

REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE

Otley College

February 1995

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.

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 clearly in their reports. They also use a five-point 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 11/95

OTLEY COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected July – November 1994

Summary

Otley College is the major provider of agricultural and horticultural courses in Suffolk. The college is responsive in meeting a wide range of education and training needs. The college has a committed staff who are led with vision. Staff are well informed about initiatives in further education and issues facing education in the land-based industry. Considerable growth in course provision and services has been achieved over the last two years. Students are recruited from a wide area. They are highly motivated and show a good deal of vocational commitment. Students are careful and conscientious in their practical work. There are good work experience arrangements for full-time students. A high proportion of students go on to further education or employment related to their studies. Teachers are well qualified and have considerable industrial experience which is effectively drawn upon in well-planned practical classes. There is sensitive and responsive guidance and support for students. The provision of resources for learning including the range of practical facilities and equipment is good. There has been however, little critical review of students' achievements by the corporation. Insufficient attention has been given to academic issues such as evaluation of the curriculum and the effectiveness of teaching. The system for providing students with additional skills to become more effective learners is underdeveloped. Other matters to be addressed include the development of the management information system, the high non-completion rates and low rates of examination success on some courses, and the implementation of an effective cross-college quality assurance system.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Agriculture, including animal care and equine studies	3	Learning support	3
Horticulture, including environmental management and floristry	3		
Business management and administration	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1 Otley College, Suffolk, was inspected between July and November 1994. A team of seven inspectors spent a week in the college from 31 October to 4 November. A further 23 days were used to inspect specialist aspects of college provision. Inspectors visited 92 classes, examined samples of students' work and held discussions with governors, staff and students. They also met representatives of local employers, higher education institutions, schools and the community including the Suffolk Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and the local education authority (LEA).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 The college operates from a single site at Otley, seven miles north of Ipswich. The college is the major provider of agriculture and horticulture courses in Suffolk. There are three general further education colleges in the county; at Lowestoft, Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds. In the eastern region there are also four other colleges offering agriculture and horticulture courses: Easton College in Norfolk, Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture, Oaklands College in Hertfordshire, and Writtle Agricultural College in Essex.

3 The college was established in 1970 to teach day-release and part-time courses in agriculture. Horticulture was included in the curriculum in 1974. In 1987, the first full-time course was established. The college draws students from outside Suffolk and has also opened centres outside the county. College courses are organised under three broad curriculum directorates: agriculture, horticulture, and environmental management.

4 The college set a target of 8 per cent growth in student numbers for 1993-94 and exceeded this by a further 4 per cent. In November 1993, there were 5,243 students on roll of whom 44 were on higher education programmes. Out of a total of 895 full-time equivalent students there were 476 undertaking full-time study. Of all enrolments, some 3,605 were over the age of 25. Percentage enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2, respectively. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. The college employs 117 full-time staff of whom 57 are teaching or supporting teaching. There are over 52 full-time equivalent part-time teachers. A staff profile with staff expressed as full-time equivalents is given in figure 4.

5 The county is divided by the LEA into three areas: northern, southern and eastern. Otley College is situated in the southern area in which there are 16 secondary schools, six of them with sixth forms. There are to be two new sixth forms at Hartismere High School in Eye and Copleston/Holywells High School in Ipswich which will open in September 1996. There are also four special schools in the Ipswich area. In recent years the post-16 participation rate has risen throughout Suffolk from 66

per cent in 1992 to 73 per cent in 1993, which is in line with the national average.

6 Ninety per cent of the land area of Suffolk is devoted to agriculture with arable farming accounting for 74 per cent of the available agriculture land. Some 5.3 per cent of the population are engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing. The county has a large number of small industrial and commercial firms and 87 per cent of all businesses employ less than 25 people.

7 Between 1990 and 1993, unemployment in Suffolk rose by 150 per cent. Figures for August 1994 show unemployment across the county to be 6.7 per cent. In the travel to work areas of Ipswich and Woodbridge/Leiston, unemployment rates were 6.6 and 5.4 per cent, respectively.

8 The college is built on 16 hectares of land leased from the Felix Thomley Cobbold Agricultural Trust by Suffolk County Council. The Trust also owns the adjacent 200 hectare arable farm which is a demonstration farm used by the college for some of its activities. The college is unusual in not owning its own farm or site.

9 The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is £18.24 per unit. The median for agriculture and horticulture colleges is £28.69 per unit. The overall median for sector colleges is £19.14. The college's income and expenditure is shown in figures 5 and 6.

10 Forty-six per cent of the college's income is from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Funding for 145 full-time equivalent students comes from other sources. In 1993, the college received £92,700 from the European Social Fund. In 1994, the fund will provide £42,000 for vocational training leading to jobs in the rural community. Otley College has contracts with three TECs in the area: Suffolk TEC, Essex TEC, and Norfolk and Waveney TEC. The college also has links, largely for development work, with the Glasgow Development Agency Local Enterprise Council and Durham TEC. Suffolk TEC was a pilot for the training credits scheme which is now in its fourth year of operation. The college received £1,138,100 for its work with the three TECs.

11 In its mission statement, the college aims to provide wider vocational opportunities for young people and adults in land-based industries and environmental conservation in the United Kingdom and Europe. It intends to do this by delivering the knowledge, understanding and skills required flexibly and to the highest standards, resulting in appropriate nationally-recognised qualifications in further and higher education for its students.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

12 College managers and teachers are well informed about national initiatives and policies in the further education sector and about the issues facing education in the land-based industry. There are clearly-stated plans for attracting more people to study at the college. The college has

met its enrolment targets. Full-time equivalent enrolments rose by 42 per cent between 1991-93. The college has developed high-quality manuals for trainers and trainees to support work-based assessment of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Staff are also working with employers to provide NVQs in conservation and the landscape sector. The provision of NVQs as a secondary qualification in further education courses is an important part of the college's strategy to support the National Targets for Education and Training.

