

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**Manchester
College of Arts
and Technology**

August 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

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

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

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 91/95

MANCHESTER COLLEGE OF ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected February - March 1995

Summary

Manchester College of Arts and Technology is responsive to the needs of the community it serves. Its links with higher education, the local authority and high schools are used to good effect to encourage students to take advantage of further and higher education opportunities. Provision for corporate clients is of a high standard and the college has a national reputation for its open learning. The college is well governed and well managed. Strategic planning is effectively developed and good progress has been made in establishing quality assurance systems. Students receive good guidance and support and the quality of teaching is generally high. There are good examination results among adult students taking vocational courses; many go on to higher education. If the college is to continue to improve the quality of its provision it should: address low levels of attendance and low retention rates on some courses; adjust teaching methods to take account of variations in student attendance; improve departmental procedures for interviewing applicants; improve the teaching of core skills; provide more precise data for departmental and course reviews; link developments in the management information system with staff training and user requirements; provide staff development in the use of information technology; and improve social areas and recreational facilities for students.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Health and community care	2
Construction	3	Art and design	3
Engineering	2	Humanities	2
Business	2	Basic education and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
Hotel and catering, leisure and tourism	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1 Manchester College of Arts and Technology was inspected in the spring term of 1995. Thirty-one inspectors visited the college for a total of 119 days. Prior to this the enrolment and induction of students had been inspected at the beginning of the academic year in September 1994. Specialist subject inspections took place in the week commencing 20 February 1995. Aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in the week beginning 20 March 1995.

2 Inspectors visited 258 teaching sessions and examined students' written and practical work. Discussions took place with college governors, managers, teachers, staff responsible for support services, and students. Meetings were held with representatives from local industry, the local community, Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), local high schools and Manchester City Council's careers, youth and adult education service. Inspectors attended meetings of the college board and its personnel subcommittee. A range of documentation, including the college's strategic plan, was used to review the college's progress towards the achievement of its mission. Inspectors also visited the 'Skill-Build' national finals of construction craft skills which was organised by the college in conjunction with the Construction Industry Training Board and trade associations.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 Manchester College of Arts and Technology was established in 1990 following a 10-year period of reorganisation of further education in the city of Manchester, during which nine further education colleges were merged into two. When courses were allocated to the two new institutions, Manchester College of Arts and Technology received the larger proportion of higher-cost provision, which included engineering and construction. The college occupies three campuses; one in the centre of the city, one at Openshaw in the east and one at Moston in the north of the city. A large amount of the college's work is undertaken in other locations, especially on the premises of companies within and beyond the Greater Manchester conurbation.

4 Manchester is a vibrant regional capital at the centre of a conurbation of over 2.5 million inhabitants. A centre for the arts and sport, as well as for financial and commercial services, it has a long tradition of being at the forefront of social, economic and political change. The city has seen a major shift away from being a centre for manufacturing to one where service functions are increasingly prominent and this has created challenges for organisations concerned with the social and economic regeneration of the city. Over 9 per cent of Manchester's households are occupied by one parent families, which account for almost 30 per cent of children under 15 years old. In the area served by the college, the unemployment rate is 20 per cent, around twice the national average, and the rate rises to 35 per cent in the inner city. Youth unemployment averages

24 per cent in the city rising to 46 per cent in the central ward. Attainments of school leavers are low compared with national averages; 23 per cent achieve grades A-C in four or more GCSEs. Only 51 per cent of 16 year olds stay on in further education. People from minority ethnic groups make up 12.7 per cent of the local population.

5 Other post-16 providers include three schools with sixth forms, three sixth form colleges and five independent schools in the centre and south of the city. There are also nine further education colleges and 11 sixth form colleges within reasonable travelling distance. Over 80 private training providers operate within the Manchester TEC area, although the college is the largest managing agency for youth training. Close and productive links exist between the college and the Manchester Adult Education Service which is one of the largest adult education providers in the country. The service works with the college to deliver programmes to meet the needs of adults in the community.

6 Since 1990 Manchester College of Arts and Technology has concentrated on the programme areas of engineering, humanities, and business and administration. Each area accounts for approximately 25 per cent of the college's enrolments; construction accounts for a further 15 per cent, and there is some provision in leisure and catering, art and design, and health and care. The college's programmes of education and training provide both for the local population and for regional and national markets. It has acquired a national reputation in the area of open learning, an aspect of the college's provision which, in recent years, has built up a range of services to clients throughout the country. The curriculum offered by the college has been developed to meet the needs of a wide range of clients from high technology firms, where training is customised to the companies' requirements, to basic-skills programmes for residents in areas of high social and economic disadvantage. Links have been established with other educational providers both nationally and overseas to deliver innovative projects which extend education and training and explore new modes of delivery.

7 The college has a senior management team of seven comprising the principal, deputy principal, senior vice-principal, three vice-principals and the college secretary. With the exception of the principal, each has responsibility for one or more of the college's support services: human resources, quality planning and management information services, finance, contracts, marketing and materials promotion, student and hospitality services, estates, physical and learning resources. The curriculum of the college is organised through 14 departments. As part of a management restructuring, 10 of these were recently grouped into three clusters: technology, business and management, and general education. A head of cluster, one of the heads of department from within the cluster, takes the lead in planning and quality assurance for the cluster. Some areas of curriculum provision have been identified as 'satellite operations' where there are significant links with outside organisations which require

a degree of autonomy from the cluster structure. These areas include trade union education, Chadderton aerostructures training, construction training and North Manchester Health Care Trust training.

8 In 1993-94, the college enrolled 25,789 students representing 6,025 full-time equivalent students; 3 per cent above the college's target. The majority of enrolments were for part-time study. At the time of the inspection, there were 19,106 enrolments against a target of 26,478. Of these, 2,507 were full time and the remainder were part time. During the past three years the college has maintained a rate of growth in excess of 8 per cent a year. It met its Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) growth targets in the last two years and is confident that the current year's targets will be achieved. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. The college employs 338 full-time and 64 part-time teaching staff; a full-time equivalent of 354. Three hundred and sixty-one support staff account for a full-time equivalent of 313. The full-time teaching staff establishment has been reduced each year from a total of 475 in 1990. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

9 The college's recurrent funding from the FEFC for 1994-95 is £13,426,776. Its average level of funding per unit of activity is £18.54 compared with a median of £18.17 for general further education and tertiary colleges and a median of £19.01 for the sector. Summaries of the college's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Less than 60 per cent of the college income comes from the FEFC and almost two-thirds of its expenditure is on staffing. Fee income earns the college approximately £2.25 million per year.

10 The college has developed its mission to 'enhance the knowledge and skills of the whole community' into five key objectives: increasing participation on learning programmes; promoting the achievement of national targets for education and training; seeking total quality in all it does; investing in people; and promoting equality of opportunity for all. In making progress towards achieving its mission Manchester College of Arts and Technology is seeking to play its part in the regeneration of the city of Manchester through preserving and developing its specialisms, broadening its curriculum base, and becoming more accessible to a range of students and clients.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

11 The college is responsive to the education and training needs of the local community and employers. It has been awarded three national training awards in the last four years. A wide range of provision is offered, including 34 subjects at General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level), 14 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects and 32 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects. There is a

strong commitment to General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). There are 11 programmes at advanced level, 10 at intermediate level and six at foundation level. An increasing range of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) is offered at all levels; 13 vocational areas are available at level 2. The college operates the largest youth training scheme in the city with 450 places in 14 vocational areas.

12 A number of productive links exist with higher education institutions, including Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan, Salford, Huddersfield, Leeds and Leeds Metropolitan Universities. At present there are 66 students on higher education courses funded directly by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and 233 student places on courses franchised from higher education institutions. Currently, six higher national diploma and certificate programmes are offered.

13 The wide range of 42 access programmes, designed for adult students, provides opportunities for those without traditional qualifications to gain entry into higher education or to enhance their job prospects. There are currently 573 students enrolled on access courses.

