

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**West
Nottinghamshire
College**

June 1997

**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 the 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 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	59%	29%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	14%	50%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	12%	54%	30%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 78/97

WEST NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COLLEGE
EAST MIDLANDS REGION
Inspected August 1996-March 1997

Summary

West Nottinghamshire College offers a wide range of vocational and general education programmes. It is involved in many initiatives which aim to increase the participation of local people in education and training. The college has achieved significant growth over the last two years. Governors have a strong sense of purpose and a keen awareness of the issues facing the college. The college is well managed. Much of the teaching is good. Teaching and support staff are effectively deployed. The achievement rates of students who complete their courses are good. The performance of the college at all levels is monitored effectively against targets. The strategic planning process and the quality assurance process are closely related. Facilities in the learning resource centres are of a high standard. Recruitment procedures are good. The support and guidance services for students are of high quality but the college needs to ensure that they are equally available on all its sites. The college should improve: students' retention rates on many courses; students' examination results on a few courses; its evaluation of teaching and learning; facilities for students' private study; and the social areas and the refectory accommodation. In addition, the college should ensure: that its needs for management information are met; and that performance indicators are used with consistency at course level.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		1
Governance and management		1
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		2
Quality assurance		2
Resources:	staffing	1
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	2	Child, health and social care	2
Construction	2	Hair and beauty	2
Engineering	3	Creative arts	2
Business	2	Humanities	3
Catering	2	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and basic education	2
Leisure and tourism	2		

INTRODUCTION

1 West Nottinghamshire College was inspected between August 1996 and March 1997. The enrolment and induction of students were inspected during August and September. In February, inspectors spent 65 days inspecting specialist programme areas. They visited 303 classes and examined students' work. In March, five inspectors spent a further 20 days examining aspects of cross-college provision. They held meetings with governors, college managers, teachers, support staff and students, and representatives from local schools, the local community, councils, employers and the North Nottinghamshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 A college has served Mansfield and its surrounding area for over 70 years. The present college was formed from the merger of a college of art and a technical college in the 1970s. It aims to meet the educational needs of rural and urban communities in the local authority districts of Mansfield and Ashfield. The college's catchment area includes part of the Newark and Sherwood district and the 'M1 corridor' with Derbyshire. Mansfield is a former mining community, in which unemployment rates rose sharply following mine closures. Since then unemployment has stabilised and in some areas it has been reduced. In January 1997, the unemployment rates were 9.5 per cent and 7.8 per cent in Mansfield and in Ashfield, respectively, although there were local pockets in both these areas where the rate was as high as 15 per cent. Local authorities and other public bodies such as health trusts, are major employers, but small and medium-size enterprises provide over 80 per cent of all employment.

3 The college has three main centres in Mansfield, a centre in Sutton-in-Ashfield and a small annexe at Woodhouse Road. The main site at Derby Road is on the outskirts of Mansfield and the sites at Chesterfield Road and Rosemary Street are in the town centre some five miles from the main site. Ashfield College on the outskirts of Sutton-in-Ashfield, is some five miles from the main site and three miles from the centre of Mansfield. There is a shuttle service between the four main sites. In addition, the college uses two 'outreach' centres in the local community and a range of community centres. Provision for the smaller towns and villages served by the college has grown rapidly in recent years, and its growth is partly due to the partnerships the college has formed with local authorities and community groups.

4 The college recruits school-leavers from over 20 secondary schools, all of which have sixth forms. It also recruits from special schools. Fewer than 60 per cent of 16 year olds in the main areas served by the college continue in full-time education. The proportion of school-leavers going into further education has risen in recent years. Half of all the full-time students and three-quarters of the part-time students at the college are adults. Students' enrolments have doubled since incorporation. In the

1996-97 academic year, 10,176 students enrolled at the college, of whom 2,292 were full time. There has been significant growth, in recent years, in programmes designed for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2, and 3. The college employs 424 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 217 are full-time equivalent teachers. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

5 The college's stated mission is 'to provide education and training of high quality to individuals, employers and the community'. Through its mission statement, the college makes a commitment to lifelong learning; recognises the potential of all staff; encourages staff to help it to achieve its mission by improving their own performance through staff development and appraisal. The college seeks to achieve the main aim of its mission by establishing effective partnerships with local communities, using its resources efficiently and effectively, and continuously improving the learning environment it provides.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

6 The college offers a wide range of vocational and general education programmes from foundation level to higher education. There are courses in all the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. These are provided through various modes of study. The college is strongly committed to helping the country meet its national targets for education and training. The college's vocational courses include those leading to: a large number of national vocational qualifications (NVQs); general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at foundation level (10 vocational areas), at intermediate level (12 vocational areas) and at advanced level (10 vocational areas); and other specialised vocational and professional qualifications which have been developed in response to local and regional demands. Twenty-three general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects and 27 general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects are offered. The number of students at the college who are studying GCE A level subjects is low. The college has come to an agreement with local schools that it will not promote recruitment of students aged 16 to 19, to its GCE A level courses. There is a substantial amount of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, much of which leads to qualifications. The college offers accredited pre-foundation and foundation programmes, and access to higher education courses. Students have opportunities to take up additional studies to complement their main programme. These studies include: GCSE and GCE subjects, computer literacy and information technology awards, first aid, sign language and computer-aided design. Some students, however, are prevented from taking these additional studies because they clash on the timetable with other classes they have to attend.

7 The college is an associate college of Nottingham Trent University from which it franchises full-time higher national diploma and part-time certificate in education programmes. The college has recently formed another important partnership with the University of Nottingham, North Nottinghamshire TEC, Nottinghamshire County Council and the Mansfield District Council to establish a University Centre for Mansfield on the Derby Road site, with some assistance from the single regeneration fund. The centre is being built and it is expected to open in September 1997. It will aim to serve the needs of local small and medium-size enterprises, and provide higher education for the local community.

8 The college has strong and effective curriculum links with most local secondary schools. Sixteen schools have formal partnership links with the college for the provision of GNVQ courses. The college runs courses at foundation and intermediate levels on behalf of the schools. Schools value these links, and particularly the opportunities they provide for staff training. By agreement, none of the schools offers courses at advanced level GNVQ. The college collaborates effectively with four local special schools and the Portland Training College for people with severe physical disabilities. The Sutton Centre Community College works with the college on community developments and the vocational aspects of work at key stage 4. The school values these contacts and pays tribute to the quality of the college's contribution to the partnership. The college is involved in a number of collaborative partnerships with local primary schools. One involves facilitating modern European language development for parents and children; another addresses issues of literacy in a particularly socially deprived area.

9 Contacts with the North Nottinghamshire TEC are close and effective. TEC officers acknowledge that the college has been very responsive to initiatives designed to address skill shortages. The college makes good use of the TEC labour market intelligence. The TEC has given valuable support to the college to enable it to achieve Investor in People status. The principal and other senior managers have been active members of TEC committees and working groups. The college was successful in its first bid for money from the competitiveness fund to establish a large computer-based learning centre on its Derby Road site. A bid for a 'textiles centre of excellence' to be established in the Mansfield area is currently under consideration.