13 The college is sensitive to changes in the rural community and is responsive to a wide range of local and some national needs, for education and training. Over the last five years, the college has expanded the range and number of full-time and part-time courses. There are good opportunities for students entering land-based industries and, with few exceptions, these lead to more advanced courses. Developments are generally well planned, taking account of likely demand and resource requirements. In addition to vocational further education, the college offers a range of services including training packages, consultancy and specific courses for industry. Some courses run with low numbers. In the future a more systematic review of teaching group sizes will be required. This is being addressed in this year's strategic planning.

14 Advisory groups are used effectively to consult with industry. Most course development has taken account of the views of industry. Although the initial interest in animal care arose from an identified demand from students, the development of the provision involved close consultation with industry. Staff maintain links with many past students and their views on specialist provision are sought informally. The outcomes from the various information sources are not always used effectively to support planning. For example, the needs analysis for past course planning has not always been sufficiently detailed, and the link with development proposals has not been explicit. Strategic planning for this year provides opportunities for the systematic analysis of market intelligence. To support this process procedures have been introduced to evaluate new course proposals. Not all staff fully understand this aspect of strategic planning and some will require support in carrying out their responsibilities.

15 There is a comprehensive range of courses in agriculture which allows for alternative patterns of attendance and routes for progression. The provision of NVQ units in addition to their main qualification improves students' employability. There is a good range of provision for environmental management, which include both full-time and part-time further education courses, and specific courses for industry. In conservation management the college has a national reputation. In horticulture the wide range of specialist options available generally relates well to local industry. Garden centre courses have been offered in the past but demand was too low for them to run and the college now meets this need through bespoke training. Animal care has developed rapidly since its introduction in 1993, and demand has been strong. Students completing

the first diploma, introduced last year, are able to progress to the national diploma which started this year. The restricted range of equine studies is realistically based on likely demand and the availability of resources.

16 The college has good higher education links in land-based studies with Writtle College and the University of East Anglia. The two higher national diploma courses for landscape construction and rural resource management franchised from Writtle College, and the degree and diploma in higher education courses, validated from the University of East Anglia, have recruited well.

17 Training in business management and administration is developing rapidly and the nature of the courses has been adjusted to meet the needs of students and industry. Flexible arrangements enable work to be carried out with schools and on employers' premises. The inclusion of management qualifications in full-time vocational courses is a benefit to students entering employment. A range of information technology courses in business management is also being developed. There has been insufficient co-ordination and planning of curriculum components in information technology in relation to overall course requirements. A co-ordinator for this work was being appointed at the time of the inspection.

18 The college has attempted to promote equality of opportunity for students. There is a learning support progress review team to ensure that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have access to specific programmes and mainstream vocational courses. The college has an equal opportunities policy but the policy is unknown to some staff and there is no implementation strategy. There is no mention of the promotion of equality of opportunity in the strategic plan and little staff development has taken place in this area. There are strong gender imbalances among students recruited to some courses though this generally reflects traditional patterns of recruitment. Some course tutors make particular efforts to support minority groups.

19 The college's business development unit, established in 1992, responds to industry's needs for training and consultancy through a range of services. The unit had a turnover of £450,000 in 1993-94. The business development unit has led the college's flexible approaches to delivering training, through its outreach work with employers. The expertise and materials developed are being used to benefit other areas of college activity. The unit's work is not sufficiently linked to the college's strategic planning. Draft proposals have been developed to achieve this.

20 There are effective arrangements for promoting the college's services. A range of attractive publicity material meets the needs of prospective clients, whether their enquiries are of general interest or relate to specific requirements. The new college prospectus, sponsored by BT, provides a good overview of the college's activities and philosophy. The college organises a number of events to publicise its services, including general-

interest open days and events catering for special interests, when potential students can also be interviewed. Seasonal rural-interest weekends involve local groups exhibiting at the college, and these events attract lots of visitors. At the college's Saturday schools more than 10 courses are provided covering a wide range of leisure and vocational activities. Although the college's marketing activities have many strengths, the recently-developed marketing policy lacks detail on procedures, and on the monitoring and evaluation of activities.

21 Good links exist with local TECs. For example, the Suffolk TEC has sponsored the development of dual accreditation materials using 'numberpower' and 'wordpower' for use on vocational courses, and several projects such as the rural business development project and a project on guidance for adults on work in Suffolk. The college is an active member of several local groups. The principal chairs the employer training network in the Suffolk coastal area. Recently, the college established an office in north Suffolk to deliver training programmes for Norfolk and Waveney TEC. The college has been instrumental in supporting local businesses through the 'Taste of Suffolk' (now the 'Taste of Anglia') project to market local produce. The link with Essex TEC involves youth training and training for work. Although the college has been successful in attracting several short term projects from TECs these are not always integrated into the college's day-to-day activities.

22 Links with the LEA are good. The LEA continues to provide the clerk for governors' meetings. Careers officers and education advisers have close contact with the college. The LEA's environmental science adviser has an office at the college. Liaison with high schools and special schools is extensive and includes link courses, taster courses and general support such as advising on their gardens and assisting in curriculum development. Some joint curriculum development includes running General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) environmental science and deploying teachers to work in schools on particular programmes. Following their work together under the Technical Vocational and Education Initiative, the college and local schools have continued working in partnership. In the learning support area there are good links with social services.

23 The college has a clear commitment to continue developing its well-established European links. It has several joint initiatives with European partners which include support for environmental education. An increasing number of students have work placements or study programmes in other European countries. A report on a 10-day visit to Denmark by environmental management students showed that the students had gained valuable insight into Danish attitudes towards conservation management.

24 The college has responded to the needs of prospective students who have difficulty travelling to the college or who are not able to attend during

normal periods. Negotiations with local public transport companies have led to timetables that match students' travel requirements more closely. In horticulture and environmental management, provision for low numbers of students has been maintained by combining full-time and part-time students on common modules from different programmes. An appreciable number of mature students, including those seeking a career change, have taken advantage of these flexible arrangements. Such flexibility does not exist in other curriculum areas.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

25 The corporation board has 15 governors. There are currently 14 governors in post of whom nine have industrial experience in agriculture, horticulture and engineering businesses in the county and beyond. The corporation also includes a chartered surveyor, a union district officer, a member of the Suffolk TEC who is also in the travel business, the principal, and an elected staff representative. The clerk to the governors is drawn from the LEA and is able to advise on LEA issues at corporation meetings. The corporation has had steady membership during a period when significant developments have been made in the college provision but expertise from education and some vocational areas is now limited.