14 Manchester Open Learning (the largest department in the college with 1,134 full-time equivalent enrolments in 1993-94) provides vocational education for individuals and corporate clients. Students can enrol throughout the year to study programmes at the college and at other locations. They use a carefully-planned combination of resource materials, workshops and tutorial support. Students who are unable to meet their tutors have access to them by telephone. Manchester Open Learning also provides a service in the Manchester Development Centre, an open-access centre which enables local people to attend college at times convenient to themselves. A large range of programmes is available in the centre from NVQ level 2 to post graduate, including management, engineering, construction and customer care. British Airways is a major client for customer care provision.

15 The college has a positive image in the local community, with which it has established and developed collaborative links. For example, a successful involvement with local community groups has resulted in specially-designed college and outreach programmes for people of Afro-Caribbean origin in Moss Side and Hulme. The productive links with the local authority are reflected in the college's sponsorship of the Manchester adult education service. Similarly, there are strong links with the careers service in the consortium which was established in 1993 to deliver counselling and guidance for the unemployed in nine locations across the conurbation, presently serving up to 5,000 clients a year. The college works closely with the local TEC and actively supports the operations of the East Manchester Business Link. In addition to the youth training and adult training schemes, there is college participation in many other TEC initiatives, including training for work and work-related further education.

16 There is an effective schools liaison programme. Members of the college's schools liaison team regularly visit 30 designated schools. Schools

welcome the college's willingness to work with them on curriculum and progression projects such as those in which 15 and 16 year old pupils attend college for NVQ units in a variety of vocational areas. A number of taster courses are provided for pupils to sample the college's range of programmes and an innovative engineering skills project exists for 15 year old pupils in collaboration with British Aerospace. The North Manchester Education Partnership provides links between the college and primary schools as part of an initiative to improve the staying-on rate for pupils aged over 16. The college is actively involved in other traditional schools liaison activities such as careers conventions, open days and parents' evenings. It sponsors the production of some schools' newsletters. The college is currently exploring ways of developing partnerships with some other providers of post-16 education in the area to improve the coherence of the education offered to school leavers.

17 The college provides an increasing range of training and consultancy services for local, regional and national companies. Currently, it has training agreements with 2,600 private companies, ranging from small and medium-size enterprises to multi-nationals. It has developed an expertise in flexible delivery of the curriculum which has enabled it to capture major training contracts, such as those with the Royal Mail Postal Services and the Central Area Health Care Trust. A seven-year collaboration with British Airways has also resulted in a number of training contracts. The college is keen to develop new methods of delivery for clients and is working with the Central Area Health Care Trust to develop 'telematics', the transmission of information and learning materials through computer and telecommunication links. The college should make more use of its extensive links with companies to promote employer involvement with some of its vocational programmes for 16-18 year old students.

18 The college has established impressive and productive international links which include training projects, work-placement opportunities and consultancies. Funding has been successfully obtained from the European Union to support such projects and to enhance the college's work with the local community. A three-year contract with the vocational training authority of the Sultanate of Oman currently involves the college in introducing GNVQs into that country and providing teaching support for the State Technical Industrial Colleges. Manchester College of Arts and Technology is a founder member of the 'Together in Educational Solidarity' network of colleges. Member colleges exist in Poland, Russia, Latvia, Denmark, France, Belgium, Greece, Turkey and the United States of America. Through the network the college actively seeks to promote co-operation between members in terms of staff and student exchanges, collaboration on transnational projects and the development of mutual recognition of qualifications. The department of trade union education has been particularly active in a large number of European and international projects.

19 An institutional marketing strategy has recently been developed which is now well defined and documented. Members of the college's marketing team have clear roles and responsibilities; appropriate strategies are being developed for the diverse market segments which the college serves. There is a highly sophisticated approach to market research backed by a wide range of information sources. Research has paid dividends in the large number of successful external bids, particularly from European funds. Information on labour markets is effectively used in the strategic planning process, in designing income-generating courses, especially those using open-learning, and high-profile community education programmes. The corporate image is not always consistent in promotional materials and this is currently being addressed.

20 The college has been successful in attracting students from groups which have not usually been involved in further education. This has been achieved by making changes to the range of provision, to the modes of attendance, and to the support available to students. The college is redesigning all its programmes, creating units for teaching and assessment, to make its provision more flexible. A framework for credit accumulation transfer is being built up in line with national developments. Since 1992 there has been a 50 per cent increase in the number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enrolled in the college. Manchester College of Arts and Technology is encouraging the full integration of such students with other students on mainstream courses, and is providing the additional learning support they require.

21 The college demonstrates a positive commitment to equal opportunities. It takes seriously its commitment 'to enhance the skills and knowledge of the whole community' by striving to remove all barriers to learning and training in a city that has high levels of social deprivation. Fifteen per cent of the college's students are from a minority ethnic background which compares favourably with the composition of the local population.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

22 The college corporation has 15 members, including the principal and an elected staff member. Eight independent members come from a variety of backgrounds including law, motor manufacturing, construction, aerospace, insurance, engineering, and trades union education. At the time of the inspection there was one vacancy on the board. Other members are drawn from organisations within the city of Manchester, including the TEC, the disability forum, and Manchester University; two co-opted members have experience in local government and one in education. Four committees, audit, personnel, remuneration and general purposes, provide additional opportunities for governors to offer their experience and knowledge to the college. Their expertise and support has helped to shape the direction of the college since incorporation. The clerk to the corporation is the college secretary and a member of the senior management team.

23 Meetings of the board take place at least three times a year. The clerk provides a report on the key recommendations of each subcommittee to the full-board meeting which helps focus the discussion of the board on the main issues raised. Governors are committed to the college; there is a high level of attendance at the board and its committee meetings, averaging over 80 per cent during the last 12 months. The governors have undertaken a review of their own effectiveness and have identified and acted upon the outcomes. They were involved in the strategic planning process and its subsequent development, in part through attendance at annual residential weekends. They receive an annual review of the plan and monitor its implementation; members feel well informed about strategic and financial issues. Whilst board members are well aware of their role and willingly contribute to decision making, they are also conscious of the importance of the principal's leadership role in the college, including that of offering advice to the board on the strategic direction of the college. Managers provide the board with readily understood data to enable them to monitor the work of the college. Some improvements should be made to the presentation of data on examination performance and student retention rates, so that a clearer picture can be gained of students' achievements.

24 Governors have familiarised themselves with the workings of the college. The board rotates its meetings between the college sites and, after the meetings, governors tour the site and meet staff and students. Some governors are involved with courses in the college, for example, through membership of boards of study. All governors received training for their roles and responsibilities. Governors were consulted on the development of the college charter. There is a sound working relationship between the principal and the chair of the board; a good ethos of team working has developed between senior staff and governors. A high priority has been given to establishing good industrial relations with staff, and the personnel committee has been closely involved in the development of the college's industrial relations strategy. The board has sought to give due attention to personnel matters as well as to those concerning finance.

25 The board has set a clear framework for strategic planning. This requires a match between the curriculum offered and the college's staff, equipment and accommodation. Departments and other organisational units are set targets for growth based on existing student numbers plus a percentage growth applied evenly across departments. Where information from the needs analysis and strategic planning process indicates the likelihood that these targets will be difficult to achieve, efforts are made to support initiatives which enable departments to meet their original targets. The college has successfully managed this process by encouraging an innovative and entrepreneurial approach to income generation. Departments keep approximately half the profits they earn from self-financed provision. This acts as an incentive to the exploration of new opportunities for income generation. The revenue received from these sources has helped the college to support the work it undertakes to meet the needs of the more socially disadvantaged students.