10 Links with the Nottinghamshire Local Education Authority (LEA) and several district councils are very good. These have resulted in a number of important joint projects. The college is the 'national lead centre' for the 'drug abuse resistance education programme'. It is responsible for training police officers for this campaign. Nottinghamshire County Council's 'fast forward' funding project provides support to those students who are traditionally under represented on vocational courses. About 1,000 students are studying at college centres through this programme and the college is the major participant in the project. County council officers confirm the college's commitment to the project and the effectiveness of its

participation in it. The college offers a large programme of non-vocational courses under contract from the county council. This contract ceases from April 1997. The college is exploring ways in which it can finance, and continue to offer, non-vocational provision after this date.

11 The college fulfils its strategic objective to meet the needs of the local community through its community liaison activities and the provision of vocational education in 'outreach' centres in the community. A team of 25 part-time local community representatives provides information and recommendations to the college about local needs. It acts as an important communication channel between the college and the local community. Provision made at centres in the local community is monitored through the same quality assurance processes as those used to monitor provision on the college's main sites.

12 There is a substantial budget for marketing activities, which is closely controlled and monitored. A college marketing liaison group meets monthly. It reviews and evaluates the effectiveness of marketing activities and ensures that relevant information related to these is passed to teachers. The college has contracted an agency to undertake its marketing, produce its publicity materials and handle its public relations. Since engaging the services of this agency, the college has benefited from high-quality publicity in the media and a successful launch of the college's 1995-96 annual report. The agency has also undertaken an exercise to assess local awareness of the college and the attitudes of local people towards it. An analysis by the Mansfield Social Strategy Group of patterns of education and employment in the area, reveals low levels of achievement amongst school-leavers and a low level of participation in post-16 education. The college has drawn on information from this analysis. It has aimed publicity material at those who, hitherto, have underachieved in education and it has been successful in recruiting them to courses. The college acknowledges that it does not yet have sufficient labour market information on companies with fewer than 10 employees. It is collaborating with the Mansfield, Sutton and Kirkby enterprise partnership to share labour market information.

13 Links with employers are wide ranging and effective. The principal is a member of a local body devoted to local regeneration and the enhancement of employment opportunities. He is also on the council of the Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce. The college has contacts with Mansfield Area Chamber of Commerce and the Nottingham Chamber Education and Training Committee. There are advisory committees for each of the college's curriculum areas but these vary considerably in their effectiveness. In the college charter, employers are acknowledged as partners. The college has recently established a company, Skilldrive Ltd, to provide services and training to industry. The company draws together a range of services which has been provided in the college and the workplace over many years. Employers confirm that the college responds rapidly and effectively to requests for tailor-made courses and assessment

services. The college has a good database on over 4,500 companies in the region.

14 The college has strong and developing links with countries overseas, and particularly with other countries in Europe. Through these links, the college aims to exchange information with educational institutions abroad, especially in relation to curriculum development. Not all curriculum areas have established such links, however. The college is seeking ways of ensuring that all curriculum areas are involved in these links. It runs staff-development activities which have an international focus and it has established a European liaison committee. Student exchanges are an established feature of the learning programmes in four curriculum areas. There is a clear action plan to introduce a European dimension into the college's curriculum.

15 The college is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all staff and students. Its commitment to equal opportunities is reflected in the strategic plan and, more particularly, in the college's annual operating statement. The college has established a working group which considers ways in which equal opportunities can be promoted through the curriculum. The group meets informally and because its important achievements have not always been systematically recorded, these have not been sufficiently recognised. The college realises that it needs to give this group more formal status. In future, the group will operate as a committee of the academic board.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

16 The corporation has 15 members: eight business members, a nominee from the TEC, three co-opted members, two staff and the principal. An observer from the students' union and one from the local education authority attend meetings. Most members have commercial or industrial backgrounds and, between them, they possess a wide range of professional skills. The college makes good use of these skills. The corporation has an open approach to the governance of the college, a strong sense of common purpose, and an awareness of the key issues facing the college. Governors focus on strategic and planning matters and are clear about the distinction between their role and that of college managers. They have adopted a code of conduct and there is a register of members' interests.

17 The corporation manages its business efficiently although levels of attendance at corporation meetings are variable. Members receive a regular series of reports which enable them to monitor the effectiveness of the college. These reports include financial statements and reports in which the college's performance is measured against key performance indicators such as examination results and students' achievements. The corporation also receives reports from curriculum and development managers. The roles of corporation committees, their membership and their delegated powers have recently been reviewed. All committees have

clear terms of reference. The chairman of the corporation is also chairman of the finance committee, the staffing committee and the search committee. The academic board reports to the corporation and plays an important part in the development of the strategic plan and the annual operating statement. The director of finance is clerk to the board. As a result of a review in 1996, the job description for the clerk to the board was revised but this does not specify how much time the clerk should spend on his duties. The clerk is supported by two assistants. The need for him to take an impartial stance in his duties is clearly understood by the chairman of the corporation, the principal, and by the clerk himself.

18 The search committee takes responsibility for the governors' professional development and for evaluating and reviewing the performance of the board. Members are offered places on external training events. As part of their training which is provided by the college, governors participate in the college's annual joint strategic planning event with senior managers. They also receive briefings on major developments in further education. The college provides governors with a summary of key issues and activities twice or three times a year. Governors with interests in specific curriculum areas, such as engineering and construction, are encouraged to develop links with the staff who teach in them.

19 There is a systematic process for drawing up the college's strategic plan. The plan and a detailed operating statement reflect the college's mission and its main objectives. There is extensive consultation during the preparation of the plan. Programme teams and course teams develop their own plans and operating statements. These are aggregated at curriculum area and college level to produce the overall strategic plan and operating statement. The operating statement for each curriculum area is clear and it includes objectives and targets against which performance can be measured. Progress towards meeting the targets in the operating plans is monitored monthly at curriculum area level and each director reports through the planning group. Action plans for improving the quality of provision are updated termly. Continual monitoring through the operating statement is the key to the effectiveness of the college in achieving its objectives.

20 All approved college policies and codes of practice are set out in a handbook, together with the name of the manager responsible for implementing each policy and the date on which it was approved by the corporation. A revised health and safety policy was approved by the corporation in June 1996, and a reconstituted health and safety committee of 15 members has been established. A draft environmental policy and a disability statement were approved in November 1996.

21 The college is well managed. College management operates in a business-like manner and there are appropriate controls over the achievement of performance targets. The principal and five directors constitute the senior management team and planning group. There are 11 curriculum areas and eight educational development services.

The managers of these areas and services each report at least monthly to a member of the planning group. Each of the development services has a liaison group which has representatives from each curriculum area. These groups meet at least twice each term. Some members of groups are unable to attend meetings because of teaching commitments, and their absence undermines the effectiveness of the groups. The planning group meets with curriculum and development managers both individually and in groups. Seven support services have been established and their respective heads meet with the planning group weekly.

22 Communication between senior managers and staff is effective. Curriculum area meetings are held at least once each month. Time is set aside on the timetable for full-time teachers to attend these meetings and part-time teachers are also invited to them. Support staff, however, are rarely involved in the meetings. A college staff magazine called 'Grapevine' and a weekly executive briefing for managers are both considered by staff to be informative. The meetings of support staff, curriculum managers and development managers with the planning group, on Thursday afternoons, serve as a useful channel for communication between middle managers and the senior managers. Whilst communication across the college is effective at management levels, it is less effective amongst the teaching staff. There are few opportunities for teachers from different curriculum areas to share ideas and discuss teaching methods.