26 Corporation meetings are well attended and the board forms smaller groups to consider specific corporation issues. In particular, the corporation seeks to maintain the college in a sound financial position. Individual members have participated in staff appointments and advised on curriculum developments, such as General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) and business needs in the community. They have also helped the college to develop relationships with external bodies. The corporation benefits from advisory councils appointed for each of the main curriculum areas of the college: agriculture, horticulture and environmental management.

27 The governors have agreed the college's mission statement but have made little contribution to the strategic plan. They are aware of future challenges such as reduced funds for student grants, transport costs, and competition from schools. The board has not established the performance criteria by which it can critically review and monitor students' achievements and the college's work.

28 The 1994-97 strategic plan reflects programme area achievements and includes a comprehensive set of corporate objectives. The college has improved the process of bringing together departmental plans and monitoring the achievement of objectives. However, staff need to develop an understanding of their part in supporting college planning.

29 The senior management team consists of the principal, vice-principal, three curriculum directors, a director of corporate affairs and the bursar. This group meets fortnightly to co-ordinate college operations. The team also meets as the strategic planning group and reports to the academic

board. The line management structure is well understood by staff and has been effective during the rapid expansion of the college.

30 The principal provides strong entrepreneurial leadership. His guidance has resulted in the considerable expansion of course provision and services offered by the college. His vision is shared by the vice-principal. Together, they have sought opportunities, and raised the necessary funding from sponsors, to develop the provision of the college. Staff have ready access to all members of the senior management team. However, until recently, few staff were included in decision making and communication between senior managers and the general body of staff was inadequate.

31 Each of the three curriculum directors is responsible for a number of teaching sections which develop and deliver the various programmes of study. The section heads, supported by team leaders, are responsible for the day-to-day management of the courses. Section heads meet regularly and provide an effective forum for considering matters of common concern. There are clear records of management meetings including appropriate plans of action and review procedures. Curriculum directors meet regularly with their heads of section. There is generally good planning at this level, although co-ordination of the development of work in business management should be strengthened.

32 The corporation and senior management have successfully expanded the college's activities. Only 46 per cent of the college's income in 1993-94 was from the FEFC. There has been a heavy reliance on the goodwill of staff and the community to achieve this expansion. Increased course provision during recent years, combined with the requirements for greater accountability, has placed a heavy administrative load on full-time teaching and support staff. The amount of administrative work undertaken by full-time staff is greater because of the high proportion of part-time teachers. The time available for lesson planning and preparation has been reduced as a result.

33 The main concern of senior managers has been income generation and curricular growth. Consequently, insufficient attention has been paid to quality issues such as the evaluation of the curriculum and the effectiveness of teaching and learning across the college. There is, for example, no one at senior management level with responsibility for improving the quality of courses or for co-ordinating the development of teaching and learning. There is no strategy for ensuring that college policies on quality assurance, equal opportunities, and tutoring, are communicated to all staff and then effectively implemented. Many managers and teachers take on several responsibilities. Their job descriptions do not describe their work and their levels of responsibilities accurately.

34 The college budget and three-year forecast are produced by the college bursar and accountant under the direction of the principal. Budget

allocation is based on the historical expenditure of curriculum areas with adjustments to reflect proposed changes in provision and the number of students enrolled. Income and expenditure plans are published for those parts of the college which are trading to provide services to students or an outlet for farm produce. Most members of the senior management team have little involvement in determining the budget allocations. Middle managers are hindered in their forward planning because expenditure is not devolved.

35 There are a number of independent manual and computerised systems which, with varying effectiveness, provide information on enrolment, personnel, finance, and staff and room utilisation. The college has recently installed a computer network with 25 terminals which can host a range of databases and software application packages. This system has the potential to enable the college to process and share information more effectively in support of course and student administration.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

36 There are well-tested manual systems for receiving and processing applications from students. Students are generally recruited to appropriate courses. Responses to enquiries are made speedily, all enquiries are logged and details are sent to departments to follow up. The student office keeps clear records and a file on each student but information on additional support for students is not yet placed on the central student file. Application and interview forms are available centrally and there is a standard approach to interviewing. Staff are selected as interviewers on the basis of their knowledge and skills but they have received little additional training to undertake this task. Staff in the student office and course tutors are helpful to many students who have difficulties with grants and funding, but none has single responsibility for liaising with the LEAs' student grant sections over grant applications.

37 There are effective arrangements for implementing accreditation of prior learning in the business development unit. In this unit, the college uses its own computer software to determine the training and assessment needs for managers in industry. Other areas of provision could benefit from the unit's experience in the modularisation of courses, assessment of management needs and accreditation of prior learning.

38 Induction sessions are generally well planned and effective. Students receive a thorough and informative introduction to the college and their courses. Although there is a departmental rather than college-wide approach to induction, a suggested list of topics for induction sessions is included in the college's quality statement. Emphasis is placed on ensuring that students are enrolled on to suitable courses and there is an opportunity to transfer between courses during the induction period. There are comprehensive induction packs which provide clear information on the objectives, activities and outcomes for each induction session. Students

say they value being able to get a feel for their course before it starts. A realistic introduction to the vocational areas takes place on some courses such as animal care, floristry, and horse management. Staff give appropriate attention to health and safety issues as part of the introduction to vocational areas. Some staff went out of their way to build good relationships with students and problems were handled well. However, some staff were unclear about the main purpose of induction. Induction does not include an introduction to study skills, which students would find useful.

39 Course tutors and course managers are strongly committed to student guidance and support. The college has an effective tutorial system. Students have an entitlement to at least four individual tutorials per year. The main purpose of tutorials is to ensure that students have a plan of action and are helped with any problems. In addition to giving guidance in tutorials, course tutors take a keen interest in their students' progress, giving them personal support, advice on careers, and sometimes helping them to find employment. There is a system for logging students' absence at teaching sessions and course tutors are clear about their responsibilities to monitor absence. The student office checks on teachers' records of students' absence.

