

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**Warrington
Collegiate
Institute**

October 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

THE FURTHER EDUCATION 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.

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.*

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 114/95

WARRINGTON COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected March–May 1995

Summary

Warrington Collegiate Institute is a major provider of further and higher education which offers programmes of study from a basic level to higher education. The institute has recently been through a difficult period involving several changes of leadership but now operates within a clear management framework. Managers at all levels are well informed about the institute's priorities. Business planning has raised staff awareness of the cost-effectiveness of courses. Productive links have been established with a variety of organisations in the community. Students are represented on the institute's committees and working parties. Central support services provide a range of advice on personal and career matters. Steps have been taken to improve the management information system but it is yet to become fully effective as a service to managers. The enrolment and induction of students is well organised but there is inadequate diagnosis of their need for support in the core skills of numeracy and communication. Staff are well qualified and experienced in their subject areas but more use could be made of the teacher training expertise within the institute to develop the quality of teaching and learning available to all students. Examination results in some courses are good but are generally weak in vocational programmes. Student attendance is poor in many subject areas and the reasons for students leaving their courses early are not adequately investigated. A course review process is well established but should focus more closely on the quality of teaching in the classroom. More should be made of the opportunities for closer co-operation and sharing of resources between different parts of the institute. Under its new leadership the institute has begun to address many of the issues identified by the inspection, several of which were highlighted in its internal assessment report.

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 | 2 |
| Students' recruitment, guidance and support | 2 |
| Quality assurance | 3 |
| Resources: staffing | 2 |
| equipment/learning resources | 2 |
| accommodation | 2 |

| Curriculum area | Grade | Curriculum area | Grade |
|------------------------------------|--------------|---|--------------|
| Science, mathematics and computing | 3 | Health and community care | 2 |
| Construction | 3 | Art and design | 2 |
| Engineering | 3 | Humanities | 3 |
| Business | 2 | Adult basic education | 2 |
| Leisure and tourism | 3 | Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities | 3 |

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INTRODUCTION

1 Warrington Collegiate Institute was inspected mainly during the spring and summer terms of 1995. Twenty-five inspectors visited the institute for a total of 105 days. The enrolment and induction of students were observed at the beginning of the academic year in September 1994. Specialist subject inspections took place over several weeks, commencing 6 March 1995. The inspection was completed in the week commencing 22 May 1995.

2 Inspectors visited 224 classes and examined students' written and practical work. They held discussions with the institute's governors, managers, teachers, students and staff responsible for support services. Meetings were held with representatives from the chamber of commerce, the local community, North and Mid-Cheshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), local high schools, Warrington Borough Council, Cheshire County Council, the careers service and members of the institute's board of governors. Inspectors attended meetings of the institute board, the senior management team, the principalship and other institute committees and working parties. A range of documentation, including the institute's strategic plan and self-assessment report, was studied to review the institute's progress towards the achievement of its mission. Subject specialist inspections were disrupted as a result of industrial action taken by lecturing staff, and some inspection visits were rescheduled.

THE INSTITUTE AND ITS AIMS

3 Warrington Collegiate Institute, formerly North Cheshire College, was formed in 1979 by the amalgamation of Warrington Technical College, Warrington College of Art and Padgate College of Higher Education. It operates from three main campuses. At Winwick Road to the north of the town an 18 acre site includes a six-storey building completed in 1970 alongside single-storey workshops, laboratories and a sports hall. The Padgate site to the east of the town has accommodation which reflects its history as a higher education campus. The 43 acre site has three-storey teaching blocks, an art, design and media workshop, a library, a conference centre, six halls of residence, a theatre and extensive sports facilities. The Museum Street site near the town centre, a listed building dating from 1883, houses classrooms and workshops which provide courses predominately for adults. The institute has recently invested more than £2 million in an extensive refurbishment programme to upgrade its accommodation and equipment. Seven school-based adult centres, five family and community centres, and a range of health and social service centres provide programmes of education for adults. Two further centres are planned for September 1995.

4 Warrington lies at the centre of the Mersey Basin Development Area. Its population of 190,000 includes 90,000 who are employed. Minority ethnic groups within Warrington account for 1.3 per cent of the population. Unemployment in the borough was 6.5 per cent in November 1994

compared with 9 per cent for the north-west region. Seventy per cent of the working population are employed in the service sector, which has grown by 40 per cent since 1981 and is the fastest growing employment sector in Warrington. In the last decade, the manufacturing sector has declined by 24 per cent and now accounts for only 18 per cent of employment. The primary sector, especially energy and water supply, accounts for 7 per cent of employment, and construction a further 5 per cent. Much of the growth in employment has been in part-time jobs.

5 The institute provides a programme of courses which range from adult basic education to degree programmes. It is the main provider of adult education in the community, offering courses leading to a wide range of qualifications as well as those of more general interest. Almost 12 per cent of students are on higher education programmes, most studying for BA honours, higher national diplomas and taught MA degrees. The institute is recognised as a faculty of the University of Manchester.

6 Within Warrington, there are seven schools which cater for the 11-18 age group; three 11-16 schools; two 11-16 Catholic schools and a sixth form college. Three other sixth form colleges and four general further education colleges recruit students from within the district. Sixty-six per cent of pupils in Warrington continue in education beyond school-leaving age and of these approximately 11 per cent pursue their studies at the institute. Last year there was an increase of 4 per cent in the number of 16 year old pupils choosing to continue their studies at school and a decline of 3 per cent in those proceeding to further education. Recruitment of students over the age of 25 has increased by 6.5 per cent over the last year.

7 The institute has two broad operational arms; academic services and business services. Within academic services the curriculum is organised through four colleges: the college of technology, the community college, the college of business and management and the university college. Each college is headed by a dean and is subdivided into curriculum areas headed by section heads. The academic services arm also encompasses the adult education organisation, the management information unit and the directorate of academic support and development which includes student and library services. The business services arm includes the support functions of finance, estates, personnel, marketing, accommodation, catering and general office services. The institute operates its own trading company, 'Company Plus' which specialises in customised training and conferencing. The senior management team comprises the principal, two deputy principals, a finance director, the director of academic support, four deans, a personnel manager, the management information unit manager, the director of external relations and the marketing manager. The principalship comprises the principal, two deputies and the director of finance and estates. It meets separately to consider strategic issues prior to their consideration by the senior management team. The principal has been in post since August 1994.

8 The institute achieved its 1993-94 target growth of 8 per cent. In the current academic year the planned growth of 12 per cent is forecast to fall below target by 4 per cent. Most of the shortfall is accounted for by a lower than predicted enrolment to full-time courses, especially by adults. The institute is confident that measures have been identified to enable it to achieve its target of 25 per cent growth over the four-year cycle. Key priorities include improving community, school and employer liaison, modernising the curriculum and making it more accessible to a broader range of students, improving the analysis of performance and increasing staff development.

9 By January 1995, the institute had enrolled 14,114 students. Of these, 2,256 were full time and 11,858 part time. Eighty-six per cent were students over the age of 19. More than 1,600 students were enrolled on higher education courses. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area in figure 3. Seventy-one per cent of students were enrolled on programmes leading to nationally recognised academic or vocational qualifications; the remaining 29 per cent were following recreation or leisure courses. The institute employs 439 full-time equivalent staff of whom 210 are teaching staff and 229 are support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

10 Summaries of the institute's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The institute receives approximately 58 per cent of its income from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The total allocation from the FEFC in 1994-95 is £6,782,831, an increase of 9.7 per cent over the previous year. This represents an average level of funding of £17.62 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £18.17, and the median for the sector is £19.01.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

11 The institute offers an extensive range of courses covering all FEFC programme areas. Of the 8,900 total enrolments on courses funded by the FEFC, approximately 40 per cent are at foundation level, 30 per cent are at intermediate level, 23 per cent are at advanced level and a further 7 per cent at the higher level. Twenty-three General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and 29 General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects are offered together with a large range of vocational programmes. These include an increasing number of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). Courses are provided on a full-time, part-time day and evening basis together with short courses which are designed to meet the needs of local firms. There is extensive full-time provision in health and social studies and humanities. Part-time enrolments in humanities and in business studies account for 46 per cent of the institute's total part-time enrolments. The range of provision, which extends from a basic or

introductory level to post-graduate level, offers considerable opportunity for students to progress in their studies. However, the range of courses is narrow in a number of vocational subjects and at the foundation level in construction, business studies, leisure and tourism, and health and care. The institute has recognised this and is planning to offer a range of new GNVQ foundation programmes from September 1995.