23 The curriculum area managers have a range of responsibilities across many courses and programmes. In September 1996, the college created the new post of a leader for each programme area. Some of the staff appointed as programme area leaders do not have a clear understanding of their role. In particular, there is confusion over what their role is in relation to budgetary processes. The administration and management of individual courses are effective. Staff display good teamwork in the planning and implementation of most courses. There are regular meetings of course teams. The minutes of course team meetings do not, however, specify action which should be carried out by named persons by a particular date.

24 Resources are effectively deployed. Managers understand the system by which finance is allocated. The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £18.23 per unit, compared with £18.49 per unit in 1995-96. The median for all general further education colleges in 1995-96, was £18.13. The college's income and expenditure for 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Information about unit costs is provided in a planning document. Detailed information on costs is required during the internal validation of proposed courses.

25 The college has a number of information systems. Financial information is provided through a commercial system and is reliable. The personnel system was developed by the college and it provides most of the data on human resources. The system concerned with student data can

produce information in response to external demands. There are few links between the systems and, collectively, they do not meet all the management information needs of the college. On all sites, managers have access to a network of management information for the whole college. Data retrieval from this is cumbersome. Staff have little confidence in the data which relates to students. The extent and quality of the information on students are variable and the network cannot provide data on non-standard provision. The college is developing a new management information system. Managers and support staff have been consulted about their management information needs, and teaching staff are being similarly consulted.

26 The college has exceeded its targets for growth each year from 1993-94 to 1995-96. However, concern about the retention of students has led to the regular monitoring of retention rates and the production of monthly reports on these. The college has a clear policy to address students' absenteeism and there are procedures for dealing with students' non-attendance. When students leave the college, they fill in a form on which they state their intended destination. Later in the same year, staff check students' intended destinations against their actual destinations. The data obtained from this follow-up exercise are unreliable. There is scope for making this follow-up procedure more effective. The college is able to identify the actual destinations of some of its students through its useful links with the careers service.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

27 The comprehensive students' support service is readily accessible to the majority of students; student support staff are based on three of the four main college sites. The number of specialist support staff has doubled in the last 12 months.

28 Printed information about college courses is comprehensive and of a high standard. Telephone enquiries about courses can be made on a direct line to the information and admissions services. Course entry requirements are set by subject specialists and records of these are held centrally for staff who deal with enquiries, to refer to when necessary. There is, however, some discrepancy between the college's entry requirements for GCE A level courses, as stated by teachers, and those which staff in student services understand to be in force. Enquiries from prospective full-time students and application procedures for full-time courses are administered centrally. Applications are followed up carefully and efficiently to ensure that the college maintains contact with applicants and offers the advice and guidance which they need. Part-time students are either enrolled by course teams, or through student services.

29 Potential students are able to visit the college on open evenings and for structured 'taster' sessions. Students value these opportunities to see the college before they enrol. Of the nine planned open evenings advertised

in the full-time prospectus during 1996-97, only one takes place at Ashfield College, and none is held at Chesterfield Road. The college has strong links with local schools for the recruitment of students. There is a college/schools consortium for the provision of GNVQ courses. School-leavers can progress from GNVQ intermediate level courses at their school to GNVQ advanced level courses at the college. The support which the college provides for school-leavers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who wish to progress to the college, is particularly well developed.

30 Pre-entry guidance is offered to all prospective students and it is mandatory for those wishing to attend on a full-time basis. Teachers from each curriculum area are available for consultation throughout July and August. Guidance is of high quality. Staff follow clearly-defined guidelines. Documentation is clear and comprehensive. Teachers and administrators work effectively together. Specialist careers advice is available where appropriate. All potential students are encouraged to attend college for an interview. A review of enrolment procedures, carried out in the autumn of 1996, revealed that 12 per cent of students felt, in the light of experience, that they would have made different choices at enrolment. The reasons why these students hold this view are being investigated by the college. There are arrangements for students to review their choice of course and to transfer to another course if it is appropriate for them to do so; in two curriculum areas, however, students were not aware of these arrangements. The accreditation of students' prior learning has a high profile in college publicity, but is not practised to the same extent across all the curriculum areas. Seven staff hold the training and development lead body award for the accreditation of prior learning. Some accreditation of students' prior learning occurs on art and design, access, hairdressing, catering, caring and business related courses.

31 There is a clear policy on the induction of students into the college and this is successfully implemented. The college has a well-planned induction programme for which there are detailed guidelines. Students receive a college handbook, which is clearly written and easy to understand. The college's charter is also given to all students at induction. In conjunction with the handbook, it provides students with clear guidelines on their rights and responsibilities. Course teams provide subject-specific information in course handbooks. Some of the language in foundation level course booklets is unnecessarily complex. Some students found the induction process overelaborate. In a college survey, however, 93 per cent of students stated that they had received appropriate information on their programme of study.

32 All full-time, and an increasing number of part-time students, are given an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. Students identified as needing additional support are offered extra tuition, which takes place in designated areas of the library and in the learning resource centres. Many students aged 16 to 18 regard their need to receive extra

tuition as indicative of their own failure. Few of these students opt to receive this extra tuition, but the numbers of adults who accept it are higher. A more successful form of additional learning support takes place within curriculum areas. For example, all GNVQ students undertake a detailed diagnostic assessment of their key skills. A comprehensive range of learning materials is available to the students which they can use, with help from their vocational tutors, to address their identified weaknesses in key skills. This form of support is generally provided in individual tutorials and it is regarded positively by students. The specific needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not always reviewed soon enough to ensure that these students receive the support early in their course.

33 Students feel well supported by their personal tutors. There are explicit guidelines for personal tutors. All tutors in the college follow the guidelines consistently and the quality of tutorials is high. Students' progress is regularly reviewed. The majority of full-time students, including adult learners, regularly update their records of achievement. In tutorials on the majority of courses, students undertake written reviews of their progress and they find these of great benefit to them. There is varied practice in the provision of written progress reports to students' parents or carers. In some cases, no written report, on students who started courses in September 1996, had been sent to their parents or carers by the middle of March 1997.

34 The student services team provides individual students with wide-ranging and high-quality support and guidance. This support, however, is more easily available on some campuses than on others. In order to provide greater consistency in the levels of support available on different campuses, specialist staff from student services move between sites on a regular basis. Students at the Rosemary Street and Ashfield sites, however, are not as well served with support services as students on other sites. Childcare facilities are available only at Chesterfield Road, but funds are available to enable parents to make their own local childcare arrangements. The college has excellent working relationships with the local careers service, which has an office at the college. The college also employs two additional careers guidance specialists. Careers information, including software, is available on each of the four main sites. Overall, the careers advice available to students is comprehensive in scope and it is of good quality. The counselling service is highly regarded by students. Contrary to normal professional practice, however, the counsellors are not subject to external supervision. Students have access to financial, legal and welfare advice. The full-time college nurse meets a wide range of students' health and health education needs.