40 Course tutors are responsible for liaising with the careers service. The Suffolk careers advisory service provides a service to the college which is adequate to meet the students' demand for advice and guidance. The careers library is comprehensive and well used by students. Students also have access to a counselling service at the college. A member of the teaching staff is a qualified counsellor and she spends half a day each week in this role. The service is not well known to students. There is no remit or job description for the post holder, no clear line manager and the room used for counselling students is inadequate.

41 The college ensures that full-time students under 19 have a record of achievement. It is optional but encouraged for other students. The college is accredited and regularly audited by the Oxford and Cambridge Joint Board for the National Record of Achievement. The college is active in the County Record of Achievement Group, co-ordinated by the LEA. Course tutors have been given the National Record of Achievement handbook written by the LEA but there has been no recent staff development to assist teachers in using the National Record of Achievement.

42 Staff share information about students' need for support and monitor students' progress at course team meetings. The frequency and arrangement of these meetings varies between departments. Minutes are made available to part-time staff. The level of student information possessed by teaching staff is of variable quality and this sometimes prevents teachers from providing appropriate support for individual students. The weekly section heads' meeting allows matters relating to recruitment and guidance to be discussed at a college level, with staff from all sections.

43 A screening test is used across the college to assess basic skills. The test was introduced with good staff training. However, some students who need basic skills support do not receive help as speedily as they might.

44 Arrangements for learning support on mainstream courses are under developed. They are limited to help with literacy and numeracy and generally provided outside class time. The college has no workshops available on a drop-in basis, which students could use to improve their computer skills, writing, research and note taking skills or to obtain extra help with their assignments. Links between vocational staff and basic skills support staff are under developed. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the support which is provided are weak.

45 The college has few social events for students although the college ball in the summer term followed by prize giving was very popular. There is no students' common room and there is little social integration between students on different courses. Students have asked for more involvement in the planning of college facilities.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

46 Ninety-two teaching sessions were inspected. Of these, 46 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses which is somewhat lower than is usually found. The major strengths were found in practical sessions. Teaching of theory in the classroom did not reach the same standard. The grades awarded to teaching sessions are given below.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GNVQ		0	1	4	1	0	6
NVQ		1	10	4	0	0	15
Other (vocational)		4	7	12	4	0	27
Other		6	13	18	7	0	44
Total		11	31	38	12	0	92

47 With few exceptions the practical classes are well planned and prepared. There are clear objectives for the sessions. In the majority of the practical sessions students worked well. In a few, students were not given enough written guidance to be able to work independently.

48 Most practical teaching is effective in developing students' confidence, skills and understanding. Techniques are clearly demonstrated by the teacher and students are carefully supervised in their practice. For example, key elements of horse riding are clearly identified and teachers' critical analysis improves students' performance. In floristry, teachers provided well-directed guidance and positive support. In a session on plant identification, the teacher reinforced the knowledge and understanding of the students through a stimulating process of self and

peer evaluation: there was an excellent atmosphere and the students enjoyed and were committed to the work. Students are also given good opportunities to develop a range of core skills such as oral communication and problem solving, although such skills are not always included in lesson objectives.

49 Although there were some effective theory sessions, others had significant weaknesses. In the good sessions teachers were clear about what they wanted the students to achieve. They identified learning needs and ensured that students were working to good effect. A class on respiratory functions for students following the first diploma course in horse care was well prepared and there were clear objectives which were made known to the students. The topic was developed logically with frequent and relevant use of examples to explain complex terms. Through skilful questioning the teacher involved students in discussion and remedied gaps in their understanding. In the weak classes there was little opportunity for students to work on their own or in small groups; teachers failed to take into account the range of experience and ability in the class; there were few checks on students' levels of understanding; weaker students did not receive the attention they required; the more able students were not appropriately challenged; or students spent too much time copying notes.

50 For most students, there is an appropriate balance between theoretical and practical work in the coursework to be assessed. Teachers make extensive use of assignments and other coursework, to increase students' technical knowledge and understanding as well as to develop their communication skills. Normally there are clear guidelines for assignment work, which set out the background for the exercises in detail. The topics for assignments are often realistic commercial exercises. In some cases, however, the guidance on how assignments are marked and what they contribute to the final assessment is unclear. Most teachers provide helpful written comments to students on their course work, and identify areas for improvement. However, students need more help in structuring their coursework.

51 In business management and administration there is generally a high standard of teaching and promotion of learning. Well-devised work schemes allow for flexibility in the organisation of teaching and learning. Students take part in a range of relevant activities. They add to their learning experience by working in the college's rural business centre and on work placements. Project work is used effectively to develop students' knowledge and understanding.

52 Much of the work on courses designed for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities shows a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Most classes are carefully planned and have clear aims which students understand. There are frequent checks on learning and action is taken to remedy weaknesses. As with other courses in the college, teachers

do not give students enough opportunity to work on their own, or in small groups. There are few examples of students in the same class working on different tasks according to their abilities.

53 All full-time students are provided with at least six weeks work experience. This gives them good opportunities to broaden their technical experience and to develop personal skills. It also provides them with information for career choices and allows their employability to be judged. On most courses students carry out a work placement exercise which is assessed by the provider. Most students value work experience but some were critical of the low level of support they received and some employers were dissatisfied with the low level of contact with the college. There are clear and appropriate work experience arrangements for students on Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses. A comprehensive information pack on the requirements is sent to work placement providers. The college has identified actions it will take to provide appropriate support for all students in its annual review of work placements.

54 In all programme areas, most documents concerned with course management and with information for students are of a high standard. Most schemes of work are comprehensive although some give insufficient information on how the integration of related elements of the curriculum is to be achieved. Personal development and core skills are often not given sufficient priority. There is a well-organised student guide for information technology but the quality of teaching varies between departments.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

55 Overall, a satisfactory proportion of full-time students complete their studies in the normal minimum time. Just over 85 per cent of those who enrolled on certificate and diploma courses in 1993-94 completed their course and entered the examination and 84 per cent of these were successful in gaining full awards. In floristry, 95 per cent of those on the national certificate completed the course but only 50 per cent attained full awards in the normal minimum time. Normally, students return to complete their study and gain full awards.