12 The institute operates a large adult education programme which has enrolled in excess of 9,000 students in this academic year. It currently makes use of 10 centres including the three main sites of the institute. A particularly successful aspect has been the introduction of Saturday morning provision for which over 1,000 students have enrolled. The programme has resulted in a significant extension of the opportunities for further education.

13 The introduction of modular courses and flexi-study programmes is increasing the opportunities for students to study programmes of their choice at times suited to their individual needs. These developments are supported by study centres and learning resources which are available for students to use on a drop-in basis. However, some flexibility is lost by the different timetabling arrangements within the four colleges which restrict the range of courses available to students. The institute is planning to introduce common timetabling across colleges and at the same time to address the lack of a significant cross-institute programme of extra-curricular activities for students.

14 The institute is in the process of developing extensive links with a range of external organisations. Senior managers have recently become active members of a large number of external groups involved locally with education, training, business and the community. The principal together with a recently-appointed director of external relations provide the focus and stimulus to the contacts that are being developed. Good links have been developed with various community groups, especially those related to the operation of the adult education programme. Activities during this years adult learners week were arranged in co-operation with a local sixth form college. The local group from the University of the Third Age makes use of two of the main sites of the institute and there are extensive links with a range of external agencies concerned with provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Growing and supportive relationships exist with a range of other external organisations including the local TEC, the county and district councils and the University of Manchester. There is a need to ensure that a wider range of staff, including middle managers and others, become involved if the institute is to be fully responsive to all its potential clients.

15 Links with local employers are being extended in a number of ways. Senior managers are well represented on local employer and development groups; teaching staff have been seconded to organisations such as the local TEC and the chamber of commerce. 'Company Plus', a limited

company associated with the institute, has links with a large number of employers; its training activities currently have a turnover of £170,000. Employer liaison groups vary in their effectiveness. In the best cases, for example, in business studies, liaison groups have a direct influence on the curriculum and on the nature of assignments. Others are inactive or ineffective. Policies recently agreed require employer liaison groups to operate within each of the four colleges and to have common terms of reference. In a number of curriculum areas, including engineering, management, and art and design, there is a need to extend the links with industry.

16 A systematic and co-ordinated approach to schools liaison is beginning to emerge. A liaison officer, supported by a small team, makes regular visits and maintains contacts with the main local secondary schools. The principal has become an active member of the Warrington Association of Secondary Heads which meets to discuss issues of mutual concern. Some joint working is beginning to develop with a local sixth form college. Prior to these recent initiatives, school liaison activities have been largely unco-ordinated and of limited effectiveness. In some cases, although the institute has attempted to encourage links, including joint curriculum initiatives, these have often failed to develop in the competitive climate for school leavers in which the institute operates.

17 A member of staff in the institute has been given responsibility for developing international links. Projects, including student exchanges, exist or are planned with a number of institutions in Denmark, the Czech Republic, Spain, France, Holland and Germany. A number of senior staff have visited the United States of America to establish links with American colleges.

18 Many staff, especially those in management positions, are aware of the issues facing the further education sector and are responding to them well. The open and co-operative style of management, now in place, should lead to a greater awareness of the challenges faced by the sector and to the way in which the institute is required to respond. Awareness amongst many staff of issues relating to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is more limited, although the distribution of work with these students around the institute is rapidly creating a greater appreciation of their needs.

19 There is a clear commitment to all aspects of equal opportunities. Provision for groups which have not normally entered further education is a high priority. There is an active equal opportunities group chaired by the principal, consisting of elected staff and students. Policies have been developed and staff are generally aware of these. The approach currently being developed includes a series of 'listeners', trained individuals who are available and accessible and with whom institute members can raise concerns. The institute has significant provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities of whom there are approximately 100

full-time and 400 part-time students. Whilst these students are very well integrated within the general life of the institute, insufficient emphasis has been given to introducing them, where appropriate, into mainstream provision. Innovative aspects of the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities include the development of an independent living centre at the Padgate site and a Spanish course developed for students with severe learning difficulties.

20 The marketing activities of the institute are effective. The publicity materials are generally of good quality and demonstrate an informative and welcoming approach to potential students. A corporate image is now effectively portrayed. A marketing plan has been developed which has clear links to the strategic plan. Efforts have been made to make marketing activities more customer orientated. Staff have been trained and close links have been established between the marketing unit and student services. Marketing activities are allocated a realistic budget of £180,000 and the marketing manager is now a member of the senior management team, underlining the importance attached to the post.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

21 The governing body has 18 members, including the principal. Two are women. Independent members bring to the board a variety of experience and expertise in areas such as personnel management, insurance, marketing, property, training and banking. Three members are from the local community, one is from the University of Manchester, one from North and Mid-Cheshire TEC, one from the staff of the institute, one is a student. The board and its three main committees, personnel, audit, and finance and general purposes meet three times a year. Average attendance at board meetings over the last year has been in excess of 75 per cent. Senior college managers are invited to attend board meetings in order to give advice to the board when appropriate. The board has revised recently its practice of excluding staff and student governors from part of its meetings and now allows all members to fulfil their duties in line with the institute's articles and instruments of government.

22 The board and senior managers have established a sound working relationship based upon mutual trust. The appointment of a new principal in 1994 provided an opportunity for the board to confirm the expectations it holds of the future development of the institute. After a five-year period of instability during which the institute has had three principals and two acting principals, the board and senior management now share a clear vision and purpose which are being translated into action. Board members are highly committed to the institute and take a close interest in its work. Through its subcommittees, members use their considerable experience and expertise to scrutinise the performance of the institute and advise on matters of policy. Responsibility for policy formulation and implementation is clearly delegated to managers. The board should ensure that information

on, and analysis of, the recruitment, retention and achievements of students receive closer attention.

23 Board members make efforts to get to know the institute and the challenges it faces. Some governors attend advisory committees, others have explored the work of particular areas of the institute by meeting staff and students and becoming familiar with their programmes. As part of a governor training programme, three members visited community colleges in the United States of America and undertook projects on aspects of college governance which were later shared with other board members. More recently, board members attended a well-structured residential training event to review current issues facing the institute. The board might usefully arrange to review its own performance and operation in the exercise of its duties.

24 The institute is now effectively led. Managers and staff at all levels in the organisation claim that a sense of coherence, leadership and accountability has been introduced at the senior level which has gone some way to restore the confidence of the organisation in its future. An open and consultative style of management is combined with a clearly communicated vision of the role of the institute in the community. Managers are encouraged to be closely involved with the work of their colleges and sections and to be accessible to staff and students. Performance targets are set for senior managers which are then regularly reviewed, updated and published to all managers and board members. The practices of target setting and performance review should now be extended to managers below the senior level.

25 The senior management team has been reconstituted to include business support managers as well as those responsible for academic programmes. Support staff are now involved in decision making at all levels in the organisation. Historical divisions between teaching and support staff are being reduced and the quality of decision making has improved as a consequence. Managers from across the institute are involved in working groups and committees which have provided opportunities to develop a corporate approach to policy making. In areas such as marketing and student admissions, where colleges recently operated in isolation, clear progress has been made towards a cross-institute approach. There remains scope for further reducing the tendency of colleges to behave as separate organisations and for encouraging greater co-operation over the use of resources and the sharing of good practice.

26 Strategic planning now encompasses business planning at section and college level. Senior and middle managers are required to justify their proposals for future courses with reference to performance measures and forecasts of income and expenditure. An academic planning subcommittee of the academic board reviews proposals for new courses and monitors the work of cross-institute curriculum development groups such as those

concerned with Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and GNVQ courses. The planning process has succeeded in raising the awareness of managers of the cost effectiveness of their programmes and has led, in some instances, to a review of alternative methods of curriculum delivery. Managers are well informed about the FEFC's funding methodology and its implications for their programmes. Not all staff in the institute feel a sense of involvement in the strategic planning process and many have not yet realised the opportunities which the new methodology offers. Arrangements for monitoring progress towards targets at section level are in the early stages of development.