35 Recreational activities and student union activities are based at Derby Road. There is little participation in these by students from other parts of the college. Lunchtime sporting activities involve seven college teams. Theatre trips, theme park visits and similar events are planned regularly.

There is no students' common room at either Derby Road or Chesterfield Road.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

36 Strengths outweighed weaknesses in 61 per cent of the lessons inspected. This compares with a proportion of 63 per cent for colleges inspected during 1995-96, according to figures published in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. Weaknesses outweighed strengths in 6 per cent of classes. This compares with a national figure of 8 per cent, according to the same report. Students' attendance rates in the lessons observed averaged 75 per cent. They ranged from 59 per cent in some humanities classes to 85 per cent in catering classes. The college carried out a survey on attendance in February 1997, and the findings of this showed average attendance rates of 82 per cent and 80 per cent for full-time students and for part-time students, respectively. The college acknowledges that unsatisfactory attendance is a matter of concern on approximately half the programmes in the college. The grades awarded to sessions inspected are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	5	9	14	0	0	28
GCSE	4	9	9	3	0	25
GNVQ	11	33	22	4	0	70
NVQ	5	28	12	3	0	48
Access to higher education	2	5	5	1	0	13
Higher education	0	3	2	0	0	5
Basic education	0	6	4	0	0	10
Other vocational*	17	28	25	4	0	74
Other	4	16	8	2	0	30
Total	48	137	101	17	0	303

* includes national certificates and diplomas, professional qualifications and City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) certificates.

37 There are good relationships between staff and students in all curriculum areas. Most teaching and learning sessions are well planned. Lesson plans and schemes of work are prepared for most courses. The lesson plans are of variable quality and some teachers explain the aims of lessons to their students more thoroughly than others. In general, lesson plans are used effectively in construction and art and design, but not in engineering, catering, English, psychology or sociology.

38 Most assessments are set at an appropriate level and they reflect course aims. Most assignment programmes are well planned. Students

are given clear assignment briefs and they are informed of the assessment criteria. However, on some business studies programmes, there are no formal assignment schedules and students' workloads are not balanced over the year. Many assignment briefs in art and design provide insufficient guidance for students and those in fashion have no clear assessment criteria. Most teachers mark work thoroughly and provide students with constructive and comprehensive comments on their performance; in a few instances, however, there is scope for improving the quality of the way in which work is assessed. In some mathematics lessons, teachers provided students with exclusively oral feedback on the quality of their work; as a result, students had no written record of how they might correct their errors and improve their performance. In engineering, some marking was thorough. In some instances, teachers of engineering, GCE A level English, history and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) failed to provide students with sufficient guidance on how they might improve their work.

39 In science lessons, practical work and demonstrations were sometimes used effectively to illustrate aspects of theory, such as the use of molecular models in organic chemistry. However, in some practical lessons, students displayed a lack of confidence in handling equipment. On GNVQ courses, students are developing key skills effectively but on other science courses, they do not develop such skills specifically. In computing, teachers made good use of question and answer sessions to check that students understood the lesson and to encourage students to engage in discussion. In practical lessons, some students worked conscientiously but a few wasted time and failed to complete their tasks within the normally expected timescale. In the mathematics and numeracy workshops the practice of setting standards and targets, reviewing them periodically, and monitoring progress towards their achievement, is developing well. In some lessons, teachers did not take sufficient account of the students' differing abilities when teaching the whole class. Students who are studying mathematics within vocational programmes are seldom given mathematical problems which are set in a vocational context.

40 In construction, students are encouraged to work on their own. The work they are set has clear relevance to the construction industry. NVQ students are taught to assess their work against the appropriate occupational standards and then to compare their assessments with those of their teachers. This approach helps to build students' confidence in their own ability and it strengthens their respect for their teachers' professional competence. Some students are capable of working more quickly; others are not pushed hard enough by their teachers.

41 In engineering, there is a good balance between practical and theoretical work. In lessons, students spend appropriate amounts of time taking notes and using handouts and booklets produced by the teacher. Practical work in the workshops is well organised. Students are able to progress at their own pace; they are provided with well-organised

worksheets and they receive help from the teacher when this is required. In motor vehicle workshops, students gain realistic work experience through working on customers' cars. However, they are not given sufficient feedback on their work or enough advice on how to improve their performance.

42 Much of the teaching and learning in secretarial and office skills is of a high standard. Staff are thorough in their record keeping and in their monitoring of students' progress. In some classes, the students had widely differing abilities and experience and their teachers made expert use of high-quality learning materials, tailoring these to suit the aptitudes of individual students. Some of the tasks set for students lack vocational realism and some teachers fail to draw on the experiences gained by students in work placements. Business studies lessons are carefully structured to include tasks which enable students to apply the knowledge and use the skills they have acquired. Part-time students are encouraged to draw on, and share, their work based experiences in class discussions. The teachers have produced some good resource packs. Some teachers, however, lack expertise in the use of teaching aids. On the GNVQ advanced level business programme, there is insufficient emphasis on current business practice, and students are not given sufficient opportunities to work on their own. On management and professional courses, teachers draw on the workplace experiences of individual students effectively and use these for the benefit of the class as a whole. Teaching materials are generally of a good standard.

43 In catering, lessons are well managed. Speakers from industry make useful contributions to theory lessons. Practical work is effective and it reflects current employment practices. Teachers provide students with excellent briefings for their practical work and in these they draw on and strengthen students' knowledge and experience of food production and service. Most key skills are effectively developed, but the work in numeracy carried out by GNVQ foundation students does not have sufficient vocational relevance.

44 Teachers of leisure and tourism provide students with a variety of appropriate learning experiences including stimulating group work and the use of topical resource material. They deal effectively with students of different abilities. Students are provided with insufficient simulated working environments which are realistic. Students are given inconsistent advice about developing portfolios of their work.

45 In health and social care, a variety of appropriate teaching and learning styles is used. Students are encouraged to draw on their own experiences. Some teachers are skilled at leading discussions, testing and challenging students' responses to questions and drawing out key issues. Other teachers, however, fail to ensure that all members of the group contribute to discussions. Teaching on counselling courses is effective but the conduct of practical exercises in counselling skills is hampered by inappropriate accommodation.

46 In hairdressing and beauty therapy, most teaching is of a good standard. Students' key skills are developed effectively. Students are able to work at their own pace using course handbooks. Teachers make good use of high-quality teaching aids. Sometimes the instructions given during practical lessons are unclear.

47 Art and design courses are well organised and students are provided with clear documentation about them. Teachers often make useful links between art and design and other subjects, and these help students to see their work in a wider context. Students are encouraged to assess their own work and to set targets for themselves. Teachers pay insufficient attention to developing students' numeracy and information technology skills. In performing arts, students work effectively in groups and approach their assessments in a professional way. Teachers' written comments on their work are pertinent and penetrative. Students studying popular music are given insufficient opportunities to work on their own. Work in the performing arts is not sufficiently well integrated with that in popular music. In fashion and textiles, the teachers are involved with local industries, and the curriculum is well matched to the needs of business. The teaching on part-time programmes is generally more enthusiastic and creative than that on full-time programmes. Teachers pay insufficient attention to the development of students' drawing skills and information technology skills. Much of the teaching in design and media is well prepared. Teachers make good use of their industrial links in order to develop realistic projects for their students. On some courses, peer group assessment is successful in developing the students' confidence, oral skills, and critical judgement.

