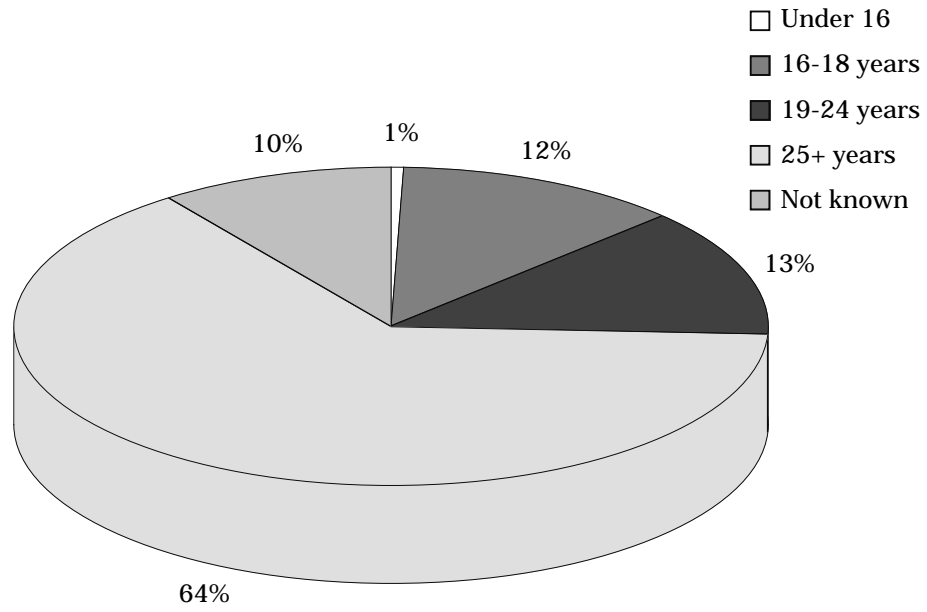
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

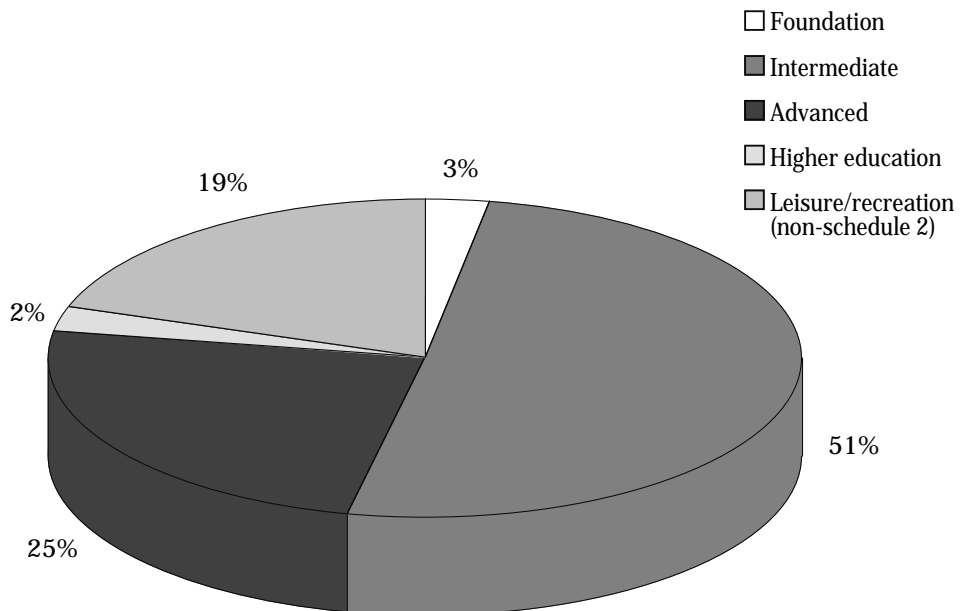
Lowestoft College: percentage enrolments by age (as at July 1995)