27 Section leaders are well informed about their roles and the expectation which the institute has of them. As new demands have arisen from changes in institute policy or the requirements of external bodies, section leaders have received appropriate briefings from senior managers. Most have coped well with the changes which have been introduced following incorporation and they provide effective leadership to their sections. There is an imbalance between the size of the various sections and the support available for section leaders to undertake their duties. Within sections, course leadership and subject leadership are in need of clearer definition. In general education, the quality of some subject management is poor and many staff work in isolation. In art and design, GNVQ intermediate and advanced course management needs to be improved. Co-ordination of foreign languages across the institute is poor; a co-ordinator has been appointed but it is too early to evaluate this initiative.

28 Several policy statements have recently been developed through working groups involving staff from across the institute. Policies covering curriculum development, assessment and accreditation, student guidance and the setting of operational standards have been produced to a common format and are designed to link with the process of corporate planning. Responsibilities have been identified for the implementation of policies but standards of performance, action plans and timescales have not yet been completed. Further attention should be given to the training which middle managers and course leaders will require to put these policies into effect.

29 Successful initiatives have been undertaken to improve communication within the institute. A managers' forum allows middle and senior managers to raise issues of mutual concern. Weekly newsletters are informative and the principal's 'question times' provide opportunities for staff and students to explore current and future developments with members of the senior management. In some sections regular staff meetings are held, to which all staff are invited, but timetables do not allow all course teams the opportunity to meet. A review should be undertaken of the effectiveness of internal communications in the institute and a strategy developed which includes the role of key managers at all

levels in briefing staff and in arranging for effective two-way communication.

30 In the current academic year, the institute has made a major investment of over £100,000 to improve its management information unit. Staffing levels have been increased, new hardware has been purchased and the network extended to include student services and examinations staff. The management information unit manager has been appointed to the senior management team and a member of staff has been appointed with responsibility for monitoring performance. The unit has coped well with the external demands made upon it but improvements are required to enable managers at all levels to obtain accurate and up-to-date information for measuring performance in their areas of responsibility. Strains occur in the capacity of the computerised register system to adapt to the changing structure of some courses. Information on students' examination results is not integrated with attendance and retention data. Not all staff alert the unit to students leaving the institute before their courses are completed. The institute is aware of these issues and is investigating possible solutions.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

31 The institute's strategic plan identified improvements in student support and guidance as one of its 'strategic imperatives' for 1994-95. Evidence of action taken is clearly visible in improvements which have been made both to staffing levels and accommodation for student services. Well-thought-out policy statements relating to induction, action planning and review, records of achievement, student counselling, guidance and careers support, personal tutorials and childcare are in place but the procedures required to implement them are not yet fully developed.

32 The student services unit is effective in providing impartial advice and information for prospective and existing students. It is housed in pleasant refurbished premises close to the entrance of the Winwick Road site and contains rooms for confidential student interviews and a careers library. Institute leaflets and information on job vacancies are available to students. The accommodation on the Padgate site is in less-suitable premises which are due to be improved during the summer of 1995. Students are well served by the range of guidance and support services which include advice on courses, careers support, information on grants and benefits, counselling, childcare facilities and health advice. Good links have been developed with the careers service, the borough council, North and Mid-Cheshire TEC and the Benefits Agency. The service is the responsibility of a manager and eight staff, several of whom are new in post, reporting to the director of academic support and development.

33 The institute is constantly evaluating its services. Publicity strategies are assessed by asking potential students how they found out about the institute. A survey of how telephone enquiries are dealt with has resulted in action to improve the process. Enquiries, both personal or by telephone,

are logged on a paper-based system. The absence of a link with the computerised system which records student enrolments means that the institute is not able to monitor and review the relationship between enquiries and enrolments.

34 Information about the institute's courses is being assembled on a database. There have been problems in obtaining the most recent information from the colleges and other sections of the institute. A few students claim that they did not receive accurate information upon which to base their choice of courses. The institute should ensure that up-to-date information is made available to all enquirers.

35 Students can obtain impartial information on education and training opportunities which are available both locally and further afield through the Warrington Employment and Training Advice Centre. This is a service which is jointly funded by the institute, Warrington Unemployed Forum and the European Social Fund and is accommodated in the institute's premises at Museum Street.

36 Students are able to enrol throughout the year, including a summer enrolment season. The option of paying by instalments or credit card is appreciated by many students. Returning students can enrol at the end of their first year of study by using a pre-printed re-enrolment form. This succeeded in reducing the numbers enrolling at the September sessions. Enrolment in September took place in a marquee on the Winwick Road site. The experiment was a major success, was well organised and supported by staff who had received appropriate training. Entertainment and childcare facilities were provided; course information and enrolment to all of the institute's programmes were available under one roof. Feedback from students indicated that the process was successful and that, in particular, they appreciated the speedy processing of their application forms.

37 The majority of students receive a well-devised, informative, and comprehensive induction to the institute and to their course which conforms to a framework for all courses. They are issued with a useful student handbook. For full-time students, induction procedures are generally effective, but some part-time students received an induction which took far too long.

38 Some induction processes include the assessment of communication and numeracy skills but such assessment is not universal. Where learning needs are identified, students are advised to obtain help. Some mature students, in particular, are unwilling to avail themselves of the opportunities offered. Good-quality support is provided through the study skills support unit and takes the form of group or individual tuition. Action plans are drawn up and clear records are kept of progress. The work undertaken relates to specialist courses where appropriate. Part-time staff are sometimes unaware of how to obtain support for their students.

39 Some accreditation of students' prior learning takes place, particularly in business administration and hairdressing, but there is very

little in other subject areas. An accreditation of students' prior learning officer is based in student services to advise on the process and to assess suitability. Some awareness training for academic staff has taken place and the institute has recently undertaken an audit of accreditation of students' prior learning across the colleges to identify areas for development.

40 There is a comprehensive system of timetabled tutorials which includes institute-wide guidelines for all full-time students; the completion of action plans, which involve students in setting their own learning objectives, and personal progress records is encouraged. There is no agreed tutorial content. Some students have little contact with their personal tutor but others were appreciative of the concern which had been shown over their personal welfare and the high level of support they had received. Most part-time students receive no formal tutorial support.

41 Students are encouraged to bring their records of achievement with them or to obtain copies from the institute. Support workers in the study centre assist students in the production of records of achievements, and there is relevant computer-based software. However, the extent to which students are encouraged to complete their records varies across the institute.

42 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported through links with special schools and a sound system of guidance provided by student services. Accreditation of students' prior learning was in evidence in vocational elements of the provision. A staff team and integration officers have started to provide cross-institute support and to identify students' needs at induction. However, opportunities for progression tend to be restricted to a set range of courses rather than based on individual students' achievements and preferences.

43 On most courses, individual tutors effectively monitor and take action on student absences. Institute-wide systems for monitoring attendance require improvement. There are examples where the follow-up of absences by tutors was inadequate. Some courses have poor student retention rates and reasons for early leaving are not systematically monitored.

44 A confidential health advisory team led by two nurses was set up in September 1994 to provide advice and support on health matters to students and staff. It has been highly successful and its use has exceeded expectations. Three sessions take place each week, plus one clinical session with a doctor present. Links have been established with other agencies, including local medical and counselling services to which students are referred if appropriate. The team is situated in a convenient position close to the student services on the Winwick Road site and the service is open to students from across the institute. The students at Padgate site are less well served, having to travel to the Winwick Road site to take advantage of some aspects of the service.

45 Students have access to other facilities which have been designed to cater for their needs. A variety of refreshment facilities at reasonable prices is available in the bistro, Brambles restaurant, the coffee bar, refectory and shop. The study centre is a pleasant, well-resourced environment in which students are able to work on a range of resources. An excellent and well-resourced nursery on the Winwick Road site, set up with financial support from a bank and including places for its staff, has been in operation for five years. Childcare provision for children from six months upwards is available and the places are well utilised. A drop-in creche providing childcare for part-time students was started in September 1994 and moved into high-quality premises adjoining the nursery in November 1994. These facilities are subsidised by the institute and are available to students from any site. A free inter-site bus is provided. There is also a playgroup at the Padgate site.