26 The college's development plan is clearly related to the college's mission and is accompanied by a comprehensive set of operating statements which include targets, staff responsibilities and criteria for success. The plan is coherent and demonstrates the contributions which the different sections of the college are required to make to achieve the mission. Staff have contributed to strategic planning through their involvement in a departmental and sectional planning process. Plans, such as that for the development of the college's provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are firmly based on college strategy. In a minority of departments, there has been insufficient analysis of market needs and of departmental strengths and weaknesses to inform planning. In trades union education, strategic and business planning is weak; much innovatory activity has taken place but the department lacks focus and a coherent plan for future development. The monitoring of progress towards the implementation of plans during the course of the year is also varied. For example, in craft construction, less than eight of the 29 target achievements to be met by December 1994 had been realised. The annual curriculum review requires more comprehensive data to support the analysis of performance and student achievement and to identify the actions which need to be taken.

27 The college has evolved its present management structure gradually. Since 1990 when the college was created, the corporation has moved at a measured pace to build a single college culture from a disparate inheritance spread over three campuses. Stability and consolidation have been successfully combined with innovation and growth. The departmental structure which existed since 1990 has been modified in an attempt to overcome the fragmentation created by the previous system of 14 departments. The new cluster arrangement is designed to improve communication across departments and to promote a sharing of good practice amongst those in the same cluster grouping. Many operational aspects are still at an early stage of development and there remains some duplication of effort and a lack of clarity over roles. Cluster heads should now be encouraged to develop a common agenda and to review and share good practice. The college has begun to implement a strategy for disseminating the good practice established in Manchester Open Learning although developments are at an early stage. A high level of mutual support, co-operation and flexibility exists across and within the management teams responsible for humanities and social sciences. Closer co-operation and better communication is required within some departments as well as between them. In art and design, staff expertise is not always effectively deployed. Examples exist of one team remaining unaware of the staff skills available in another. In construction, little interaction takes place between specialist teams within the same department. Where staff work across sites, some frustration is created by the lack of uniformity in management procedures. The college has provided appropriate training for senior and middle managers which has been related to the developing roles they are required to adopt.

28 Staff are encouraged to participate in the formulation of college policy. The academic board includes representatives from across the college and from all types of staff. Through its meetings and those of its subcommittees, staff representatives engage with college managers in advising the principal and board on issues affecting the college. The academic board has been consulted over the development of a range of college policies but arrangements for monitoring the impact of these policies are not systematic. There is no learning support policy and there are no cross-college learning support arrangements for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Managers are required to conduct team briefings to disseminate information to groups of staff, and a staff newsletter 'MANCHAT' includes short articles and announcements. These vary in quality and appropriateness. Staff use of electronic mail is increasing. In view of the size and complexity of the institution the college might usefully monitor the effectiveness of its internal communications and identify areas for improvement.

29 Course team meetings are held regularly; most are well documented, actions are identified and responsibilities indicated. In many cases, programme team manuals, containing a range of documents relating to the subject or course programme, are a useful aid to curriculum management. Documentation relating to the programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is comprehensive and detailed. Responsibilities for subject and course management are understood by most staff but the expectations which the college has of course leaders and arrangements for reviewing their performance against targets are not well defined. Although most departments set targets for recruitment, retention, completion and achievement of students, at individual course level the practice is variable. In engineering there are no targets for enrolments and retention rates. In English there is no overall subject leadership; responsibilities are fragmented between sites and between GCE, GCSE and access courses, although English within the access courses is well managed. There is a lack of co-ordination at college level for both mathematics and computing. In modern languages, however, clear structures and sound working practices have been established. For example, full-time staff have been given responsibility for monitoring and supporting part-time staff and documentation in use is thorough and relevant to management needs. At programme level, the use of performance indicators to inform planning and review is underdeveloped and programme team meetings do not adequately address performance indicators. The presentation of examination results and data on student retention rates on courses are inadequate to allow proper analysis of performance.

30 The quality of data from the college's computer-based management information systems is improving. It is particularly well developed to support the management of Manchester Open Learning. A computerised register system provides information to line managers on student

attendance and retention rates, and the student guidance unit has defined its requirements from the system. The college should ensure that tutors who have responsibility for monitoring student attendance receive more regular reports on student absences. A computerised personnel record system is in place but its use for recording and monitoring the outcomes of staff appraisal is in the early stages of development. The college uses the further education management information system for student records which currently has to cater for over 25,000 student records each year and a course file with over 1,000 records. The capacity of the management information systems is being extended to support managers at all levels. As the systems develop, managers will need further training in their use.

31 An inherited deficit of £1.5 million at incorporation was expunged over the following two years. Budgets are delegated to departments on the basis of numbers of full-time equivalent students. A proportion of the budget is held back so that departments which recruit above their targets can bid for additional funds. An adjustment to part-time hours allocations is the only financial penalty for departments which fail to reach their enrolment targets or which have a high drop-out rate. In some cases, budgets are not delegated below departmental level and some staff are unaware of the basis upon which financial resources are allocated. However, in construction, budgets are delegated to programme cost centres which receive regular statements of their cashflow. In the trades union education department, resource management is not clearly related to any college requirements for efficiency or for meeting performance targets. In many areas of the college, clear efficiency gains have been made in recent years. In engineering, since the new teaching contracts were introduced, the part-time staffing budget has been reduced by one-third. A recent exercise in calculating unit costs across departments has succeeded in raising awareness among managers of the costs of programme delivery.

32 Human-resource management is given a high priority. The college has successfully negotiated new contracts for lecturing staff. Staff managers throughout the college speak positively about the increased flexibility which the new contracts provide. Staff can adjust their programmes to meet the short-notice demands of clients. Off-site working, including participation in international projects, is more easily planned and managed. Staff morale is good. Efficiencies have been demonstrated in the use of part-time staff and the staffing budget overall has been reduced.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

33 The management of the support and guidance services across the college is the responsibility of the vice-principal (customer services) working with the head of guidance and student services. The service has been designed specifically to identify and meet the needs of a diverse student population drawn from a wide range of backgrounds. Students

have access to a comprehensive range of careers guidance, welfare and personal support services. The services are provided by a network comprising Manchester Adult Education Service, the careers service, the youth service, the college chaplaincy, learning support and the college training agency. The services provided by the network are carefully managed through a system of contracts and targets. They are accessible through conveniently located centres at Moston and Openshaw. On the city centre site the service is less well placed.

34 Courses are effectively publicised through links with employers, careers evenings, exhibitions and trade fairs and by visits to schools. Manchester Open Learning courses are advertised nationally. Information is largely in the form of course leaflets, most of which conform to an attractive college format. A few poorly-produced additional leaflets create a poor impression. An attractive document for school leavers, entitled 'Time to Decide', gives clear information on how to apply for the college's courses.

35 Applicants are offered interviews prior to acceptance. Staff in the guidance centre are well briefed about the college's courses. Enquirers who are unsure of their choice of course are effectively counselled in the unit while applicants who know what they want to study are interviewed by the specialist departments. Interviews result in completion of an initial action plan. Applicants' experiences vary at the interview stage but for most the experience is a positive one. There are some examples of inadequate guidance for GCSE and part-time applicants. Quality standards for interviews have been established and monitored as part of the quality monitoring of 'threshold' services. These encompass the providing of information, pre-learning advice and guidance, careers advice, initial diagnostic assessment, individual action planning, admission, enrolment and induction. Progress is being made but there remains a need to ensure that all students are made aware of the appropriate options open to them.

36 Students can enrol on any of the college's three sites. Arrangements generally work well. Returning students welcome being able to re-enrol at the end of their existing courses. This process is being streamlined by the introduction of pre-printed forms produced by computer. During enrolment, students are provided with a loose-leaf handbook containing useful information, including the student charter, a learner agreement and information on student services.

37 The quality of induction varies between courses and departments. Nevertheless, induction programmes are generally well planned and students find them helpful. In the best practice, students are involved in getting to know the college, their course and their fellow students. Many full-time courses, such as those in art and design, the built environment, GNVQ and programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have good induction booklets. An induction checklist for new students provides them with an opportunity to express their views on the process.