48 Most GCSE English lessons are well taught but much of the teaching on other courses in English is dull. In foreign language lessons, staff display enthusiasm for their subjects and they carry out much of their teaching in the language being learnt. There is a tendency, however, for teachers, including those who are native-born speakers of the language being taught, to use too much English in lessons. Most teaching of geography, history and politics is well organised but students are rarely required to carry out research or to debate ideas. In general, teachers use handouts well, although some handouts are of poor quality. In some psychology and sociology lessons, effective use was made of practical work and video film. In some lessons, discussions were poorly managed and the teachers failed to ensure that all students contributed.

49 On courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, much of the teaching is effective. Teachers provide the students with encouraging and positive feedback on their performance. Appropriate attention is paid to health and safety in practical lessons. The 'vocational access' course provides an enriching residential experience for students and it includes a link programme for school pupils to ease their transition from school to college. Initial assessments of students are carried out but some of these are insufficiently rigorous. Some students who are only at

the beginners level in literacy, are in mixed ability groups; in lessons, these students received ineffective teaching which did not meet their individual needs. Lessons in ESOL are well prepared. Students work hard in lessons. In some instances, insufficient attention was given to individual students who were beginners in English.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

50 Students' retention rates on a number of courses are low. The retention rate on the GNVQ information technology course at advanced level was particularly poor, at 54 per cent over the two years 1994 to 1996. Only 19 of the 33 students enrolled on the BTEC national diploma course in travel and tourism in 1994, completed it in 1996, and the retention rate for the course was 58 per cent. By contrast, retention rates on most construction and engineering courses were good. The college has recognised the need to improve retention levels and it has made some progress during 1996-97 towards improving them.

51 The 1996 performance tables, published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) show that 61 per cent of the 115 students on the final year of vocational courses at intermediate level in 1996, achieved the qualification for which they were aiming. This places the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. In 1996, 82 per cent of the 171 students on vocational courses at advanced level achieved the qualification for which they were aiming. This places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector, on this performance measure. These results represent an improvement on those for 1995.

52 GNVQ students who completed their courses in 1996 had pass rates higher than the national average at intermediate level in science, business studies and leisure and tourism, and at advanced level in construction. Pass rates were below average at advanced level in science, engineering and leisure and tourism, and at foundation level in health and social care.

53 Students study for a wide range of qualifications. In 1996, they achieved good pass rates on the following courses:

- BTEC national diploma in electrical engineering (100 per cent)
- BTEC higher national certificate in mechanical engineering (100 per cent)
- NVQ level 2 in business administration (94 per cent; candidates were mature students)
- NVQ level 3 in hairdressing (91 per cent)
- NVQ level 2 in catering (90 per cent).

Results were poor on the part-time C&G motor vehicle servicing course and on the certificate course in childcare and education. On a number of NVQ courses, including some in caring, carpentry and joinery, and

hairdressing and beauty therapy, many students make slow progress and they take longer than the normal time to achieve the award.

54 In general, students' achievements are good, particularly in practical work. For example, students on courses in construction and engineering carry out practical work competently and safely; catering students work well in the kitchens and also achieve good information technology skills; and students on the arts-related course produce expressive, creative work. Students' written work is less impressive. There is poor use of English by some students on motor vehicle engineering and business courses.

55 Only a small proportion of students take GCE AS/A level examinations. The 104 students aged 16 to 18 who entered for at least one GCE AS/A level examination in 1996 scored, on average, 2.7 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This placed the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1996 performance tables published by the DfEE. Students' results in 1996 represent a small improvement on results for 1995. The college's GCE A level results are above the national average for colleges in the further education sector in history, geography and foreign languages, but below that average in art, physics, sociology, psychology, law, English and mathematics. The college's GCSE results are generally better than its GCE A level results, in that the proportion of students who gain grade C or above in their GCSE examinations is higher than the proportion of students who gain grade E or above in their GCE A level examinations.

56 Students on adult basic education courses, and on courses for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally make suitable progress and many are able to proceed to vocational courses. Few, however, gain qualifications such as those in wordpower and numberpower.

57 The college attempts an analysis of students' destinations by type of course, age group and mode of attendance. However, this analysis is not very successful and a high proportion of students' destinations remains unknown. In 1996, 43 per cent of students from intermediate level courses continued in further education and 16 per cent of advanced level students progressed to higher education. Only 16 per cent of GNVQ advanced students are known to have entered employment.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

58 The college has a policy on quality assurance which has been approved by the academic board and the corporation. The framework for quality assurance is closely linked to the strategic planning process. There is a quality management committee which is a subcommittee of the academic board. Its membership includes student representatives. It has clear terms of reference. Its main role is to ensure that issues raised in internal reviews and external evaluations are responded to appropriately.

59 There is a well-established process of course review and evaluation. In general, this is effective in identifying issues, and prompting action which leads to improvements. There are a few curriculum areas where course reviews lack rigour and self-critical analysis. The course review and evaluation process has eight stages which are appropriately spaced throughout the duration of the course under review. Each stage focuses on a particular aspect of the course. A course log provides a comprehensive record about each group of students taking the course. The format of the log, however, is not well suited for recording information about students whose starting and finishing points on the course are different from those of the other students. A simplified review document has been introduced for single-subject courses. Course teams are responsible for the quality of their courses. They must ensure that action plans are drawn up at the end of each stage of the review process, in order that the course may be further improved. There is some variability in the amount of detail in, and in the quality of, course action plans. All course teams are required to set targets for students' recruitment, attendance and retention rates, and achievements. There is scope for course teams to improve their analysis of their performance against these targets. A record is kept of the qualifications which students possess when they begin the course. Course teams do not compare the level of these qualifications with the level of the students' subsequent achievements, in order to assess the extent of progress which individual students, or groups of students, make during the course.

60 The teams of support staff are subject to a cycle of reviews. The teams maintain comprehensive files, in a common format, on their work and operations. The teams are in the process of setting targets against which their performance may be measured, and of identifying standards to which their services will conform. Staff in the teams say that they find this process valuable as a means of helping them to improve their own performance, and as a way of influencing decisions on cross-college issues and of informing the planning group of their views. The planning group attends the support staff managers' weekly meetings.

61 A programme, whereby teachers have their work in the classroom observed by their colleagues, has been developed and implemented. The response of staff to this programme of classroom observation is positive. They say that they find the process of being observed by their colleagues to be supportive and helpful. A pilot programme of classroom observation, involving approximately half the teaching staff, was undertaken in all the curriculum areas. Following this pilot programme, the process for classroom observation was reviewed and modified, and a rolling programme of observation has now commenced. Staff receive training in classroom observation. Staff who are observed receive feedback on their performance. Findings from the observations are reported to curriculum managers who, increasingly, take them into account when they draw up programmes for staff development. Any evaluation of the effectiveness of

teaching methods is not incorporated in course logs to enable staff to share good practice.

62 Students' views are sought through questionnaires and the responses to these are analysed centrally. Summaries of students' responses are recorded on bulletin sheets which are posted around the college. The bulletins do not give the college's responses to the issues raised. Students' responses on issues which are specific to courses are fed into course reviews, recorded in course logs, discussed at team meetings and taken into account in action planning. There is student representation at all course review meetings and on the quality management committee. Employers' views are sought through a questionnaire but few employers respond to this.