46 The rights and responsibilities of students are well publicised in the institute's student charter. The student union has full-time presidents on both sites who are paid for by the institute and who play an important role in representing the views of the students on many of the institute's committees.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

47 Over 55 per cent of the 224 sessions seen had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. Over 11 per cent were judged to have more weaknesses than strengths. The following table shows the grades given to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

| Programmes | Grade | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Totals |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|---------------|
| GCE AS/A level | | 2 | 5 | 9 | 5 | 1 | 22 |
| GCSE | | 4 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 18 |
| GNVQ | | 6 | 14 | 11 | 1 | 0 | 32 |
| NVQ | | 4 | 14 | 15 | 7 | 0 | 40 |
| Other vocational | | 6 | 25 | 23 | 3 | 1 | 58 |
| Basic education | | 1 | 20 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 24 |
| Other | | 7 | 11 | 7 | 5 | 0 | 30 |
| Total | | 30 | 94 | 74 | 22 | 4 | 224 |

48 There are excellent working relationships between staff and students. Many staff used a variety of teaching and learning styles to maintain students' interest, though some sessions lacked sufficient variety. In many of the better sessions, teachers made good use of relevant learning aids such as printed handouts and audio-visual resources. In some sessions there was not enough opportunity for students to ask questions or to

discuss issues and in others there was insufficient differentiation of activity to meet individual students' needs.

49 In some of the good science lessons, students asked some probing questions. Teachers invited discussion and handled it well. On a number of occasions, however, students were not able to respond effectively to lecturers' questions. Many marked assignments received too little written comment from teachers to enable students to improve their work, although assignment work was often discussed in a subsequent class. The numeracy and arithmetical skills of some GCSE students were poor, but tutors have not been able to persuade some of them to seek appropriate specialist help.

50 Mathematics and computing sessions were well planned. There were some examples of the use of good-quality handouts to support the learning. Teachers provided clear explanations and students responded well to the frequent questions directed to them. In some weaker sessions, the limited range of activities failed to motivate students and they were less responsive. Students copied detailed notes from overhead projectors when other methods of working would have helped them to learn more effectively. Frequent staff changes, particularly in computing, had adversely affected the continuity of experience for some students. One full-time group of students had up to five different lecturers for the desktop publishing aspect of the course.

51 In construction, most course documentation was of high quality. There were well-organised schemes of work and good records of students' achievements. Staff are beginning to make use of comprehensive course files. In the best sessions, teachers took account of the different abilities and experience of students and made effective links between course activities and industrial practice. However, the standard of teaching varied widely. In some instances, the lecturers were innovative and well prepared; the work was interesting and relevant and students applied themselves. Other lessons were dull or ill-focused and students were poorly motivated. Insufficient checks were made on students' understanding of the topics being covered.

52 Motor vehicle engineering work showed both strengths and weaknesses. Students were generally attentive. In the higher level classes teachers successfully used the experience of employed students to draw attention to the industrial relevance of topics. Work was guided by published schemes of work, giving topics and week numbers which were cross-referenced to the page numbers of the standard textbook. Handouts were designed with spaces to facilitate note taking and teachers made good use of overhead transparencies, though some of these were difficult to read. Students' progress was carefully recorded. A useful series of instrumented modern engine test beds, some with fault switches, has been developed at the college. Practical work was supported by appropriate learning materials and there was some demonstration equipment to guide

work on electrics and fluids. In motor vehicle science, the amount of practical work undertaken is limited. Whilst there was considerable motor vehicle workshop practice, there was no work experience. Students completed diagnostic tests in mathematics and communications but extra work undertaken in the learning centres was neither monitored nor evaluated.

53 In engineering, there were some examples of good teaching. Teachers used videos, microscope cameras, practical work, team work, and worksheets designed to help students establish links between theory and practice. Students learned to work in teams. The approaches used were demanding. Classroom discipline was good and students responded well to teachers treating them as adults. Students were set challenging standards and found the workload heavy. There was insufficient practical work on technician courses. The planning and timetabling of assignments should be improved.

54 The quality of teaching on business courses was generally high. Business staff kept accurate records of progress, assessment and internal verification, though documentation for the recording of progress and for action planning was not consistent for all courses. Lesson plans and schemes of work, produced to an agreed format, were generally available in classes. Assessment briefs were clear, concise and unambiguous and the quality of presentation was high. The range of assessments was designed to ensure coverage of curriculum aims and objectives. Criteria for achievement were presented with all assignments, but were sometimes brief. Students were made aware of the weighting of assignments within the individual units but the absence of a planned assignment programme resulted in fluctuations in students' workloads. Most assessments were marked and returned promptly. Those based on residential work were used in a positive way to enhance students' learning. Although relevant feedback was normally given, teachers' written comment varied in length and the remarks related more often to knowledge than to skills. On NVQ courses, good opportunities were provided for students to obtain accreditation in the model office, but other courses were too theoretically based and did not offer experience of a working environment. Part-time students did not always receive adequate guidance on study skills.

55 Tourism and leisure courses are well documented and the documentation is widely used by staff and students. In good lessons, the teaching was relevant, well planned, set in a vocational context and made use of the students' previous knowledge and experience. For example, in a lesson on stock control, students were asked about their own experiences from their part-time employment; a handout was distributed and discussed; and the class was then questioned about how it might be possible to control and eliminate losses. Visits outside the institute were an integral part of coursework and often provided the basis for subsequent assignment work. In less successful lessons, teachers failed to exploit the

material available to strengthen students' understanding of matters related to the leisure industry.

56 Health and caring courses had clear schemes of work, lesson plans, and assessment schedules and student handbooks. National schemes of work were adapted for students' use. There were clear links made between students' work on practice placements, real-life experience and the required theoretical knowledge. Students on some courses were informed of their progress through unit tests, assignments and the use of individual action plans. Students were set appropriate work and it was marked consistently. Teachers provided helpful comments to improve performance. In hair and beauty, course files were well maintained and used effectively in course management. Sometimes the teaching lacked variety and students were not always stretched sufficiently by the work they were given.

57 In most areas of art and design, there were good course documents but students on foundation or GNVQ programmes did not have clear written descriptions of their course units or guidelines on assessment and grading. The quality of work was good. Students often attained a higher standard than was indicated by the requirements of the course. In particular, the standard of drawing in graphics was excellent. Students understand the need to work to deadlines. Part-time provision was particularly well organised. Planned programmes allowed some negotiation so that students could take some responsibility for their own learning. The range and balance of assessments were appropriate across most courses, and students were involved in problem solving and personal research. Records of students' progress were often rudimentary. Informal reports on students' progress were provided, but formal reporting should be more frequent. On GNVQ programmes there was inadequate attention to the development of core skills.

58 There were schemes of work for all English and social sciences courses, but they were often too broad and general. GCE A level and GCSE English language schemes have clear aims and the course outlines showed evidence of some team planning. The expectation that students should study in their own time and complete homework was understated in course requirements. A few teachers maintained good records of students' progress, but most only recorded the marks awarded to assignments. In most cases, work was carefully marked and teachers' responses were supportive and helpful. Some assignments in sociology and on access courses were pitched at too low a level and were not marked rigorously enough. The quality of lessons varied. Some were well planned and well delivered. On access courses, activities were purposeful, students' interest was stimulated and they made good progress. In group discussions, students used appropriate terminology and occasionally referred to evidence from research. On most courses, there were instances where more reticent students were not encouraged to participate in classroom

activities. Some classes were too small to provide the stimulus and exchange of ideas necessary in the study of social sciences. There were examples of students coming to class ill prepared or unaware of what work was to be undertaken. Some students found the work which was set for them too difficult.

59 Many of the schemes of work for modern languages were simply lists of the topics to be covered. They need extending to provide a more consistent approach to the teaching of languages. Most lessons were well planned and work was conducted at an appropriate pace. Teachers sometimes conducted skilful reviews of past work at the beginning of lessons; for example a 'question time' was used to introduce some GCE A level lessons. Students often worked on authentic materials and in some lessons the resources had a suitable vocational focus. In several lessons, translation was used inappropriately as the main approach to understanding or practising the language. Teachers did not make enough use of teaching aids such as overhead projectors, flash cards, cassette recorders, television and computers. Few languages games were used. Opportunities for students to work in pairs to practise their language skills were missed and the amount of written work undertaken in some classes was inadequate. The tasks set for students were generally of a suitable standard and the assessed assignments for GNVQ were well designed. Most written work was carefully corrected and students often received helpful written comments from teachers.