38 Some accreditation of students' prior learning takes place on mainstream programmes where there is evidence of student demand, but most of the development of accreditation of prior learning has been for sponsored clients or as a result of special projects. Student portfolios are used in several areas and action planning, which involves students in setting their own learning objectives and evaluating their performance, is becoming more widespread. There is little encouragement for students to update records of achievement systematically.

39 The network for student support which brings together staff from many different professional backgrounds is working effectively. Guidelines for action have been drawn up for several activities, including full-time student tutorials. Lecturers' job descriptions include statements on tutorial roles. A key part of tutorial work is careers education. This is monitored by the guidance unit, although formal monitoring of the whole tutorial process is infrequent and there is a lack of student feedback. In engineering, there is little evidence of the recording of tutorial activity. Few part-time students have timetabled tutorials.

40 Students on Manchester Open Learning are well supported by the tutoring arrangements. Regular tutorial meetings are arranged either in Manchester or at other locations around the country. Records of progress are carefully maintained and students speak highly of the support they receive during their open-learning programme.

41 The chaplaincy and personal tutors provide individual support, referring students to outside agencies for specialist help where necessary. Whilst the chaplaincy meets the needs of those who approach them, the college should ensure that students who do not feel comfortable taking this route are adequately catered for. Prayer rooms have been established on all the sites; at the city centre, the facilities for prayer and washing are in newly-converted rooms and are of excellent quality.

42 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported by staff and support workers, although there is insufficient focus on the identification of overall goals and the development of individual programmes to deliver them. The resource-based learning centres provide good support for students. Students of English as a second language are well catered for in the languages resource-based learning centre. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on art and design courses receive particularly good resources and support from staff to enable them to work on their own at their own pace.

43 Students with young children are able to use the college's nursery. Places are quickly taken up. The nursery meets a real need, allowing students who would otherwise not be able to do so to join the college's programmes.

44 Students are tested to determine those who require learning support in basic skills. However, many of the procedures which have been developed for referring students for learning support in basic skills have

not yet been implemented fully. A significant number of students whose needs have been identified are supported in class, in the resource-based learning centres or by individual tuition. There are instances where support needs have not been identified.

45 Improved arrangements for monitoring and recording students' attendance and early withdrawals from courses have recently been introduced but are not yet fully implemented. A computer-based system provides information about non-attenders. For full-time students, these are only received after four weeks absence. Tutors on part-time day courses receive information at an earlier stage. Such inconsistencies should be addressed. Information on student absences is passed to the guidance and student services unit to follow up. Students who are planning to leave their course are offered an interview. Employers are able to obtain information directly from the college system on the attendance of their employees who are part-time students.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

46 Overall, the quality of teaching is good. In 63 per cent of the sessions inspected, the strengths clearly outweighed the weaknesses and in 16 per cent, there were many strengths and very few weaknesses. The weaknesses outweighed the strengths in 9 per cent of the sessions. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		3	13	15	4	0	35
GCSE		3	11	6	3	0	23
GNVQ		4	18	17	9	0	48
NVQ		10	14	9	5	0	38
Access		8	18	5	0	0	31
Other*		14	47	19	2	1	83
Total		42	121	71	23	1	258

*Note: * other includes mainly vocational and professional courses, largely for part-time students, some delivered through open and flexible learning.*

47 Particular strengths of the teaching and promotion of learning are the good working relationships between students and staff. Many lessons are well prepared and involve appropriate activities. This is particularly true of access courses. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive a high standard of support which enables them to take up relevant vocational learning opportunities on a wide range of courses. The quality of course planning is generally good. Recent standardisation of the information held in course manuals, has created detailed and useful

course documentation. A few manuals have not yet been completed and are simply lists of documents held elsewhere.

48 Standards of teaching and the promotion of learning are generally high. However, in a significant minority of lessons students are not given enough opportunity to ask questions and to discuss issues and the work fails to sustain their interest. Long periods of information giving, often through dictated notes, and insufficient checks on understanding, reduce the effectiveness of the learning. There is insufficient sharing of good practice across divisions and across the college generally. Many classes are disrupted by high levels of absenteeism and by students arriving late. In some cases, little action is taken in response to absence and unpunctuality. Some teachers do not adjust their teaching to take account of low attendance. In the 258 teaching sessions inspected, the average level of attendance was 65 per cent. Average attendance on business administration courses was 92 per cent, though on business courses overall, it was 75 per cent. The average level of attendance on health and community care courses was only 33 per cent.

49 Engineering courses have detailed schemes of work and assessment which are used by all staff and shared with students. Comprehensive assignment briefs identify core and personal-development opportunities within each assignment. Assessment criteria are well defined. On some courses, students are made aware of their progress, and there are good records of work and achievement. On others, marking of work is superficial and teachers fail to provide sufficiently detailed comment on students' performances. Engineering students benefit from well-organised practical sessions in realistic environments, using industry-standard equipment and working practices. Teaching sessions are well planned and include a range of appropriate methods of working. Some teachers make good use of part-time students' up-to-date knowledge and experience and some helped students by providing a review of the important aspects of theory covered during the lesson.

50 Engineering sessions often involve a high proportion of practical work. Most practical work is productive and purposeful. For example, in a digital electronics class, the teacher explained the relevant theory with the aid of suitable overhead transparencies. Students then carried out a practical exercise which involved designing and building an electronic circuit and testing its operation. The session was logically planned and well executed. A good range of modern equipment was available in a well-organised laboratory. The teacher made regular checks to monitor students' understanding. In contrast, some of the theory lessons have too slow a pace and are uninspiring. Students spend most of the time listening to the teacher and have little opportunity to check their understanding by asking questions or sharing ideas. Poor use is made of teaching aids and when handouts or workbooks are used they are of variable quality. On a significant number of occasions, students arrive late for class and interrupt other students' work.

51 The majority of courses in business studies have clear, appropriately sequenced schemes of work and well-planned lessons. The best lessons have an appropriate mix of learning activities, including case studies, role plays, work-related projects and research activities. Students are encouraged to ask questions and discuss topics in small groups. Staff have good working relationships with students and generally maintain their interest and involvement by successfully relating the work to students' past and current experience. For example, tutors on trade union education courses successfully draw on the students' own experience at work to illustrate and inform class and group activities. As a result, students perceive the relevance of the programme throughout. Most business studies teachers use a wide range of teaching and learning aids, though, in a few cases, these are of poor quality. In some of the weaker lessons, students' understanding is not checked before moving on to new topics or teachers fail to take account of the range of student experience and ability. On some accounting courses, students' experience of information technology at work is not sufficiently acknowledged or used. Occasionally the small size of classes reduces the effectiveness of the learning.

52 Most business studies programmes are sufficiently flexible to enable students to achieve their aims. Teachers make comprehensive records of students' prior learning and their objectives on entry, and programmes are adjusted to take account of these. Opportunities are provided for students to study specialist modules alongside their main courses. Students on secretarial courses find it easy to switch between modules and select appropriate options. On GNVQ programmes, some students have difficulty coping with this level of flexibility. Business studies assignments are set at appropriate levels and there are effective systems for tracking and recording student progress. The marking of students' work is detailed and encourages students to set clear targets for improvement. In some cases, there is no assessment scheme for the programme nor are assessment criteria being used for grading students' work. Teachers are not always clear about how they assess individual contributions to group assignments. Though most courses have effective procedures for monitoring students' attendance and taking action on absenteeism, little is done about the poor attendance on GNVQ programmes or the irregular attendance at timetabled core-skills sessions.

53 Open-learning programmes in business professional studies are well structured and delivered effectively. There are occasional workshops which involve presentations from the tutor and opportunities for students to discuss topics and share experiences. The combination of these workshops, high-quality open-learning materials and the tutor's availability to deal with queries over the telephone, meets with students' approval as satisfying their learning needs.