63 In addition to course reviews, classroom observation and questionnaires, there is an 'internal quality audit' which staff perceive to be positive and supportive. A process known as 'audit themes' relates to a particular system or set of systems, such as central admissions, library/resource centre systems or recording of students' achievements. A team of trained 'internal quality auditors' samples the work of teaching areas and support areas on a termly basis. Currently, the sample is chosen at random. Students' views are sought as part of the audit process. Issues requiring attention, and action to resolve problems, are identified. Issues are not 'signed off' until an auditor has confirmed that the appropriate action to deal with them has taken place. Most proposed new programmes are subject to an internal validation procedure for which there is a detailed procedures manual. There is also an effective framework for internal verification. This framework applies to all vocational programmes involving internal assessment of students' work which contributes towards the final assessment for a qualification.

64 The college produced a self-assessment report in preparation for inspection. Self-assessment documents have been compiled in previous years but this report was the first to follow the framework set out in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Self-assessment is supported by a guidance document produced by the college. Each curriculum and development area compiles its own self-assessment report which draws on the findings of its review procedures. The reports from the curriculum and development areas are then used, with other evidence, to inform the college's self-assessment report. The report has been considered by the corporation. It is presented clearly. It contains a balance between description, analysis and judgements. There are references to supporting documentation including the objectives in the strategic plan. No grades are awarded. The main strengths and weaknesses of the college, however, are identified. The self-assessment report is generally realistic but some of its action statements lack specificity.

65 The college's charter is a clearly-written document which is addressed to students, parents, employers and the local community. It is widely available on all sites. It contains some specific and measurable targets.

Each section provides readers with a reference as to where more detailed information can be obtained. The commitments given in the charter reflect the college's strategic objectives and priorities. Most students are aware of the charter and of their rights and responsibilities. They are not aware, however, of the right to appeal, through the college procedures, against gradings given to their work.

66 The college collaborates with an external agency to provide programmes in customer care in hospitality and catering, at an 'off site' centre. These programmes are not yet subject to the college's full quality assurance procedures. Regular meetings take place between staff from the agency and with college staff who have responsibility for quality assurance, and these meetings are minuted. The college has carried out internal verification of assignments and assessed work on these programmes. There is no documentation relating to the formal review and evaluation of these programmes.

67 There is a structured programme of induction for new staff. During their first year at the college, new staff are allocated a mentor who acts as a 'critical friend'. There is a comprehensive staff-development programme. Its chief aim is to help the college to meet its strategic objectives, but some training events reflect the particular needs and interests of individual staff. Staff feel that the programme is supportive and sufficient for their needs. The programme does not address teaching and learning strategies. Staff development is linked closely to strategic priorities and objectives, and staff-development needs are mainly identified at team and programme meetings and through reviews. The staff-development needs of individual members of staff are also identified in this way. There is a system for staff appraisal which is linked to staff development. Not all staff had been appraised at the time of the inspection. The budget for staff development is £160,000 which represents 2 per cent of the staffing budget. The college achieved Investor in People status in July 1996.

RESOURCES

Staffing

68 Teachers are appropriately qualified in the subjects they teach. Ninety-one per cent of the full-time and associate teachers have a teaching qualification. Staff who do not hold a teaching qualification are expected to obtain one and they receive support from the college to do so. Staff who are involved with courses leading to NVQs or GNVQs hold appropriate assessor and verifier awards. Teachers on vocational courses have relevant commercial or industrial experience although for some of them, this is not recent.

69 The level and quality of technician support are good in most areas. When new equipment is introduced technicians receive appropriate training to help them use it. There is, however, insufficient technician

support for the college's expanding computing services. Two additional technicians are undertaking training in order that they may help with these services.

70 The staff are effectively deployed. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of support staff. The ratio of support staff to teaching staff is now close to one-to-one in full-time equivalent terms. The introduction of learning adviser and vocational assessor posts has made it easier for managers to adjust the deployment of staff in response to changes in the curriculum. Staffing budgets are devolved to curriculum area managers and are closely monitored. The budget for a curriculum area is determined by the students that area recruits.

71 There are clear procedures for dealing with staff appointments, staff records, staff development, welfare, discipline and the termination of employment. The college employs external consultants to advise on particular aspects of personnel matters. Staffing is analysed by gender, ethnicity, disability and age. One of the senior management team of six is a woman. Across the management team as a whole there is a more even balance between the numbers of men and women. The college employs 11 staff with registered disabilities.

Equipment/learning resources

72 Budgets for consumable items are devolved to curriculum area managers. Staff understand the system of bidding for funds for capital equipment. They receive feedback on the progress of their bids within a reasonable timescale. The criteria for approving bids are not always clear to staff. There is some flexibility within the financial system for curriculum managers to contribute a proportion of their revenue budgets to the costs of capital items. There is a computerised assets register that calculates potential costs which may be incurred through the depreciation of equipment and these are included in the budget forecast. In this way, the college identifies funding needed to replace equipment.

73 In many vocational areas, the equipment matches that found in industry. The college has much good equipment. This includes: a good range of modern industrial catering appliances; good computing equipment and software for art and design students on graphics courses; appropriate electronic and electrical equipment for demonstrations and testing in engineering; a 'radio station' for media students; and a range of suitable equipment in construction. In some areas, such as science and mechanical engineering much of the equipment is dated. General teaching equipment is of good quality and most classrooms have overhead projectors, screens and whiteboards. Audio-visual equipment is provided through a centrally co-ordinated service and it is generally adequate. There is a central reprographics facility, and this is used increasingly for the production of good-quality learning materials.

74 There are a few curriculum areas where equipment is insufficient. In media there are not enough video editing facilities; performing arts students need more sound and lighting systems. Textiles equipment is of adequate quality but of insufficient quantity.

75 On each of the four main sites there is a library/learning resource centre where students can use books, videos and learning material held on computers and compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases, in order to study on their own. There are sufficient library staff. The stock of books and periodicals is generally sufficient in quantity although some is dated. Some books are also held in curriculum areas and these are not listed on the central catalogue. In conjunction with course teams, the learning resource centre staff have produced over 400 helpful project packs on popular topics.

76 The college has recently established a computer communications network within and between the four main sites. This has been extended to one 'outreach' centre. The network provides all students with access to information and learning materials. Many of the computers are kept in the learning resource centres which are open from 08.30 hours to 21.00 hours on weekdays and on Saturday mornings. There is supervised access to electronic mail and the Internet. Overall, the ratio of students to computers is 7:1. At certain times, on two of the college's sites, there is heavy demand for computers from students who wish to work on their own, and some students cannot gain access to a machine. There is no computerised reception system for use by catering students. The number of computer workstations in staff rooms is insufficient to enable all teachers to use computers for administrative purposes and for lesson preparation.