60 Adult basic education students appeared to enjoy their studies and working relationships with teachers were good. Students worked on clearly-defined programmes which had been negotiated with their teachers. Learning targets took into account the students' needs and interests and were related to a variety of accreditation routes. Teaching methods did not always take account of the varied needs of students, especially those related to employment. Record sheets were well kept. There was effective use of volunteers who were aware, as were all staff, of the need to avoid students becoming too dependent on them. Students worked well with other students. In some sessions there was little planned groupwork or information technology support.

61 The best feature of the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was the good relationship between staff and students. The commitment of staff helped to create a sound working atmosphere and encouraged appropriate behaviour. There were some well-planned schemes of work in which theory and practical activity, including work experience, were closely linked. However, too many schemes of work and lesson plans lacked specific objectives. The better lessons were well focused, teachers gave clear explanations, the activities and choice of resources were appropriate. In many of the lessons, methods of working were inappropriate for students' wide range of age, ability and experience. In some courses, differentiation of task and outcome was apparent and

students were able to work to the level of their capabilities. However, too many sessions had a group focus and this prevented staff from checking adequately that individuals were learning. Many of the sessions were teacher led. There was not enough opportunity for students to work on their own, or to develop problem-solving skills. Appropriate support was available in many classes from care assistants and care workers. In vocational areas, many sessions were linked to practical work and there were suitable activities which matched students' abilities. Activities were well documented and had stated specific objectives which were assessed at regular intervals. Students had opportunities to practice these activities on work placements for which they were carefully prepared. In some sessions students achieved less than their potential, especially where they simply practised skills they had already acquired, often in ways which were repetitive and removed from the reality of life.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

62 In many courses, students are well motivated and enjoy their studies. They speak knowledgeably and confidently about their work and are enthusiastic about their experiences at the institute. Many are clearly extending their levels of knowledge and understanding and are working to an appropriate standard. A significant proportion of students at the institute fit their studies around part-time employment.

63 In humanities courses and in business and management courses there are many examples of students developing good oral and writing skills. Adult basic education students' achievements are clearly identified; study skills are an integral part of their coursework and play an important part in helping them to make progress. Many students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are able to talk about their work and understand clearly what they are doing, particularly in the more employment-focused sessions; they are involved in discussing their learning, evaluating their own performance, and negotiating their assessment grade with their tutor. Other sessions would benefit from the more widespread dissemination of such good practice.

64 Most modern languages are studied by part-time or evening only students. Many of these display good oral and writing skills. In some groups, students know and can use appropriate, grammatical terminology. Many have good listening skills and are acquiring authentic accents in the foreign languages they are learning. There are several examples of beginners who have made outstanding progress in acquiring a new language in a brief space of time. There are others, however, whose speaking and writing skills are well below those required for the course. In a small number of classes, there are examples of students who lack the confidence to involve themselves fully in activities.

65 Students demonstrate the ability to work co-operatively in pairs or groups in many courses. In engineering, there are good examples of students working in teams and, in health and social care courses, the

expertise of staff enables students to understand key concepts through collaborative working. In many sessions, students develop their communication skills through group discussions and making presentations of their work to the rest of the class.

66 Standards achieved in science practical classes are usually good. The necessary laboratory safety precautions are well documented, emphasised during lessons and sensibly adhered to by science students. In engineering, there are good standards of practical work. In health and caring programmes, students develop good skills and good standards of professional practice. In art and design, standards of practical work are high and all work is carried out safely. The emphasis on drawing in the second year enables students to achieve good results in their work. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities carry out practical activities safely. They can explain why they should work in particular ways.

67 Only 4.6 per cent of enrolled students at the institute study GCE A levels. Those aged 16-18 entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1993-94 scored, on average, 2.3 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the institute among the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. Figures supplied by the institute indicate that for those students who actually sit the examinations in GCE A level science subjects, percentage pass rates have been above the national average for general further education colleges for the last three years. GCE A level mathematics pass rates are low, with 43 per cent passing last year. Pass rates in statistics are better at 60 per cent. In humanities subjects, pass rates were often below the national averages, although in a number of subject groups enrolments were too low to provide a statistically significant sample.

68 Students undertaking GCSE programmes represent only 5.8 per cent of enrolled students. In science subjects the percentage of students completing their courses who gain grades A-C in their GCSE examinations is above the national average for students aged 16-18 in sector colleges other than sixth form colleges. In one daytime psychology and one evening sociology group, all candidates entering the examination were successful. Pass rates at grades A-C for English language students who study at evening classes are above the national average for students over the age of 19. Some results in languages are below national averages.

69 A substantially greater proportion of students at the institute study vocational programmes. Seventeen per cent of these are enrolled on GNVQ and NVQ programmes. Sixty-five per cent of 16-18 year old students in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education's 1994 performance tables were successful. This places the institute in the bottom 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Results are variable between programme areas. In construction, 81 per cent of students gained

an award at level 2 but only 43 per cent of business studies part-time students gained an award. There are poor results for GNVQ programmes in leisure and tourism, with pass rates of 53 per cent and 59 per cent. At NVQ level 3, all full-time students who completed their course were successful compared with 33 per cent of part-time students.

70 Many students prepare for the examinations of specialist technical and professional bodies. On courses equivalent to NVQ level 2, pass rates amongst students who complete their courses vary from 100 per cent in community care practice, information technology and background to business, to less than 30 per cent in jewellery and silversmithing and the certificate in continuing education. Seventy-eight per cent of full-time and 70 per cent of part-time students obtained awards at this level. In secretarial programmes, RSA Examinations Board (RSA) single subject examination results in the majority of cases are above national averages. Examination results for RSA basic French, German and Spanish are good, with pass rates of 100 per cent, 92 per cent and 88 per cent, respectively. Overall, results at level 3 were better than at level 2. Eighty-one per cent of full-time students and 75 per cent of part-time students obtained an award. Results in individual courses varied from 100 per cent in some secretarial skills subjects to 41 per cent in electrical installation. In engineering, there are some indifferent examination results on various courses with pass rates less than 50 per cent on the BTEC national diploma and the national certificate in engineering. On the BTEC first diploma in engineering in 1993-94, no student successfully completed all the modules at the first attempt. Courses at higher national certificate or equivalent level produced generally good results; overall, 86 per cent of full-time students and 80 per cent of part-time students who completed their courses gained an award.

71 The student charter indicates that students agree to attend regularly and punctually and to hand work in to agreed deadlines. Poor student attendance is an acknowledged cause for concern in the institute. There is a system for monitoring and following up students' absences and late submission of work. Teaching staff took industrial action during the specialist inspection week, and registers were checked in order to establish longer-term attendance patterns. Attendance during the specialist inspection was consistent with the pattern established earlier in the academic year. During the week of the specialist inspection, the average attendance of students from a sample of 127 classes was a little over 60 per cent of those on roll. In business management, where levels of attendance were highest, the average attendance was 78 per cent. In mathematics and computing, where attendance was lowest, the average attendance was 43 per cent. Low attendance was also apparent in some of the community provision for adult basic education.

72 The institute's figures for 1993-94 indicate that 92 per cent of students who enrolled on 1 November 1993 completed their programmes. Data at 23 May 1995 show a 90 per cent figure for the year 1994-95. NVQ

courses had the highest retention rates in 1993-94 (94 per cent) and 1994-95 (88 per cent). GNVQ programmes also retained over 80 per cent of students in both years. GCE A level retention rates have improved from 75 per cent last year to 87 per cent this year. Retention rates on GCSE courses have declined from 86 per cent to 76 per cent, although the data do not clearly identify students who change their course as opposed to those who leave the institute. There are good completion rates for most GCSE evening classes in humanities and completion rates in line with national averages for daytime courses in English language and sociology GCSE. Between one-third and one-half of students fail to complete daytime GCSE psychology courses. GCE A level and GCSE courses in science and mathematics and some computing courses have high non-completion rates. For the two-year courses in engineering, both retention rates and examination pass rates are low. Retention rates on secretarial courses are also low and the reasons for early leaving are not systematically monitored. Some health and care courses have below average retention and pass rates. 1993-94 has witnessed a decline in retention rates for hair and beauty, which staff link to the withdrawal of discretionary awards. Successful completion rates are low on access to higher education courses.