54 There are sound schemes of work and clear aims and objectives for English courses at all levels. Detailed records are kept of students' progress and attainments; the review and recording of students' progress on some

GCSE courses is exemplary. Assignments have an appropriate content and are pitched at the right level. Students' work is marked regularly and consistently and returned promptly. The best marking includes detailed feedback to students giving them a realistic assessment of their strengths and weaknesses and targets for improvement. Lessons are well planned. A good balance of learning activities encourages high levels of interest and involvement. Students of English as a second language use a wide range of learning resources which are well matched to their language skills. Working relationships between staff and students are positive and productive. The standard of teaching is particularly high on access courses. Teachers have high expectations of students. They reinforce students' achievements by providing support and encouragement. A significant proportion of teaching seen at GCE A level and GCSE was carefully planned, but students were not allowed enough opportunity to ask questions or to explore their own ideas.

55 There are good schemes of work for modern foreign language courses. Lessons are well planned and coursework and assessment tasks are appropriate. Although the department does not have a consistent approach to assessment and marking, teachers mark students' written work carefully, making detailed corrections and giving helpful comments. Oral work is corrected tactfully to avoid undermining students' self-confidence and willingness to speak. Teachers make extensive use of the language being studied to give information or instructions and to explain grammatical points. Many skilfully create opportunities for students to develop and use their oral skills in a variety of situations, through whole class work, in pairs or in group tasks. Not all teachers use the full range of learning resources available.

56 There are well-structured schemes of work for courses in education and training. Effective preparation and organisation are features of almost all lessons. Assessment arrangements are thorough and assignments are marked consistently. Teachers pay particular attention to the development of study and research skills. Students have positive working relationships with teachers and feel able to contribute effectively to discussions, many of which are of high quality. They experience a good range of methods of working. Occasionally the pace of work is unnecessarily slow. For example, the use of the technique of 'micro-teaching' merits review, to assess whether or not it is possible to make more productive use of the time available.

57 Social studies students work to clear aims and objectives and topics are developed logically. Teachers use ideas and vocabulary appropriate to the level of study and take time and effort to produce high-quality learning materials. Students in an evening class for GCE A level law are provided with a well-produced booklet which incorporates guidance on study methods, a list of handouts to be used during the year, details of textbooks and a reading list, guidance on how to answer examination questions, details of the assessment scheme and a breakdown of the

syllabus to be covered. It provides an excellent introduction to the course and is valued by the students as a course guide. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and the overall standard of teaching is good. Students are helped to develop initiative, curiosity, self-confidence and interpersonal skills. Significant absence rates and high numbers of early leavers on some courses have a disruptive effect on teaching and learning.

58 Detailed records are kept of the progress of students on construction courses, particularly of those on NVQ courses. Assessments are of the standard required by accrediting bodies, though students would benefit from a clearer definition of performance criteria in GNVQ assignments. Construction staff have sound industrial knowledge and experience which they enthusiastically convey to students. Teachers often set the lesson in an industrial context and link topics to students' own experiences. Students develop their understanding by responding to questions which teachers direct at them. There is a good use of review techniques to build on work from previous lessons, but there are insufficient checks on students' understanding of the topics being covered. In a small number of classes, teachers fail to take sufficient account of the wide range of student ability and students' attention wanders. Most teachers use a variety of learning resources to help students to learn. For example, in a session on health and safety, a teacher used a comprehensive learning package, a questionnaire and a technical crossword puzzle to ensure that students had learned the topic and were well prepared for their work experience placement the following week. Resources located in craft areas and 'drop-in' computer facilities for technician students are used effectively to help learning. In a few cases, handouts for class use lose their effectiveness because they are poorly produced. The low numbers in some classes, particularly some GNVQ classes, reduces the opportunity for students to participate in group tasks and to develop their presentational skills.

59 Lessons in science are well prepared. Schemes of work and lesson plans are of a high standard. Teachers are knowledgeable and experienced. They involve students and make constructive use of their contributions. The working relationships between staff and students are excellent. Students receive good handouts but teachers make insufficient use of other teaching and learning aids during the longer theory sessions. There are few opportunities for students to use information technology as part of their work because of the lack of appropriate facilities. Class assignments and homework are set regularly. Marking is detailed and students are given helpful feedback on their work. Teachers keep registers of attendance and maintain comprehensive records of students' progress.

60 Some of the better mathematics and computing lessons involve an effective balance of class activities and individual work. Students are encouraged to speak by the frequent use of questions. Most respond well. In some of the weaker classes, the level of work is not suitable for all students or classroom activities are inappropriate. Occasionally, a number of students become bored or frustrated and disrupt their own learning and

that of others. There is a significant level of absence in many mathematics and computing classes. The coursework for GCSE mathematics is limited in quantity and in the range of work set. There are no detailed records of GCSE students' progress and achievement.

61 Staff teaching catering courses use well-constructed, comprehensive schemes of work. They maintain detailed records from which it is easy to follow the progress of each student. Students' recording of their own progress is poorly organised and unsystematic. Action planning is used on all programmes but it is infrequent and not sufficiently rigorous. Relationships between staff and students are good and students are given a great deal of encouragement and support. In the majority of practical classes students are allocated clearly-defined tasks and helped to understand what is expected of them. Individual help with the acquisition of skills is given as necessary. Some simulated work environments are not organised and operated to industry standards. While the restaurant is attractively furnished, it is not run on sufficiently professional lines. For example, students are encouraged to sit down in the restaurant to complete their workbooks, sloppiness in service standards is not always corrected, menus are handwritten and washing facilities are shared with other students in the college and are of poor quality.

62 The standard of teaching in catering is variable. The better lessons are characterised by logical planning, clear and simple exposition, and the skilful use of questions to challenge and encourage students to solve problems and make progress. For example, in a lesson on food preservation, the teacher built up a diagram of the types of preservation commonly used by questioning the students and making constructive use of their answers. The lesson was illustrated by examples of preserved food which the students were allowed to handle and, where appropriate, taste. They copied the diagram as it was built up and finally were given a handout listing the main ways of preserving food and the classes of food-stuffs to which each applied. The lesson ended with a short test to ascertain that the students had assimilated what had been taught. In some weaker lessons, teaching lacks variety, is poorly focused or fails sufficiently to stimulate responses from students. For example, in one class concerned with vegetables, the sequencing of the content of the lesson was disorganised; the teacher failed to ascertain what students already knew and did not relate the varieties of vegetable to their uses in a catering kitchen.

63 Programmes of study in leisure and tourism are clearly outlined in course plans which are shared with students. There are appropriate arrangements for the assessment of students' achievements in GNVQ and NVQ programmes. Students conscientiously maintain evidence of their progress through completion of log books and portfolios of work and teachers discuss progress with individual students. Class registers are completed methodically and used to monitor students' records of attendance. Nevertheless, there are significant levels of absenteeism and

unpunctuality on many courses. Teachers provide an appropriate range of learning activities. At times, students take some responsibility for their own learning and working purposefully on assignments, sometimes in the model travel office, which provides a realistic working environment. On other occasions, teachers address the class, supporting their exposition with visual aids and well-constructed handout material. Knowledge and understanding are reinforced through well-directed questions and constructive use of students' responses. In a few lessons, poor class management reduces the rate of work and level of challenge.

64 Courses in health and community care are organised as a combination of vocational aspects and GCSE or GCE A level subjects. This flexibility does not detract from the coherence of the programmes and students are clear about what they have to achieve. GNVQ assessment schedules are rigorously implemented and most assessment tasks are well defined. Students are given clear feedback on their work which is returned promptly. Students are involved in monitoring their progress, making good use of record sheets. This is not always the case on GCSE and GCE A level courses, where the criteria for the internal assessment of work are not always understood by students. There are good working relationships between teachers and students. Staff are knowledgeable and up to date in their subjects, and generally provide students with highly-effective learning experiences. Students work well, particularly on small group tasks. A major concern is the lack of learning support in the classroom for those foundation level students who need it. Foundation level students have long lessons of three hours with the same teacher. They find it hard to maintain attention and sometimes become disruptive. A significant number of classes in health and community care have poor attendance rates.