Accommodation

77 The college has a range of buildings. The oldest building was built in 1898 and the most recent dates from 1982. The accommodation includes two purpose-built colleges on two different sites; one of these colleges was opened before the war and the other was erected in 1982. The remainder of the buildings have been converted into educational premises. Curriculum managers can, in their annual bid for resources, request funding for modifications to accommodation; some of the buildings, however, do not lend themselves to adaptation. The college has employed consultants to assist in drawing up an accommodation strategy. The original strategy has been updated because of changes in the college's strategic plan. There is a 10-year planned maintenance programme which is regularly reviewed in the light of curriculum developments and the progress made in implementing the accommodation strategy. A survey of the college's accommodation found that some parts of the college presented problems of access for people in wheelchairs. Some of these problems have been addressed but they remain on two sites. The accommodation strategy recognises that these problems need to be addressed in a phased way because the buildings on these sites, and the sites themselves, cannot easily be adapted to suit wheelchair users.

78 The college regularly carries out surveys on the utilisation of accommodation and these show that the college's use of space has improved over the last 12 months. A committee has been set up to identify and resolve problems relating to room utilisation. There are some mismatches between the size of rooms and the size of classes using them. There is also some inappropriate timetabling of non-specialist classes in specialist accommodation.

79 Internally, the college buildings are generally well maintained and clean and they provide a pleasant working environment. They have been subject to some recent improvements including the development of the learning centres, the creation of a glazed gallery area at Chesterfield Road, and the refurbishment of the Woodhouse Road accommodation. Some accommodation, including some of the science laboratories and the business centre, is in need of attention. Noise penetration is a problem at Woodhouse Road. There is no travel shop or language centre. There are insufficient study spaces at Derby Road. The refectory at Chesterfield Road is of poor quality. There are insufficient social areas for students on most sites.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

80 Particular strengths of the college are:

- its many initiatives to widen participation in education and training
- its effective and supportive governors
- its effective management
- the strong growth in student numbers over the last two years
- the good quality of much of the teaching
- the good achievement rates of students who complete their courses
- the effective monitoring of performance against targets
- the close links between strategic planning and the quality assurance processes
- the effective deployment of staff
- its learning resource centres
- the effective support for students.

81 In order to build on its strengths, the college should improve:

- students' retention rates
- examination pass rates on some courses
- internal management information systems
- the use of performance indicators at course level
- the evaluation of teaching and learning methods as part of course review
- facilities for students' private study

-
- social and refectory accommodation
 - the availability of student support services on some sites.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at March 1997)

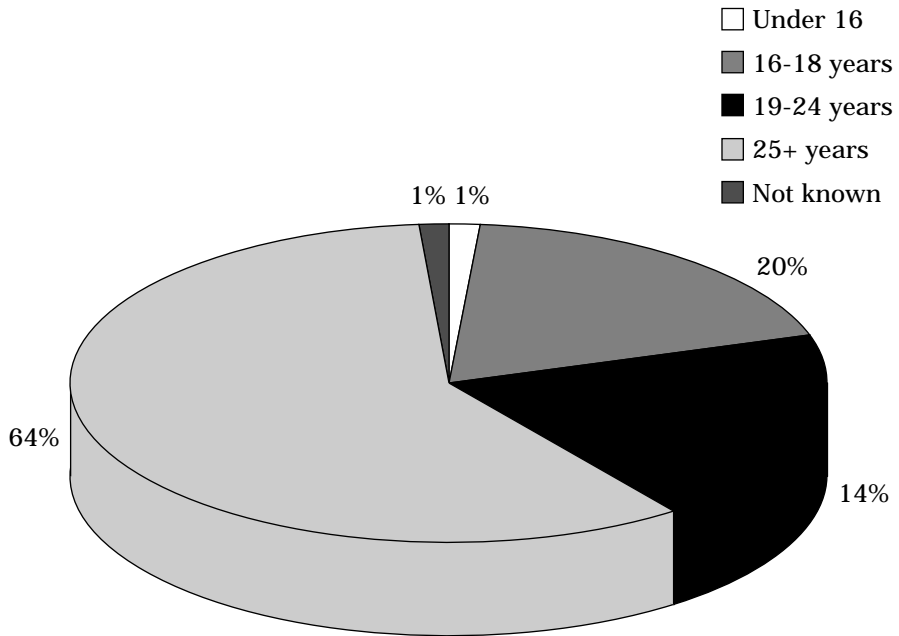
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

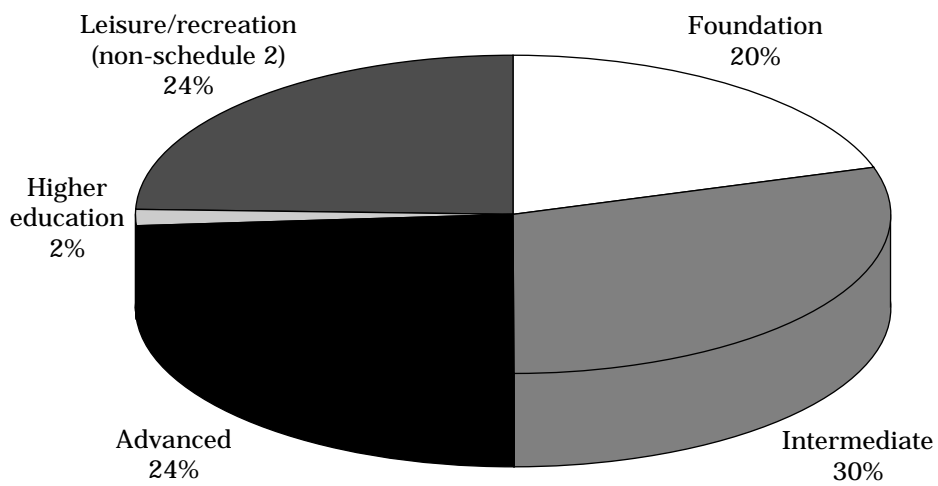
West Nottinghamshire College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 10,176

Figure 2

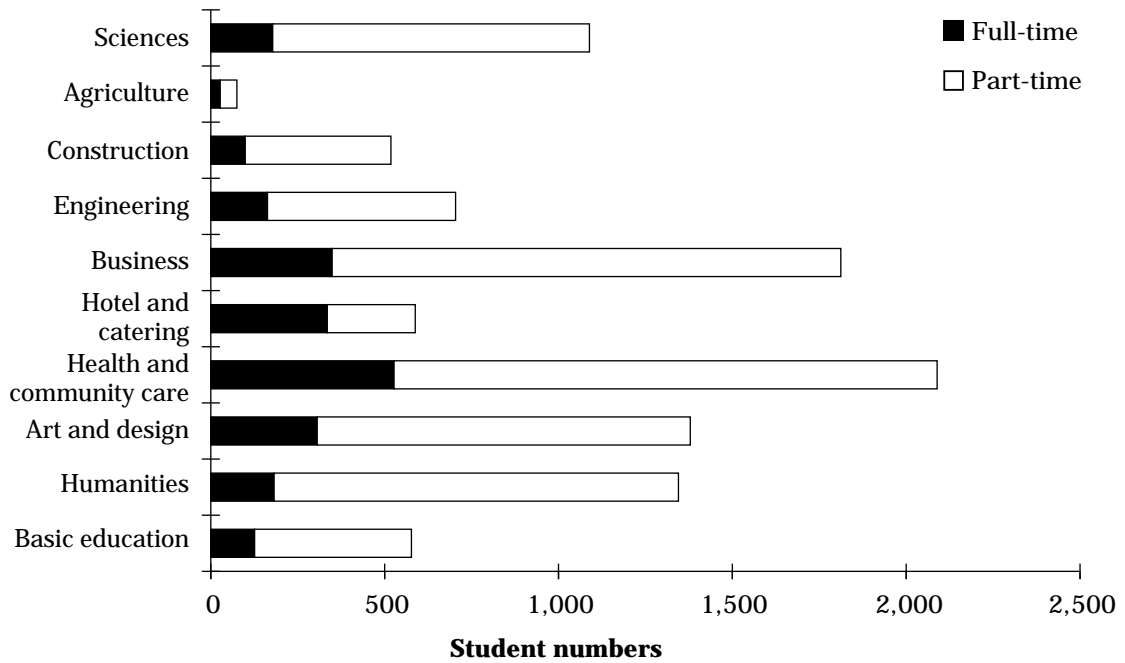
West Nottinghamshire College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 10,176