73 Information on students' progress after leaving the institute is published, both by course and by originating high school, in a well designed 'moving on up' booklet. Over half the students who completed courses at intermediate level in 1993-94 continued in further education; a further third obtained jobs. At advanced level, 65 per cent continued their education and 27 per cent went into employment. Seventy-five per cent of students who successfully completed the BTEC first diploma in engineering in 1993-94, after retaking their modules, went on to the BTEC national diploma in engineering. The other 25 per cent sought employment. All national diploma in engineering students went on to degree courses or higher national diploma courses in universities and colleges. The institute has achieved funding to provide its own higher national diploma next year. Of the 32 GCE A level 16-18 year old students leaving last year, eight took a degree course and three took higher national diploma courses. Nine students remained at the institute, but none of them entered degree programmes.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

74 The institute publicises its commitment to 'quality learning experiences' through its mission statement which is on prominent display in the entrances to buildings, together with its equal opportunities policy and student charter promises. The characteristics of such a learning experience have not been adequately discussed in the institute. Evidence from the inspection suggests that practice in many courses and subjects currently falls short of the ideal. Comprehensive quality assurance systems have been introduced, aspects of which are not fully understood or implemented by all staff.

75 A key feature of the quality assurance system is a course review process which builds on well-established practice in parts of the institute. Course leaders welcome the improved consistency encouraged by a college-wide system. A recently-introduced quadrennial review submits a quarter of courses to three scrutinies during their review year. All other courses are reviewed annually. Reviews involve surveys of student satisfaction, some of which are commissioned from outside agencies, the formulation of action plans for improvement, and target setting. Where targets have not been reached, deans are required to report their proposed actions to the director of academic support and development. There have been separate reviews of the effectiveness of the new induction arrangements and the student charter.

76 The course review system is designed to link to the process of budget planning, since both involve setting targets for enrolments, retention, and achievement. Staff development, appraisal, and internal verification are all shown in policy documents to be supportive of quality assurance. Not all staff fully understand their part in the system, but most course leaders can readily quote examples of changes and improvements made by them and by senior managers as a result of the process. Course reviews are summarised during the reporting process and their findings filtered so that the main messages are considered by the academic standards subcommittee and the academic board. The filtering process should not exclude reports on actions which have already been taken to improve defects, especially if it reduces the focus on issues of teaching and learning.

77 Overall course targets are set by the institute. An example of this is that 80 per cent of students should achieve their stated qualification aim. In 1994, 73 per cent of courses reached this target. There has, as yet, been no debate with staff on the issues arising from the figures for last year which might raise staff awareness both of the targets themselves and ways in which they might be reached. Quality standards have been developed for some aspects of the institute's work, mainly in non-teaching functions, but these will take some time to complete. There is a quality working group in existence which includes members of the corporation, but its purpose and links with the rest of the system are not clearly defined.

78 Staff-development policies and procedures are clear and form an important part of the personnel management function. Their impact is increasingly linked to the staff-appraisal system. An induction programme is in place for new staff, and was well received. Staff-development priorities for the coming year are closely linked to strategic objectives but further consultation with staff on these priorities is required. The inspection process has revealed a need to pay greater attention to the quality of teaching and learning. This was not a feature of the current priorities, except for support to initial teacher training for inexperienced staff. The trainers of internal verifiers, and the teacher trainers who are part of the institute's staff, should be in a position to make a major contribution to the

development of teaching quality. This potential is not currently exploited to the full.

79 There is a good level of staff-development activity. Around two-thirds of staff have benefited from training in the current financial year. The budget for staff development is just over 1 per cent of the payroll costs. One major target has been to increase the number of accredited assessors and verifiers for NVQ and GNVQ programmes and this is being managed by the recently-established Training and Development Lead Body unit in order to concentrate existing expertise. Decisions about who participates in training activity are the responsibility of the deans. This process needs to be better related to college priorities if it is to serve the institute's strategic aims.

80 The charter has been produced in three forms, for students, employers, and the community, respectively. All three are short, clear, and readily available. The student version was distributed at enrolment. Its impact has been evaluated and a revised and more informative version prepared for next year. There are appeals systems within the arrangements for quality assurance, the charter, and the internal verification system. These are regularly, but not frequently used.

81 The institute prepared an effective assessment of its own quality in preparation for the inspection. It is an honest appraisal; the judgements accord closely with those of inspectors. One useful feature of the document is its helpful cross reference to the evidence available for each aspect of the inspection process.

RESOURCES

Staffing

82 Most staff are academically well qualified and are appropriately matched to the courses on which they teach; many have relevant vocational expertise. Seventy per cent hold formal teacher qualifications and approximately one-third of these gained their award in the last 10 years. A high proportion of staff have first degrees and 18 per cent have higher degrees. Good use is made of the institute's own certificate of education programme and Training and Development Lead Body unit to develop teachers' skills. This training programme should be accelerated to ensure that the requirements of GNVQ awarding bodies are met.

83 There is an appropriate balance of men and women on the academic staff and at middle manager level. However, at the senior lecturer grade, the majority of staff are male.

84 Part-time staff are generally well supported and are strongly encouraged to participate in course developments, meetings, project work and training events. There are some pockets of high dependency on part-time staff. For example, in mathematics and computing 40 per cent of staff are part time. Similar high percentages exist in science, modern languages and health care.

85 The overall level of technical and administrative support staff is adequate. There is a need to improve the availability across the institute of technical support for computing. This is recognised by senior management and is currently being addressed. There are no paid foreign language assistants to support GCE A level and GCSE courses in general education.

86 Policies and procedures associated with the personnel function have been significantly improved. Arrangements for the recruitment, selection and deployment of staff are becoming more clearly prescribed. The collegiate structure of the institute has not, to date, facilitated the wider cross-college deployment of staff. Some programme areas have high staffing costs. Staff utilisation and monitoring are now subject to more rigorous controls, budget management and reporting mechanisms.

87 A well-focused business plan for the personnel function is clearly linked to the institute's mission. Academic and business services staff increasingly work together within an emerging framework of an institutional approach to personnel policy. Further progress towards the institute's strategy to achieve greater flexibility in working methods has been inhibited by the national dispute on lecturers' contracts. At the time of the inspection, 120 of the 212 academic staff were on new contracts.

88 Recent industrial experience is lacking in some areas, for example in engineering and construction. There is a more general need for staff to update their professional and vocational experience. Currently, there is no systematic plan for achieving this updating.

Equipment/learning resources

89 The provision of equipment to support teaching and learning is generally good for the majority of programme areas. A phased reinvestment programme across a broad range of provision has brought clear improvements in specialist equipment and central learning resources.

90 The institution has a good level of computer resources to support its academic and vocational work. A high proportion of computers can support the latest versions of software. The current ratio of students to computer terminals is 8.6:1. More recently, an institute-wide approach has been adopted in the planning and extension of information facilities, including the development of a single network. Some aspects of the provision continue to reflect a previous lack of overall co-ordination and management. An information technology steering committee is currently addressing these issues. A strategy is needed to ensure that adequate staff training and the associated development of information technology learning materials is more closely synchronised with the acquisition of new hardware and software.

91 An impressive new study centre has been developed at the Winwick Road site. It is a well-designed and well-used resource which incorporates

up-to-date learning facilities. Together with learning support workshops which are located nearby, the open-plan facilities represent an attractive and accessible learning environment. A more modest study centre has been established at the Padgate site. The libraries at the two main campuses have received injections of extra funding of £25,000 each to upgrade their facilities. There are some gaps in library stock which need to be addressed, for example in art and design, health and social care and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The international studies centre is well equipped. It has a compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database, a number of language booths, television sets and video recorders. A more limited range of equipment is available for other language teaching.

92 Although learning materials can be obtained centrally, especially those produced by the Further Education National Consortium, the concept of developing a central bank of learning resources by sharing materials across the college is underdeveloped. Handouts, assignment materials and visual aids are often regarded as the property of subject teams and are rarely centralised or catalogued for wider access. There is a limited range of support materials, especially information technology based materials, to support the study of mathematics.