Enrolments: 16,926

Figure 2

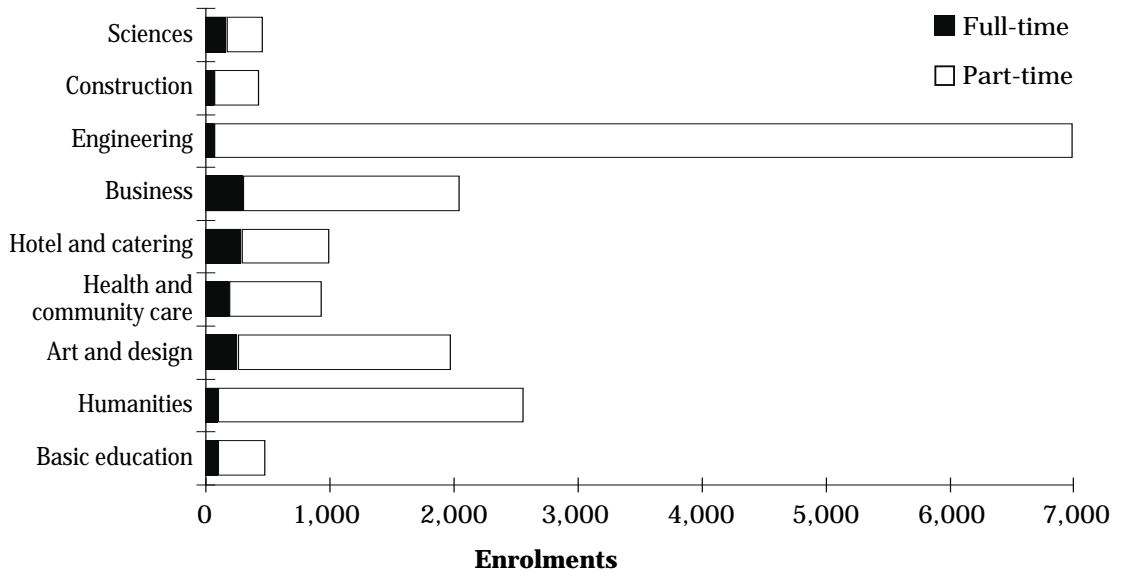
Lowestoft College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at July 1995)



Enrolments: 16,926

Figure 3

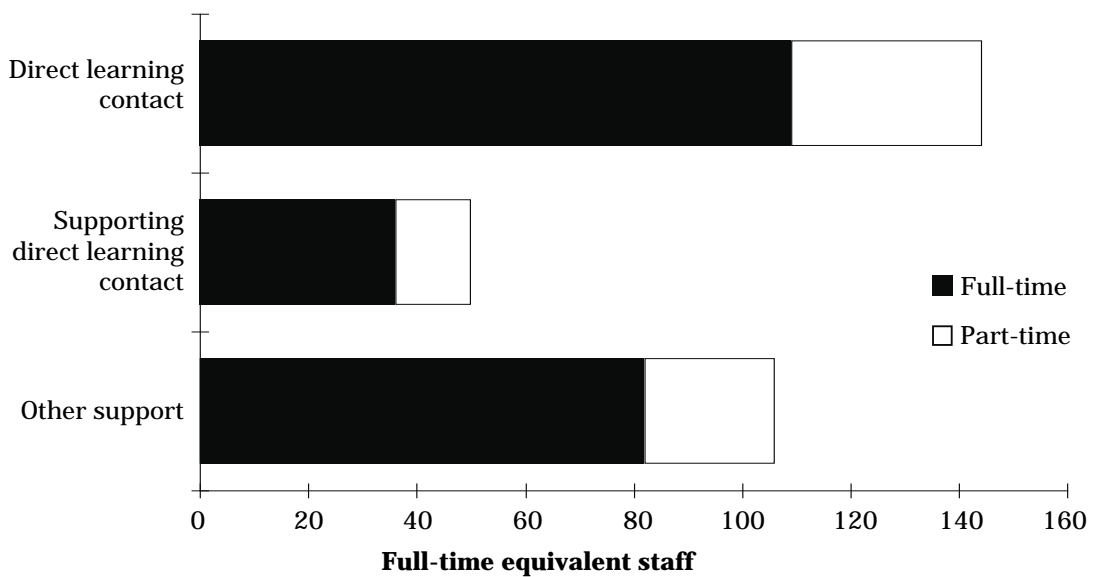
Lowestoft College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1995)