Figure 3

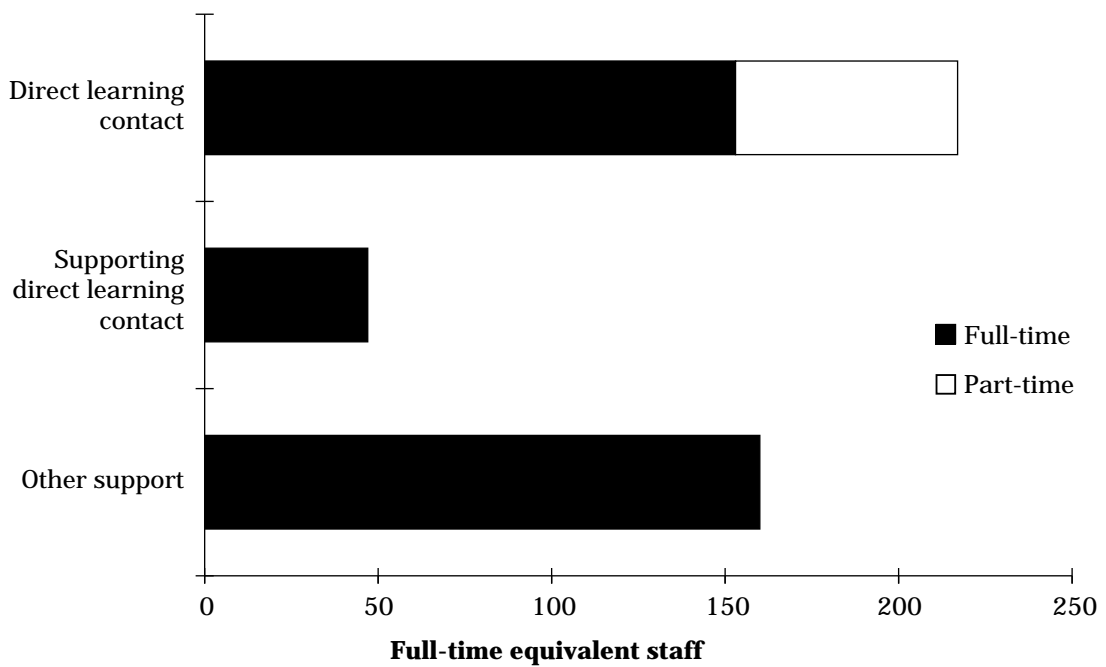
West Nottinghamshire College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 10,176

Figure 4

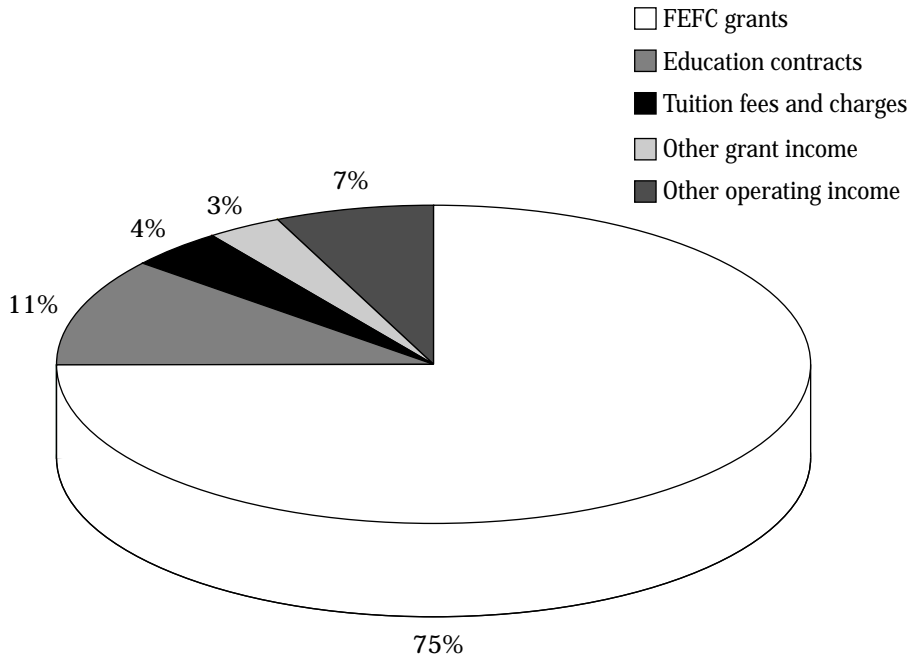
West Nottinghamshire College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at March 1997)



Full-time equivalent staff: 424

Figure 5

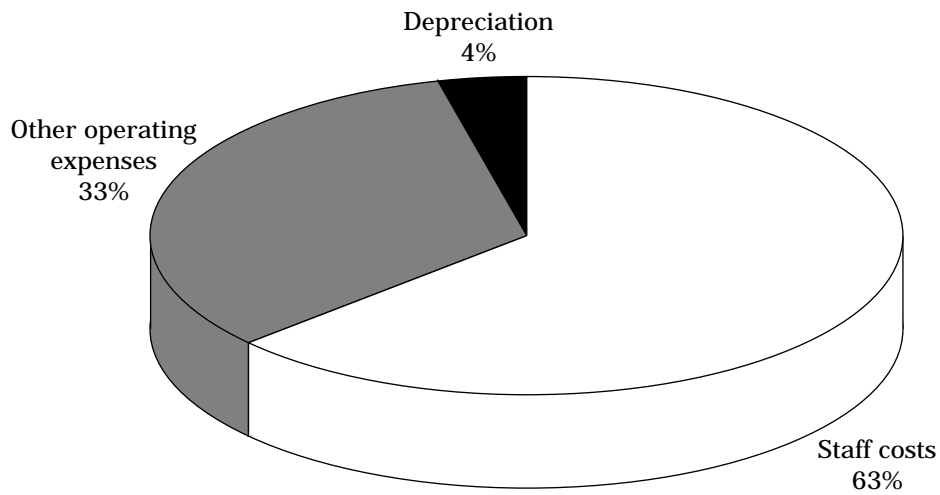
West Nottinghamshire College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £12,023,000

Figure 6

West Nottinghamshire College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £12,096,000

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