93 In engineering, although the workshops are well stocked with a good range of machine tools, they are dated and few have digital readouts. Much of the classroom apparatus is old and not of an industrial standard. Construction equipment is in good supply and condition but the material testing laboratory is not well equipped and surveying equipment needs updating. In beauty care the salons could be modernised.

94 There is a clear policy of making resources available to colleges and sections. Agreed allocations are phased over three terms and adjustments made in accordance with targets and outcomes. Resources are allocated down to course level and staff have a good understanding of the new funding methodology and its significance to resource decisions. Budgets are subject to tight control mechanisms and the process is increasingly linked to the business planning process.

Accommodation

95 The accommodation available at the institute's main campuses at Winwick Road site and Padgate site offers a good-quality learning environment for the vast majority of students. There is a clear strategic commitment, underpinned by appropriate funds, to raise the general standard of accommodation. Much of the further education work occurs at the Winwick Road site which has recently been prioritised for improvement. Extensive upgrading of the main tower block has occurred with new furnishing, decorations and carpeted corridors which have created an attractive working environment.

96 There is a customer focus to many of the improvements and this is reflected in the design and development of the study centre, student services and bistro facilities. A welcoming atmosphere is created by the well-appointed reception foyers at both main campuses. The strategy has successfully retained the distinctive character of the different sites whilst conveying a common corporate image across the institute.

97 An accommodation strategy for the institute is still being developed. Options for future major investment decisions are being considered following an earlier appraisal by consultants. There is a well-focused estates management team which oversees a rigorously-controlled capital works programme and a planned preventative maintenance schedule.

98 There is significant overcapacity. Senior managers are actively seeking to analyse, monitor and improve the use of space. Room use is low before 10.00 and after 15.00 hours. The institute has extended its opening hours to include weekend opening. Opportunities are currently being explored to involve outside agencies, for example, a local health trust, to use surplus college space and so improve space utilisation.

99 The quality of most general classroom accommodation is satisfactory. Some of it is good. Some needs improvement. The Long Lane accommodation for technology is poor and much of the accommodation for engineering is dated, drab in appearance and presents a poor image of the programme area. Classrooms and resource centres in construction are inadequate for craft courses. Whilst the international study centre is an asset to the institute it is housed in cramped accommodation which has limited potential for expansion. There is no other accommodation in the institute which is dedicated to languages. Occasionally, for example in health and social care, teaching rooms are not well matched to class size, despite appropriate rooms being available in the vicinity.

100 Good progress has been made in addressing accommodation issues which improve access to learning for many students. The provision of creche and nursery facilities has made it easier for parents of young children to pursue their studies. There have also been developments on each of the main sites to improve access for students with restricted mobility including the installation of a new lift at the Padgate site. A feasibility study is underway to improve access to the upper storey at the Museum Street site.

101 For students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities an independent living centre has recently been established at the Padgate site. The facility is well furnished and has a good range of domestic appliances and household equipment. The local TEC and private sector firms have helped fund the centre and construction students helped to create it.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

102 The institute is building upon the strengths of its past and identifying a clear agenda for the future. Its strengths are:

- a wide range of courses from basic level to degree programmes
- developing links with a range of external organisations
- a well-informed governing body which has a productive working relationship with the institute's management
- a course planning process which gives due attention to issues of cost-effectiveness
- an open and consultative style of management
- an improved range of central services providing support for students
- good working relationships between staff and students
- well-designed and informative publicity materials
- some attractively refurbished accommodation.

103 The institute should:

- improve the effectiveness of its management information system
- address poor levels of attendance on many courses
- ensure that there is effective monitoring of students who leave before completing their courses
- improve the quality of some students' learning experiences
- assess students' core skills at an early stage to identify those who need additional support
- address some poor examination results, especially in vocational areas
- sharpen the focus on teaching and learning in the quality assurance process
- pool resources and share good practice across the institute.

FIGURES

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

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

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

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

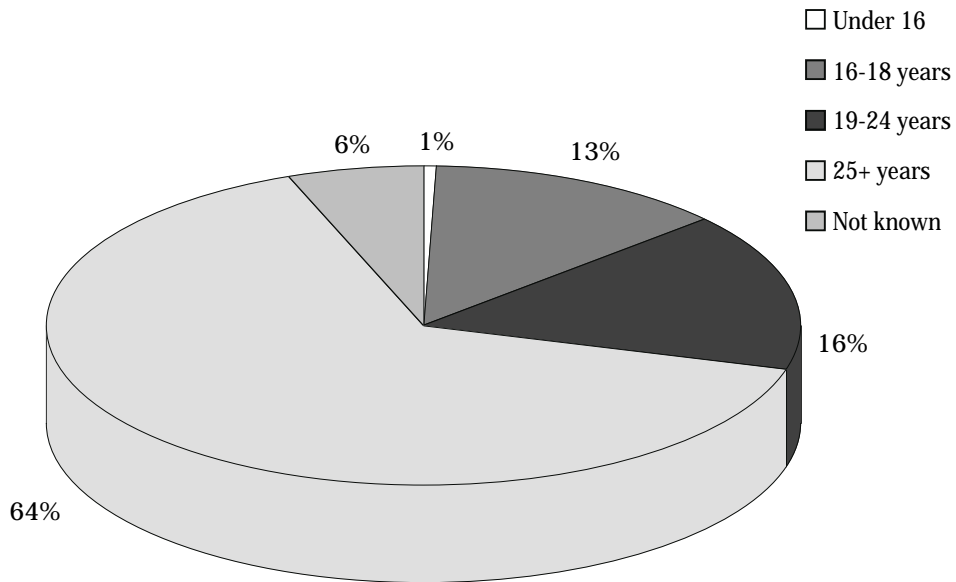
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

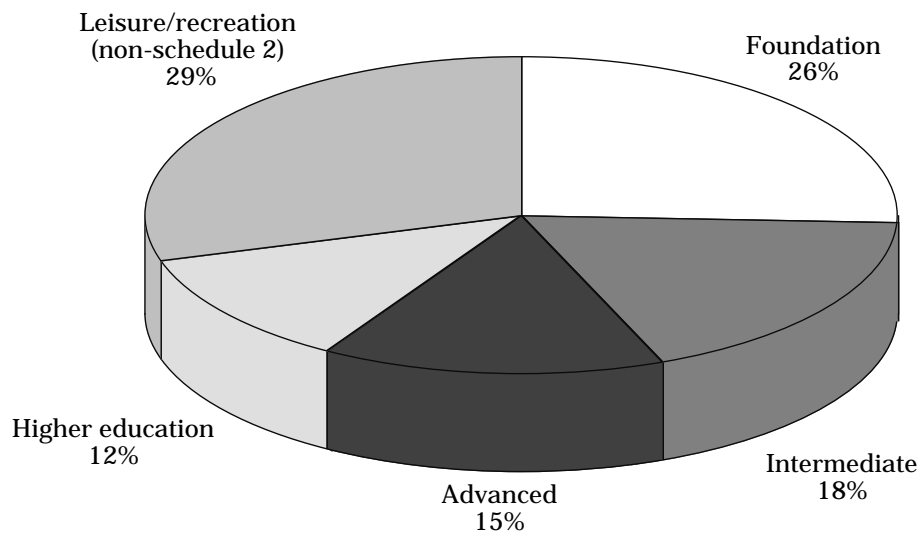
Warrington Collegiate Institute: percentage enrolments by age (as at January 1995)