56 For about a third of the programmes a high proportion of students, about 25 per cent, do not complete their studies. When the number of Students who have not completed their courses is added to the number who fail in examinations, the proportion of students passing is low. There are low rates of successful completion, about 64 per cent, on first diplomas in rural studies, floristry and horse care. Many have returned to complete their studies for the full award. College records show that many students leave to enter employment before completing their course. Most of the students on courses in horse care who took jobs had gained the course's optional British Horse Society qualification.

57 For most courses the college has up-to-date information on students' destinations. These show a high proportion going on to further education

courses or employment related to their studies. About 80 per cent of students from first diploma courses stay for other programmes of study at the college. Although many students from certificate programmes pursue other further education courses, the majority enter employment.

58 Written assignments are generally of a good standard, particularly in terms of factual content and presentation. Most work shows a reasonable level of understanding and an ability to apply knowledge. However, the structure of some assignments is weak and the work confused. The quality of students' notes varies considerably. Some notes are incomplete or poorly composed and of little value for reference or revision.

59 Students carry out their practical work carefully and conscientiously, with due regard to safe practice. Students are careful about the welfare of the livestock they are handling. This is particularly noticeable with animal care students. Students generally demonstrate levels of competence which are appropriate to their stage of study. Many students of equine studies show good riding skills. Students' keyboard skills are generally weak.

60 The majority of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve their learning goals, which include, for some of them, nationally-recognised qualifications. Some of the students on learning support programmes go on to employment. However, others move to different courses in the college and unnecessarily repeat the same level of work. Students have little involvement in evaluating their own performance. Evidence of achievement is not always recorded effectively.

61 With few exceptions, students are highly motivated, responsive and show a good deal of vocational commitment. Students generally work well together and are ready to lend each other support.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

62 The college is committed to meeting the requirements of the Charter for Further Education. All full-time students have a copy of the college charter which addresses the basic requirements. A copy of the charter is on display in most teaching areas.

63 The development of quality systems has relied too heavily on initiatives at course level. There are aspects of good practice in course evaluations, curriculum team meetings and annual course reports. However, departmental quality assurance systems do not, of themselves, provide a comprehensive college-wide approach to quality. There has been little transfer of good practice between curriculum areas. Responsibilities for implementing quality assurance systems are not clearly defined at all levels. The college has identified some of these weaknesses and has gone some way to addressing them by the introduction of a new quality statement prepared for the inspection. The quality statement usefully summarises the current state of development and forms a good basis for developing quality assurance systems. However, the quality statement is not an evaluative document and there has been no assessment of the quality of the college's activities.

64 The review of individual courses has been thorough. Curriculum team meetings are held at frequent intervals and are generally fully minuted. The team meetings review progress on all the courses and considerable care is taken to review the progress of each student. Some annual course reviews are attended by, or include comments from, students and employers. Students' evaluation of their learning experience and employers' evaluation of work placements, provide valuable contributions to course reviews.

65 Plans for action resulting from course reviews are usually in place but some fail to indicate the time scale for action or the person responsible for making sure that action occurs. Action plans do not address all the issues that are raised at annual course reviews and there is insufficient analysis of course data as a means of identifying course weaknesses. There is no formal process for identifying staff-development needs and linking this with staff appraisal. The weakness with the current arrangements is that there are no clear procedures to monitor and respond to issues beyond the responsibilities of the curriculum director. As a result, there is a lack of clear accountability for quality assurance across the college.

66 The college guidelines, recently introduced for carrying out the end-of-year course reports, were issued too late to contribute to last year's course reviews. The new guidelines are comprehensive and provide sufficient detail, if fully observed, to ensure that reviews and reports are effective.

67 The business development unit of the college achieved the British Standards assurance of quality (BS 5750) in May 1994. For the time being, the college has no intention of extending this quality standard further. Curriculum areas are expected to meet BS 5750 requirements when they are teaching courses for the business development unit. The college is aiming to achieve the Investors in People award this academic year and three members of staff have undertaken Investors in People facilitator courses.

68 The college shows a clear commitment to supporting staff and their development. All college employees receive appropriate induction at the start of their employment. Induction packs for new staff include comprehensive information on college policies. Recent policies are not as systematically communicated to long-standing staff. Some of them are unaware of these policies and their role in the translation of college policies into practice.

69 The staff development budget is about 1.5 per cent of staff costs. Additionally, the college has a training centre which facilitates training for staff all the year round. The college expects its staff to maintain and update their specialist skills and knowledge. Staff have shown willingness to undertake training through industrial placements, interchange with other college staff and attendance at training courses

70 Staff appraisal is valued by teachers. However, the current procedure is proving to be unwieldy and time consuming. All full-time staff and regular part-time staff are included in the appraisal programme.

RESOURCES

Staffing

71 Teachers are well qualified and many of them have considerable practical experience. In all areas, there is sufficient technical expertise for the range of programmes on offer. About one-third of the teaching staff have no teaching qualifications and a significant number are new to teaching. In general, there are adequate levels of support from non-teaching staff. However, some areas suffer from a shortage of administrative support to meet the demands of new business and the growth in provision.

72 The deployment of teachers to support new courses is appropriate. The college also buys in the services of private establishments. For example, the staff and facilities of two riding schools are employed to help provide equine courses. In general, part-time teachers and new staff receive good support but there is sometimes insufficient support for part-time teachers.

73 The college has increased the proportion of part-time staff as a way of buying in expertise and relevant experience and deploying staff resources in a more flexible way. Part-time teaching staff make up 52 per cent of the full-time equivalent college teaching staff. Some well-qualified technician staff contribute to teaching by being employed on separate part-time teaching contracts and this helps with their staff development.

Equipment/learning resources

74 By using a mix of its own resources, off-site facilities and loaned machines the college is well provided with specialist accommodation and equipment. The use of resources not owned by the college is a strength in helping to broaden students' range of experience. However, specialist resources not owned by the college may not be available when they are required and time is lost travelling to other sites. Most of the specialist facilities provide realistic working environments for practical activity. This is particularly true of the off-site locations.