65 The standard of teaching on most art and design courses is high. Staff form good working relationships with students. They use a variety of teaching methods and respond effectively to the needs of a diverse range of students. A strong emphasis on the development of drawing skills underpins all courses and contributes significantly to the quality of students' work. Staff positively encourage students to develop their potential and achieve more than the outcomes required for examination purposes. Most programmes have clear curriculum aims and are soundly documented. Coursework tasks are used to create links between elements of study to provide a more coherent programme for students. Assignments are well designed. Verbal and written feedback, given at regular intervals, helps students to set learning targets and draw up action plans. On GNVQ programmes, core skills are not adequately developed or assessed. At present, GNVQ course management and assessment procedures are inadequate.

66 Lessons for students with learning difficulties are carefully managed. Work takes place in well-organised classrooms where materials are

arranged to enable students to get to them easily. Teachers have established positive working relationships with their students. They have high expectations of them and respect their adult status. Skilful questioning encourages students to contribute to discussion and is a means of checking their understanding. Some classes are too long; many of the students cannot maintain their concentration throughout the session. There is careful recording of the work undertaken during lessons, though records often describe the work which has been done rather than analyse what students have learned. Individual objectives for students are not always set and assessment of progress lacks consistency. There is little assessment and recording of the progress students make in their personal development.

67 Work experience provides a valuable learning experience for students on the work preparation programme. They develop both practical work skills and the more general skills required by employers such as listening, following instructions and making decisions. Students undertake work in a number of small businesses which have been established within the access department. Teachers work hard to provide a realistic work environment. A range of learning materials has been produced by staff to enable students to work independently on a variety of tasks or projects.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

68 Students generally enjoy their studies and are able to speak confidently and with understanding about them. In class, many students respond well to teachers' questions and demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding, though some students do not participate well in whole class activities. Engineering, construction, art and design and social sciences students are enthusiastic about their studies. Students on trade union education courses speak highly of the relevance of their courses and of the ways in which the skills and confidence they are developing enable them to perform their roles at work more effectively. Modern languages students have positive attitudes to their work and are attentive in class, though a few lack confidence in speaking the language being studied. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enjoy their work and respond well to the challenges set for them.

69 Most assessments are of an appropriate standard and are marked consistently. Assignment and project work is carefully planned and the level of written work and quality of presentation are good. On some GNVQ courses, for example hospitality and catering, adherence to agreed deadlines for the completion of assignments is insufficiently strict.

70 Oral communication skills are particularly well developed on care, English, social studies, education and access courses. Students on professional courses in business studies make considerable gains in confidence by developing their interpersonal and communication skills. Education students make thoughtful contributions to class discussions. Those studying English as a foreign language make good progress towards

achieving fluency in spoken and written English and in access classes in English standards of speaking, reading and writing are generally good. However, English students' prior reading experience is very limited and a plan of support for these students acknowledges this. In modern foreign languages, many students display good oral skills, use appropriate vocabulary and correct grammar in the language being studied. Listening and reading skills are often good; written work is of an appropriate standard. There are several examples of beginners who have made outstanding progress in acquiring a new language in a brief space of time. Social studies students have opportunities to develop a good range of skills, including oracy, listening, observation, analysis and independent thinking.

71 Many students are able to demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of their subjects. Art and design students speak knowledgeably about their work and are able to apply existing skills to new tasks. Internal assessment results indicate that some students achieve work of an exceptionally high quality for the level of programme. This is especially noticeable on the GNVQ intermediate course. Some students on GNVQ business studies courses demonstrate good standards of work in portfolios; they are able to apply their knowledge and understanding in a variety of contexts. For other students, poor language and communication skills limit their rate of progress and affect the quality of their coursework and assignments. The standards achieved in GCSE and GCE A level English lessons are variable. Some students of GCSE mathematics and computing show little understanding of their work and are unable to assess their own progress.

72 In some courses, little attention is paid to the development of basic and common skills such as communication, number, information technology and study skills. Some students in engineering and business studies have particular difficulties with mathematics and/or communications skills. Learning packages are available to allow students to pursue and gain practice in these skills but they are not always effective in raising standards. Some GNVQ business students do not develop these core skills to the standards required. Art students are not developing the core skills which form part of the accreditation of GNVQ units, especially the application of number and information technology; for example, students at intermediate level do not have sufficient opportunity to develop and use information technology at the levels required by the course criteria. The attainments and use of information technology skills vary across programmes of study. Construction and leisure and tourism students have good access to information technology and develop skills which they apply in assignments. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities display skill and confidence in the use of information technology equipment. Trade union education students achieve information technology skills which they can apply directly in their workplace. In science and mathematics, information technology skills are insufficiently encouraged. In engineering, there is little use of information technology in class or assignment work.

73 Most mature students, particularly those on access, care and English as a foreign language courses, work productively and collaboratively. Students on engineering, care and modern language courses work well and learn effectively in small groups, though this approach is less successful for care students at foundation level. Low numbers in some classes, due to high absence rates or the number of early leavers, limits students' experience of collaborative working.

74 Practical work is an important element of many courses. Workshop activities and practical project work are carried out to the required safety standards, although science students did not always wear safety goggles for experimental work. Engineering students achieve a high standard of practical skills and make artefacts which have long-term practical use and are of value to them. In practical workshops, art students demonstrate confidence and competence in a range of practical activities. As part of their practical project work in art and design, the foundation (pre-degree) course students recently completed a commission for the Manchester City Operational Services Department for which they earned a fee. Care students experience well-organised and relevant work placements which are clearly linked to their learning programme and goals.

75 The college enters students for many types of external examinations. In 1993-94, GCSEs, GCE AS/A levels, GNVQs and NVQs at levels 1 to 3 accounted for only 14 per cent of these. Most accreditation was of adult vocational and professional courses. Adult students taking vocational courses comprise over 80 per cent of total college enrolments. Of these, 93 per cent are following part-time courses. The results achieved by adults in vocational courses are generally good. In many cases, for example in electrical and electronic engineering, accountancy, personnel development, and management they achieve results which are consistently above the national average. In 1993-94, students in construction, art and design, management, cabinet making and health and safety won awards and prizes. Though most courses lead to nationally recognised qualifications, a few do not. For example, students leave the trade union education courses having made great gains in knowledge and skills, with no formal recognition of their achievements.

76 Results on the college's open-learning courses are generally good. Examination results in 1994 were consistently better than national average pass rates. The college has received several awards for its open-learning provision including a national training award for work with Wolseley Centres Limited.

77 The number of students aged 16-18 represented under 4 per cent of college enrolments in 1993-94. Full-time students aged 16-18 years following vocational courses and entered for external examinations, comprised just over 2 per cent of college enrolments. Of these, 71 per cent in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education's 1994 performance tables were successful, which places the college among the bottom third of colleges in the further

education sector on this performance measure. Students on advanced diploma and NVQ level 3 courses in construction, some areas of engineering and business administration, achieved good results. Generally weak results were achieved by students on vocational courses at intermediate level. Results in GNVQ art and design and manufacturing at intermediate level were poor. Less than 50 per cent of the students on the GNVQ foundation level programme gained the qualification.

78 The 16-18 year old full-time students entered for examinations in GCE AS/A level subjects formed less than 1 per cent of college enrolments. In 1994, they scored, on average, 2.9 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college among the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. Entries for individual subjects were very small in number. Results above the national average were achieved in GCE A level art and graphics, photography, further mathematics and statistics. Poor results were achieved in biology, chemistry and geography. Results achieved by the 428 adult entrants were slightly better overall and very good in art and psychology.

79 The number of students entering GCSE examinations have been declining over recent years as numbers following vocational and access courses have increased. Although students entered for 22 subjects during 1993-94, the numbers of entries per subject were small apart from those for English and mathematics. Of the 55 students aged 16-18 entering English, 42 per cent achieved grades A-C; of the 71 students entering for mathematics, only 28 per cent achieved grades A-C. Results for adults were better but pass rates were below the national averages in all subjects.