Enrolments: 16,926

Figure 4

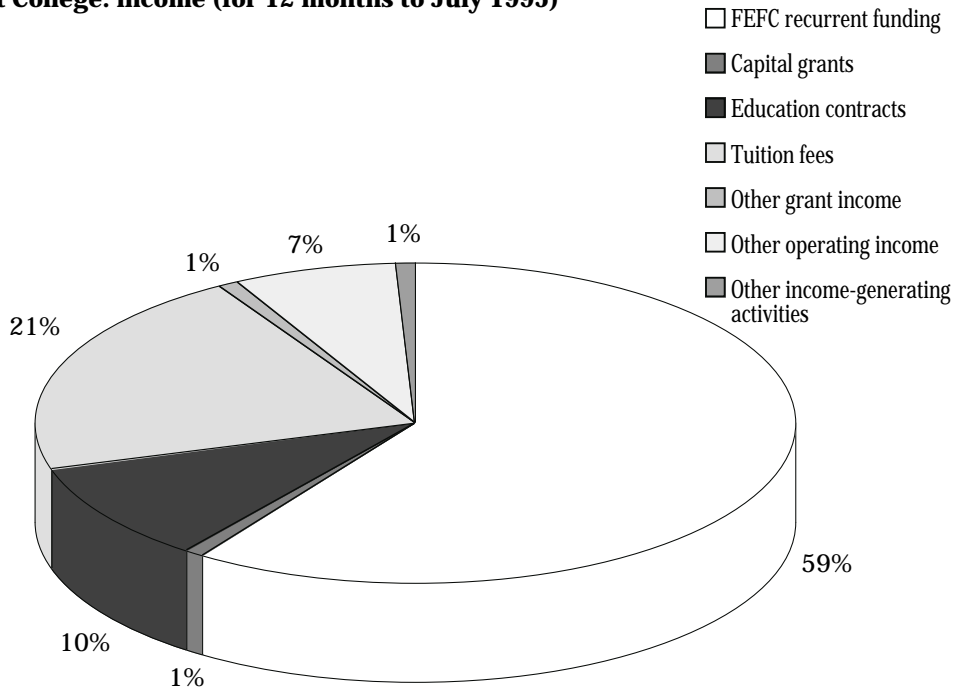
Lowestoft College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1995)



Full-time equivalent staff: 300

Figure 5

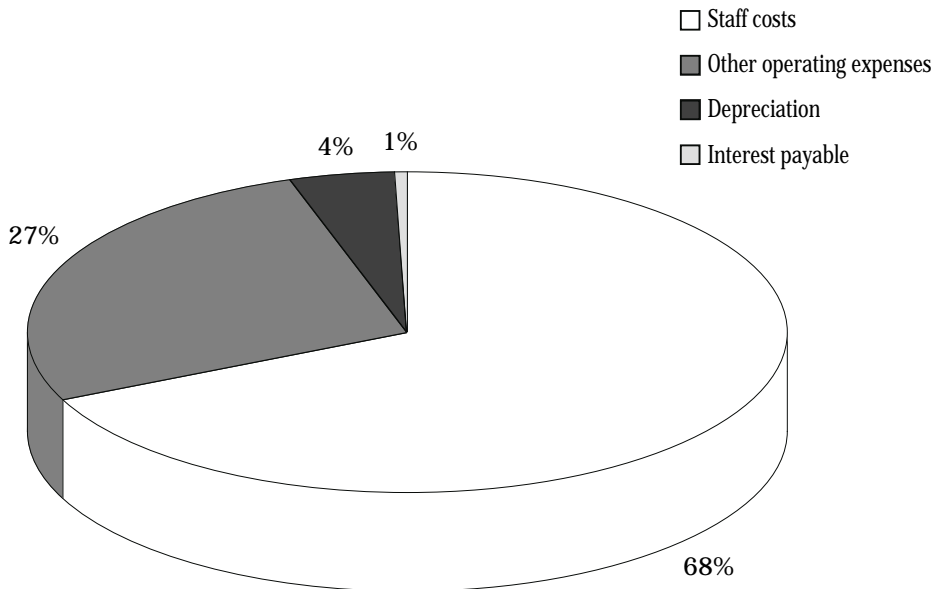
Lowestoft College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £9,287,000

Figure 6

Lowestoft College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £8,681,000

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