75 There is an appropriate range of livestock and land facilities on campus. However, the scale in some areas is limited and extensive visits to local enterprises are necessary to gain access to the necessary resources. For example, environmental management students gain experience of a wide range of habitat types and management systems through off-site activities. They also benefit from productive links with a large number of local groups, statutory bodies, national and local government organisations and farmers. Extensive use is made of local farms. For arable work the college has ready access to the Trust farm that surrounds the campus.

The farm is used for crop investigation work and projects requiring performance data. A farm information room provides data on the performance of the farm and livestock unit.

76 In horticulture, there are insufficient sports turf facilities at the college. The deficiency is, in part, compensated for by visits to local golf courses and other sports venues. The college is currently developing a new area for this activity. There is a good supply of hand-tools and small machines. High-cost specialist machines are often obtained on loan.

77 The new animal-care facility has been well planned to meet the developing demands for this provision. There is a reasonable range of small animals and larger animals are borrowed where necessary. The laboratory is well designed and furnished but storage facilities are limited. A successful joint venture with two local commercial riding establishments has enabled the college to make provision for the programmes of equine studies without investing in specialist facilities.

78 There is a reasonable level of up-to-date computer equipment which students can use at any time. There is also a suitable range of software of a standard used in industry. Students need more support with written materials which could be used to develop their technology skills. Information technology facilities are well organised and the environment in which students work is of a professional standard.

79 The new science laboratory is well designed and furnished although the range and scale of analytical equipment is limited in some areas. The overall workshop space is adequate but the layout of rooms means that some areas are rather cramped. These shortcomings should be overcome by the new building project. There is a reasonable range and quantity of agricultural machinery and tractors. Although some machines are dated they are suitable for the work undertaken. Some specialist machines for demonstration are on loan from local farm machinery dealers.

80 The library's stock of books is small but it is augmented by a number of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases. There is also computerised access to the library catalogue of the University of East Anglia and the joint academic network. A significant weakness is that few course text books have multiple copies. Improvement in library provision is a priority in the college's plans.

Accommodation

81 There has been an impressive effort to raise the quality of accommodation to meet the growth in student numbers, new business needs and teaching strategies. Through sponsorship, investment of its own funds and contribution from the LEA, the college has recently built two additional teaching blocks. The majority of the college's accommodation is clean, well maintained and welcoming.

82 There is a firm focus on environmental conservation and an ambience which promotes learning throughout the college. Opposite the entrance to

the college is a three-acre arboretum with nearly 200 different varieties of labelled native trees or common cultivars. Every opportunity is used to encourage awareness of the college's mission and aims. Displays of students' and staff's achievements and awards decorate teaching rooms and corridors.

83 Most teaching rooms are well furnished and are adaptable for a variety of activities. There is a large covered area which enables the college to continue practical work on machinery in bad weather. Where appropriate, rooms and corridors have carpets. Most general teaching rooms have blinds, white boards and appropriate teaching aids. Additional specialist equipment is easily available. The majority of teaching rooms can take 15 to 20 students. The college is increasing its number of rooms for larger groups with a view to moving towards more learning in which students work on resources independently. The college uses a commercial software package to monitor its use of teaching spaces.

84 The college has self-catering accommodation for about a dozen people and a warden-controlled hostel for 50 students. Students are well cared for in residence. There is a well-planned daily transport service to and from the campus. Additional transport is provided on request so that students can take part in extra-curricular activities and use college facilities.

85 Some support facilities for students and staff are inadequate or lacking. There is no student common room and no childcare service. The student dining room is too small and the single service point results in long queues at peak times. There is insufficient car parking space for students and staff. The college is addressing some of these shortcomings in its accommodation strategy.

86 There is a planned programme of maintenance and replacement of equipment and accommodation which also ensures that repairs are carried out rapidly. Extensive redecoration and refurbishment of teaching rooms and public areas was carried out in 1993-94. The college's accommodation strategy includes a proposal to spend £1 million on the next phase of its building plan. This would provide a residential block for 50 students on the main campus, and a teaching block which would allow the college to stop using some inadequate mobile classrooms.

87 The college has carried out a review of the access to its accommodation. Ramps provide wheelchair access to the college entrance, the dining area and all teaching blocks. There is no access for wheelchair users and people with mobility difficulties to about 40 per cent of teaching rooms and specialist workshops including the library and information technology rooms. The building plan includes improvements in this area.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

88 The college is making good progress towards its aim of providing a quality service for education and training in the land-based industries.

The strengths of the college are:

- the wide range of vocational courses relating to the land-based industries
- the college's responsiveness to employers, the local community and national organisations
- the energetic promotion of courses and the significant growth in enrolments
- the strong entrepreneurial leadership provided by senior managers
- effective teaching in practical sessions
- good work experience arrangements for full-time students
- the high standard of course documentation in all programme areas
- a strong system of tutorial support
- highly-motivated, responsive students who show vocational commitment
- staff who are well qualified, experienced and committed to the work of the college
- significant improvements in the quality of accommodation
- good support for newly-appointed staff.

89 The college should address the following issues:

- the governors' lack of a strategy for monitoring the college's performance
- insufficient attention to the evaluation of the curriculum and the effectiveness of teaching and learning across the college
- development of the computerised information system for administration and management
- effective implementation and monitoring of college policies
- the poor quality of teaching in some theory sessions
- underdeveloped learning support for students across the college
- high non-completion rates for some courses and the inadequate analysis of completion rates and examination results
- the underdeveloped cross-college quality assurance system.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)