Enrolments: 14,114

Figure 2

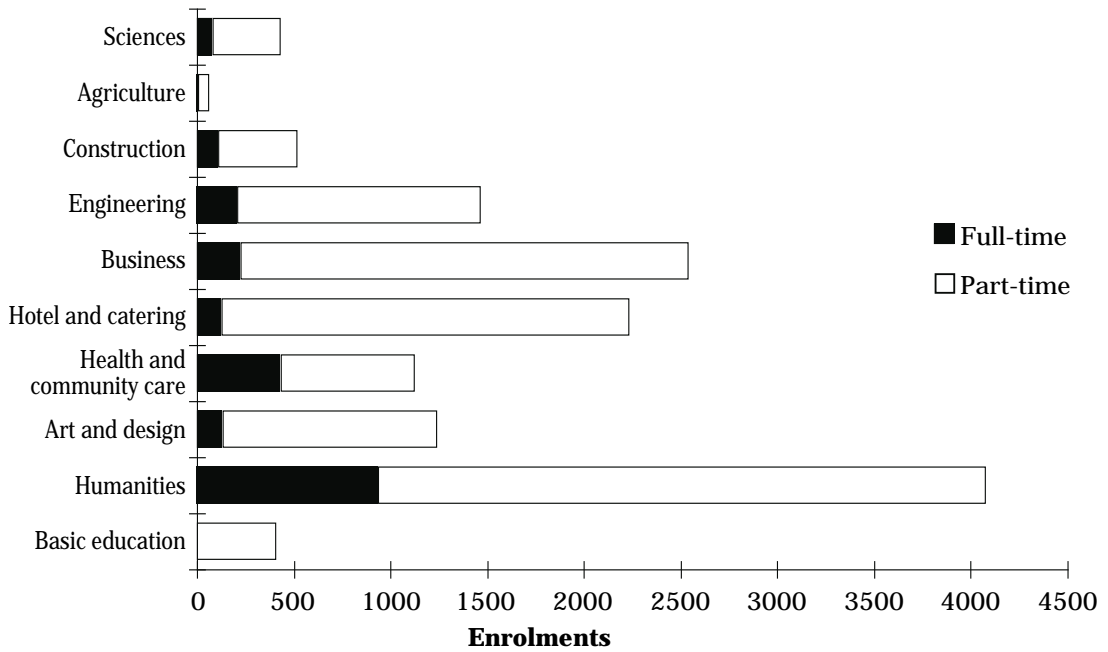
Warrington Collegiate Institute: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at January 1995)



Enrolments: 14,114

Figure 3

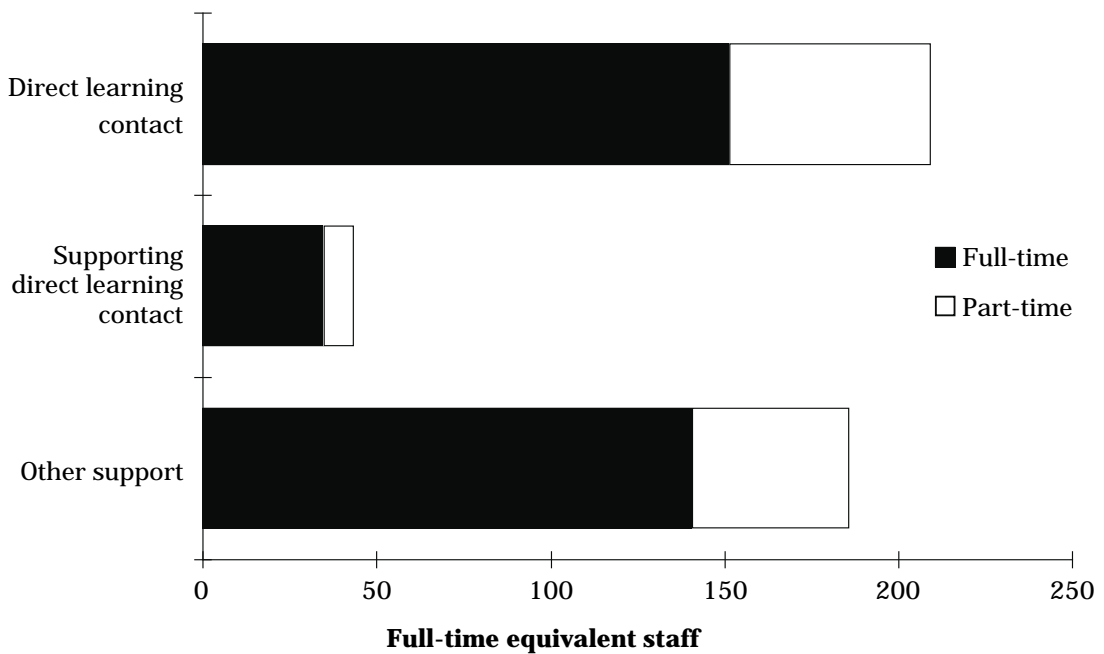
Warrington Collegiate Institute: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at January 1995)



Enrolments: 14,114

Figure 4

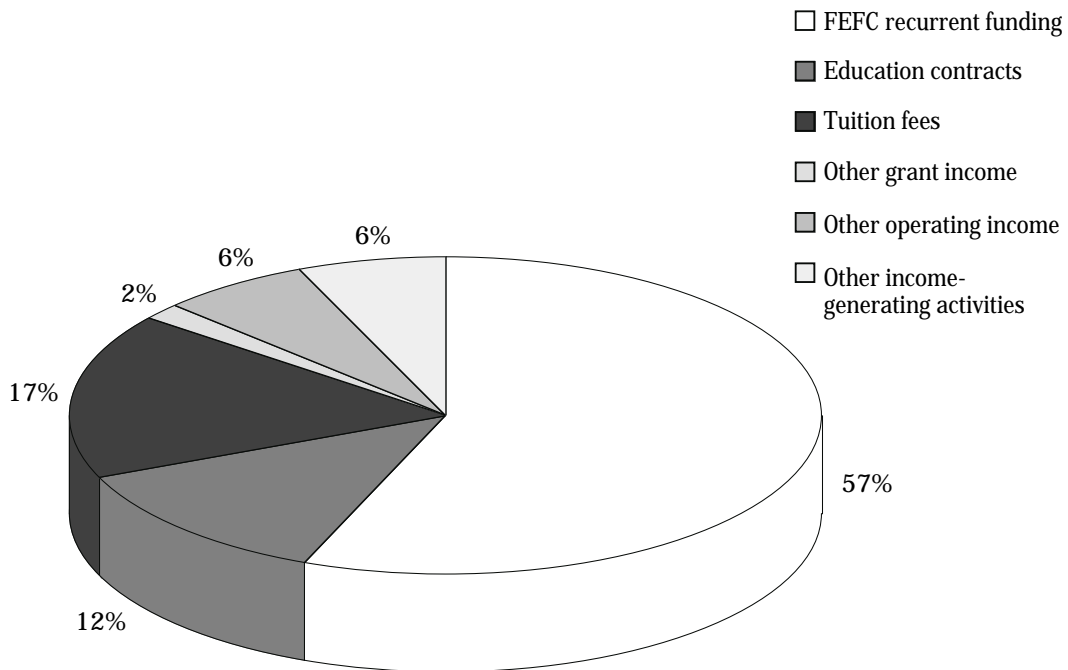
Warrington Collegiate Institute: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 439

Figure 5

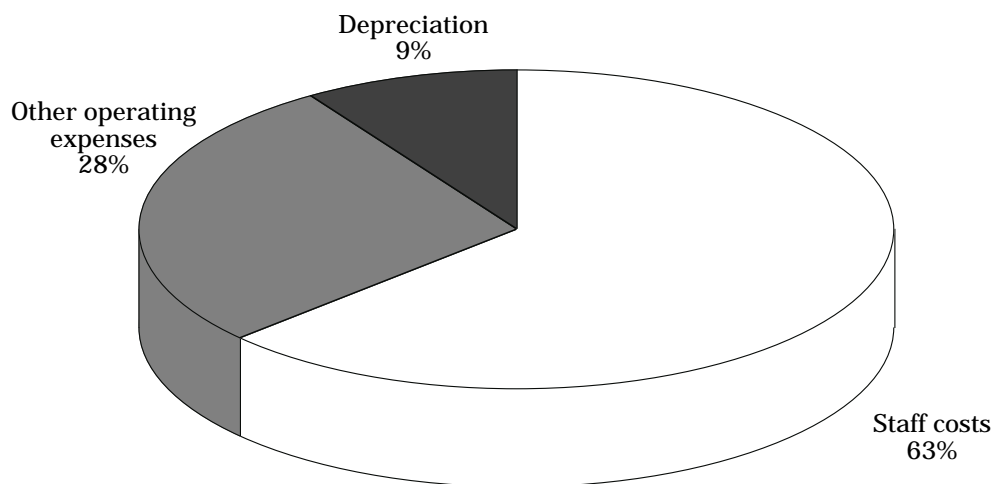
Warrington Collegiate Institute: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £16,165,000

Figure 6

Warrington Collegiate Institute: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £16,512,000

Note: this chart excludes £10,000 interest payable.

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