80 Access programmes are well established and progression routes into and out of courses are clear. There are numerous examples of students joining the foundation programmes and going on to university. The access foundation programme is offered in three programme areas and, in line with the strategic plan, caters for students from inner city communities, particularly those from minority ethnic groups. In 1993-94, 36 students were enrolled on the programme and of these, 19 went into the access to higher education programme, eight into other further education courses and three entered employment. Six students withdrew because of personal or financial difficulties. Access to higher education courses are provided in eight study areas. In 1993-94, 630 students, 65 per cent of them of African, Caribbean or Asian origin, embarked on the access to higher education courses. Of these, 504 students gained full or partial accreditation and 378 completed the course and gained the full award; 240 went on to higher education and 13 are continuing their studies at the college.

81 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieved accreditation for some study units through the open college network. A

small number of them progressed from specially designed courses to mainstream college programmes at the end of the last academic year

82 The diverse nature of college provision has led to examination outcomes and accreditation information being presented in a format which hinders the analysis of achievements by programme area. The college has recognised this and has set up a working group to address the issue. Its brief is to develop a system for college-wide student tracking, the recording and reporting of student achievement, and the analysis of examination and accreditation data. It is intended that the system should take into account the college charter and the needs of programme teams undertaking curriculum review. The group is due to report in April 1995.

83 Non-completion rates for 16-18 year old students from inner city areas are high. Monitoring information on early leavers, for the academic year 1993-94, indicated that, while the average withdrawal from college courses as a whole was 7 per cent, non-completion by 16-18 full-time students from inner city areas, particularly those on general education courses, was over 15 per cent. At the time of the inspection, the rate of withdrawal among 16-18 full-time students on GCE A level and GCSE courses was higher than 15 per cent for science, mathematics, computing, modern languages, sociology and English. Withdrawal from GNVQ courses at intermediate level in leisure and tourism, art and design, and care ranges from 25 to 35 per cent. Early leavers are contacted by tutors. They also receive a questionnaire from the college although only a small proportion of recipients return it. There are plans to make the tracking of early leavers more systematic and more consistent across the college. A draft document, currently at the consultative stage, proposes college-wide procedures for monitoring drop-outs. The results of tracking have been analysed to identify reasons for early leaving. Action recently taken by the college in response to this analysis includes the adoption of GCE A level modular syllabuses, changes to induction programmes and developments in student support. The project to remodel the curriculum into smaller units is also in part a response to this problem. It is too early to judge the success of these measures. Dramatic improvements have, however, been made in tracking the destinations of students completing their courses. Only 19 full-time students' destinations were listed as 'not known' in 1993-94 compared with 1,157 in the previous year. The college records the destinations of all students, but the reduction in the numbers of part-time students whose destinations remain unknown has shown a less marked improvement.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

84 There is a well-defined policy on quality assurance reflecting the institution's commitment to continuous improvement. The complex and diverse nature of college programmes has meant that there has been a phased introduction of quality processes and systems to encompass the diversity. The college has been successful in securing external

accreditation for British Standard (BS) 5750 for five departments in the college including Manchester Open Learning. Other quality standards are applied to the college's threshold services which cover student support and guidance.

85 The programme team manual has been adopted throughout the college as a key element in its quality assurance strategy. These comprehensive manuals represent an effective mechanism for co-ordinating the quality strategy to meet internal and external requirements. The manual provides a framework covering programme delivery, student records, assessment, student portfolios, staff development, and monitoring, review and evaluation. Varied procedures for monitoring, review and evaluation are used to track quality. These include feedback from external moderators and verifiers, students and employers. The system is not yet fully established and staff in programme teams vary in the rigour and effectiveness with which they use the framework. It is nonetheless a major step towards the development of more consistent practice.

86 Quality initiatives are steered by a college quality team led by a quality systems manager who is also secretary to the academic development committee. This subcommittee of the academic board is responsible for the review of curriculum quality. The college is involved in a Department of Employment project exploring ways of harmonising approaches to quality assurance. The quality team could usefully pursue the aims of this project by bringing together related quality developments in the college, such as the moves to achieve Investors in People status and BS 5750.

87 Appropriate standards and targets for development are set as part of the college's annual operating statements. The targets are derived from the strategic plan with additional contributions from departments. The college's operating statements are translated into more detailed statements produced by departments. Operating statements contain measurable objectives, indicators of success and quality aims. The college has a formal system for annual review of all operating statements. The annual review is considered by the corporation board.

88 Enrolment targets are set for the whole of the college although information is available which would enable departmental targets to be produced. Performance indicators are being developed, and the standards are established by evaluating their use in different areas of the college.

89 A well-designed college charter has been developed in consultation with staff, students and external organisations with an interest in the college. Service standards which the student can expect have not yet been formalised and arrangements for monitoring college performance against the charter are not yet well established. Students' opinions are sought through questionnaires; their responses are considered at programme team meetings and outcomes are incorporated into action plans.

90 In preparation for the FEFC inspection the college undertook its own pre-audit which was conducted by its quality team. It presents a candid

and thorough evaluation of key issues linked to the framework in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The audit formed the basis for subsequent drafting of both departmental and college self-assessment reports. These documents are detailed, and include a helpful description and evaluation of college developments. They have made a significant contribution to the college's own process of self-assessment.

91 There are well-organised arrangements for the induction of new staff. The personnel section has designed and introduced a comprehensive package of induction material for all newly-appointed staff. Imaginative pilot work is taking place on developing a staff portfolio to include induction and appraisal information and this will form a working document for staff.

92 An appraisal process for all staff is well established. For teaching staff it includes classroom observation. A significant proportion of staff have completed the first round of their appraisal and have drawn up their action plans. The scheme is clearly linked to identifying developmental needs. It has been well received by staff.

93 A new staff-development policy is in place. Priorities are aligned to strategic and operating plans. Staff-development resources are very limited and where possible training is provided in the college. Most recent staff development has focused on the development of teaching skills, the acquisition of Training and Development Lead Body awards and providing for GNVQs. Involvement in a range of externally-funded projects has increased the amount of staff development and there is a continuing need to ensure that the numerous college-wide initiatives to unify structures and practices are underpinned by adequate staff development.

94 The personnel function, appraisal process and staff-development activities are gradually being harmonised. Progress on achieving Investors in People status is well advanced and accreditation is anticipated for spring 1995. Further scope exists to develop the work of the quality team by linking issues arising from programme reviews and evaluation to staff-development planning.

RESOURCES

Staffing

95 In recent years, the college has successfully managed a phased contraction of its staffing establishment. At the same time, it has redefined staffing roles and has reviewed teaching, technician, instructor and administrative posts in the light of changing needs and a desire to improve the flexibility with which staff are deployed. Staff costs as a percentage of total budget have been progressively reduced from 77 per cent in 1991 to 65 per cent in 1995.

96 Teaching staff are appropriately qualified for the courses they teach. A high proportion of teachers and technicians have completed, or are in the process of undertaking, training towards appropriate Training and

Development Lead Body awards. Staff are conscientious and have responded well to demands for increased flexibility in work practices.

97 The college has a low turnover of staff. Some gaps in staff expertise are being addressed through the college's staff-development priorities. For example, only 20 per cent of the teaching staff have adequate information technology skills and the confidence to use them in the classroom. In a minority of programme areas there are some shortages of qualified staff; for example in health care where steps have been taken to utilise expertise from a local health trust to support teaching.

Equipment/learning resources

98 As a result of financial difficulties inherited at the formation of the college in 1990, the college has had to invest in some areas to bring them up to an acceptable standard.

99 Overall, the college has enough computer workstations for students' use. Good access is provided to information technology facilities for students, mainly through a series of learning-resource centres on all three sites. The college has recognised the need for more effective management and co-ordination of information technology resources. Policies and plans have recently been developed and agreed by a college strategy group, though many aspects of these have yet to be fully implemented.