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

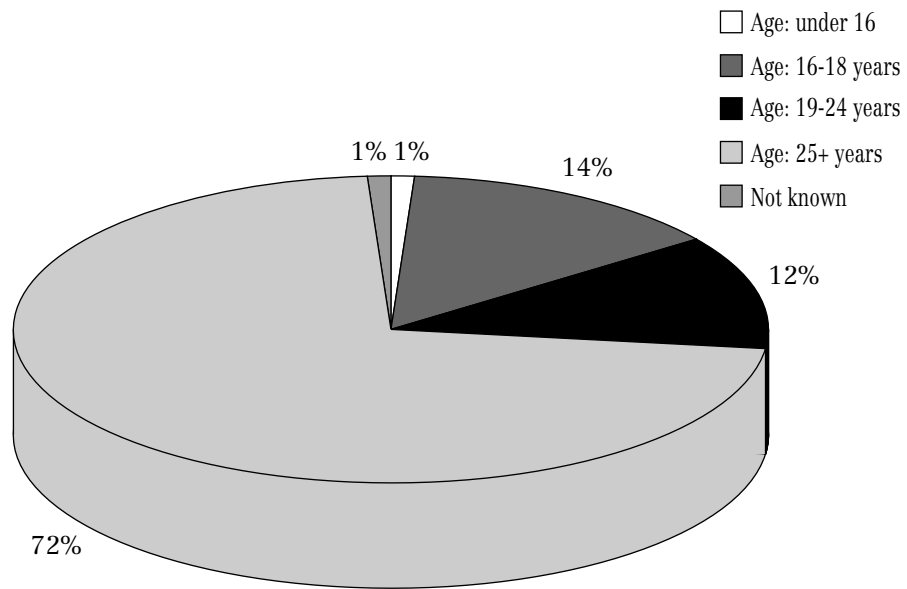
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

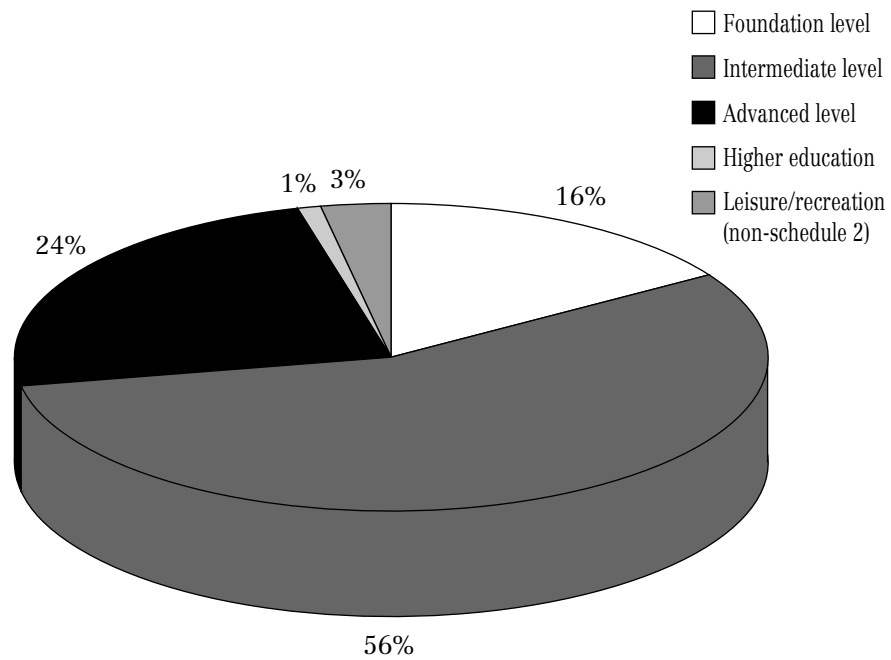
Otley College: percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)



Enrolments: 5,243

Figure 2

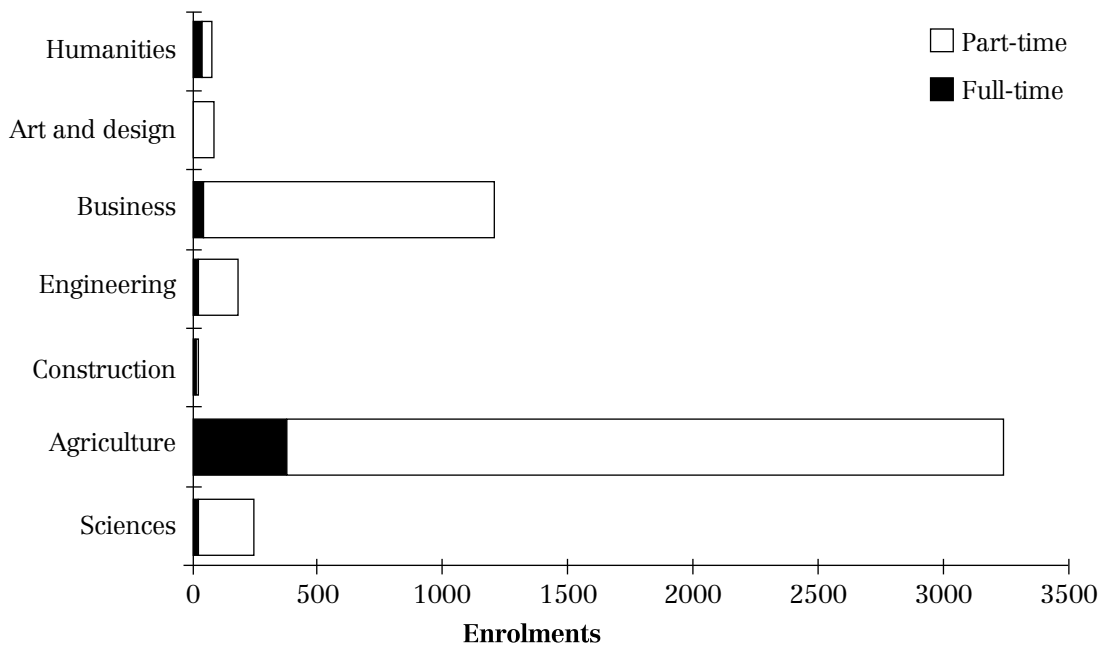
Otley College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)



Enrolments: 5,243

Figure 3

Otley College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)

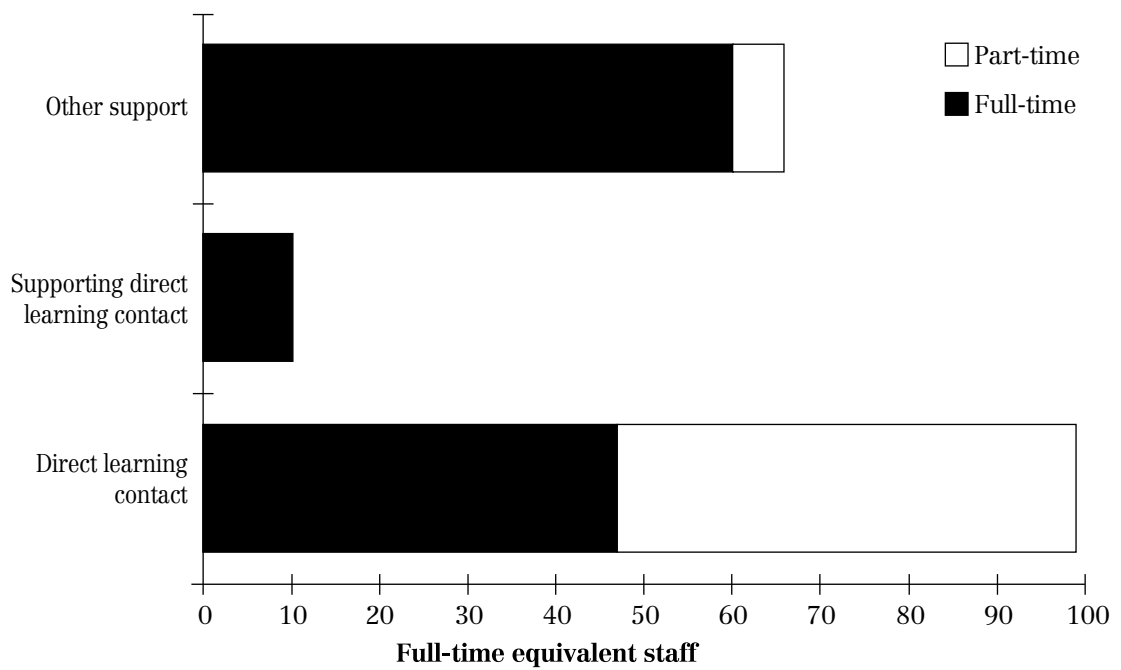


Enrolments: 5,035

Note: this chart excludes 208 leisure/recreation and higher education enrolments

Figure 4

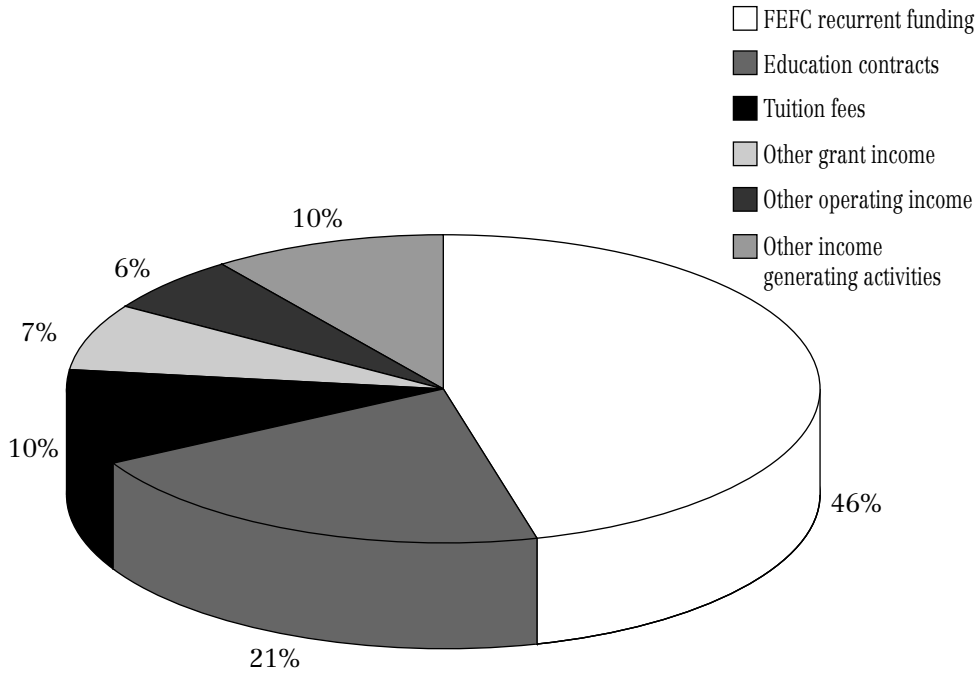
Otley College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)



Full-time equivalent staff: 175

Figure 5

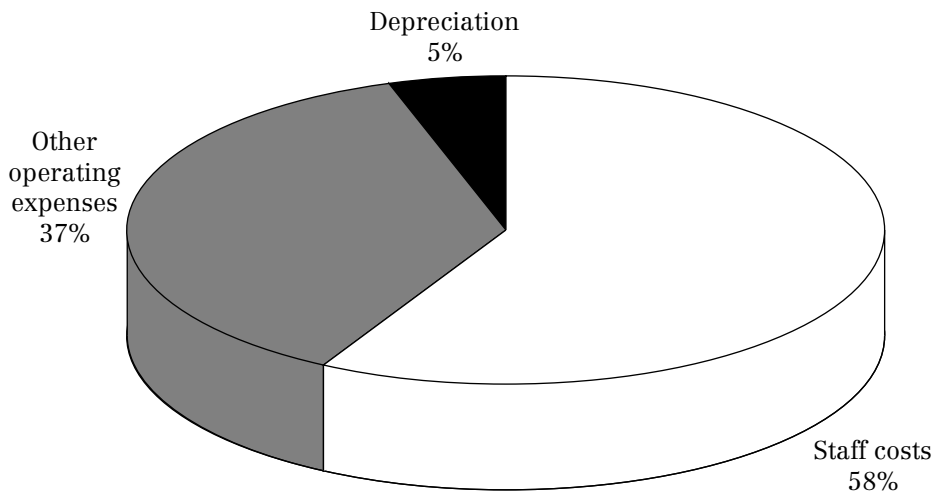
Otley College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £5,758,439

Figure 6

Otley College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £5,455,077

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
February 1995