100 At present, the distribution and availability of information technology resources are variable; provision largely reflects individual departmental or sectional initiatives. Expenditure on information technology equipment has received a high priority in recent years with a high proportion committed to computing equipment. Nevertheless, approximately half of the workstations still represent ageing technology and are not capable of supporting the latest versions of software. In some teaching subjects, particularly in mathematics, science, and art and design, there is insufficient access to information technology.

101 A significant strategy has been the establishment of a learning-resource service for the whole college. There has been a well-considered initiative to develop resource-based learning study centres, library facilities and technical, computer and audio-visual aids on all three campuses. Although this is a recent development, the facilities provide good support to students and are well used. The college has a dedicated production unit for good-quality open-learning materials in Manchester Open Learning.

102 In engineering, there is a comprehensive range of equipment in good working order. Workshops have plentiful industrial grade equipment, but much of it is well worn. Good links with industry have helped to provide some modern equipment such as the video cassette recorders used in electronic servicing. There is a need for purpose-built motor vehicle workshops. Car repair workshops lack fume extraction facilities. There is a good range of specialist and classroom equipment in construction

although the wood-cutting machinery is out of date. Catering kitchens are well furnished with an appropriate range of commercial equipment.

103 The priority given to enhancing information technology resources has meant that a rolling programme of replacement for other capital equipment has not yet been formally implemented. A draft college policy for the replacement and improvement of equipment has only recently been developed. It gives due attention to health and safety and takes note of new course developments.

104 In most areas of the college, there are sufficient general teaching aids to support learning. Resources for teaching English as a foreign language are varied and well used. Modern language courses are well resourced and most staff make appropriate use of the equipment available.

Accommodation

105 College accommodation is located on three separate campuses; the largest in the city centre with others at Openshaw and Moston. The quality and appropriateness of accommodation vary but most lessons take place in a suitable environment.

106 Business and professional studies accommodation is of a good standard; rooms are generally spacious and allow for a variety of learning activities. For catering and leisure courses, most teaching rooms match the requirements of the subject and there are good practical facilities. The model travel office at the city centre site is furnished and equipped to a high standard and is well located. The specialist language centre is a good facility and is complemented by a suite of specialist rooms. Whilst the teaching rooms for English and English as a foreign language are generally adequate, many are too small for the size of groups that use them and there are some problems of external noise.

107 Accommodation at the city centre site is heavily used. At the other sites this is less true. At Moston, where space significantly exceeds current use, the college has sought to improve the use of accommodation through partnership arrangements with the Manchester Adult Education Service and with local junior schools. Specialist workshop accommodation for construction is of good quality and well used, but there is a lack of storage facilities in some areas and this has caused work spaces to become cramped. Good use has been made of Urban Aid and European funding, for example, in improving access for students with restricted mobility at each site and supporting a landscaping scheme at the city centre campus.

108 At the Openshaw site, accommodation for engineering provision is only just adequate and many of the teaching areas are in need of decoration. Despite some refurbishment, a significant proportion of electronics accommodation remains in need of attention. The Openshaw building has serious structural defects and there will be a need for some rebuilding in the near future. A draft accommodation strategy has been prepared which addresses the issues at all sites and considers the

opportunities available to accommodate the college's changing curriculum pattern and the needs of the community.

109 A significant weakness on each of the college sites is the lack of dedicated social areas and recreational facilities for students. In some measure this has been addressed at the city centre site but there is scope for improving facilities further.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

110 The college is making significant progress towards achieving its mission. Its strengths are:

- a well-developed strategic planning process
- a wide range of courses which meets the needs of individuals and of corporate clients
- the successful initiatives undertaken to provide alternative methods of curriculum delivery
- good practice in the arrangements for students' induction
- effective guidance and support services for students
- the successful development of resource-based learning centres
- good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- a successful human-resource strategy which has led to efficiency gains and maintained high staff morale
- some good teaching across all programme areas
- the progress made in devising and implementing a quality strategy
- the progression rates from access courses to higher education
- good examination results amongst adults taking vocational courses.

111 If the college is to continue to improve its responsiveness and the quality of its provision, it should address the following issues:

- low student retention rates on many courses
- the need to adjust teaching approaches on some courses to take account of variations in student attendance
- the variable procedures and standards for interviewing students, especially at departmental level
- the need for greater consistency in the initial assessment and provision of support for core skills
- the variable quality of monitoring on the implementation of departmental plans
- the need for more precise and consistent information to underpin the annual curriculum review
- improved communication across the college and between sites
- the lack of social areas and recreation facilities for students at each site.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

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

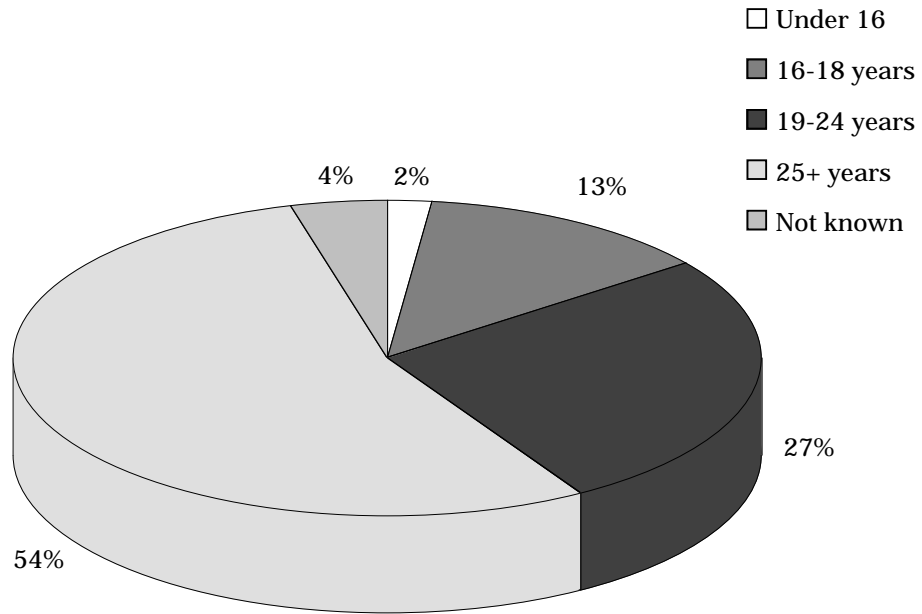
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

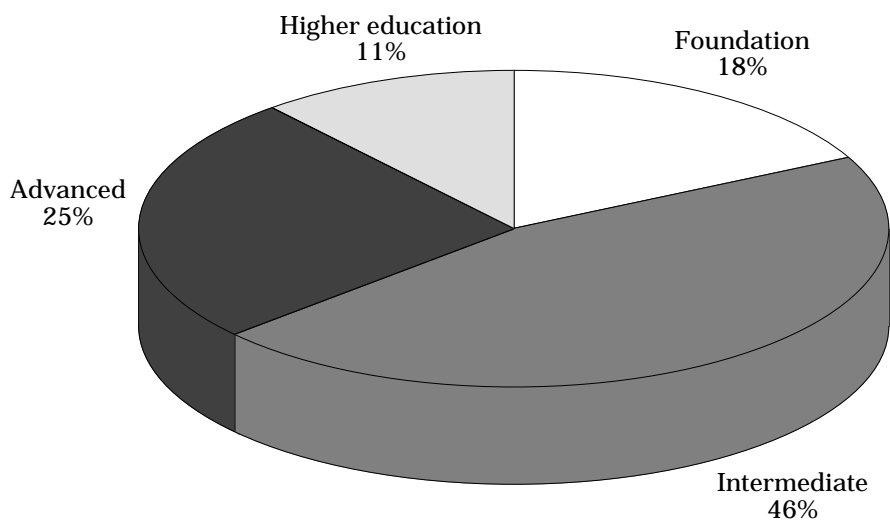
Manchester College of Arts and Technology: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 19,106

Figure 2

Manchester College of Arts and Technology: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 19,106

Figure 3

Manchester College of Arts and Technology: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

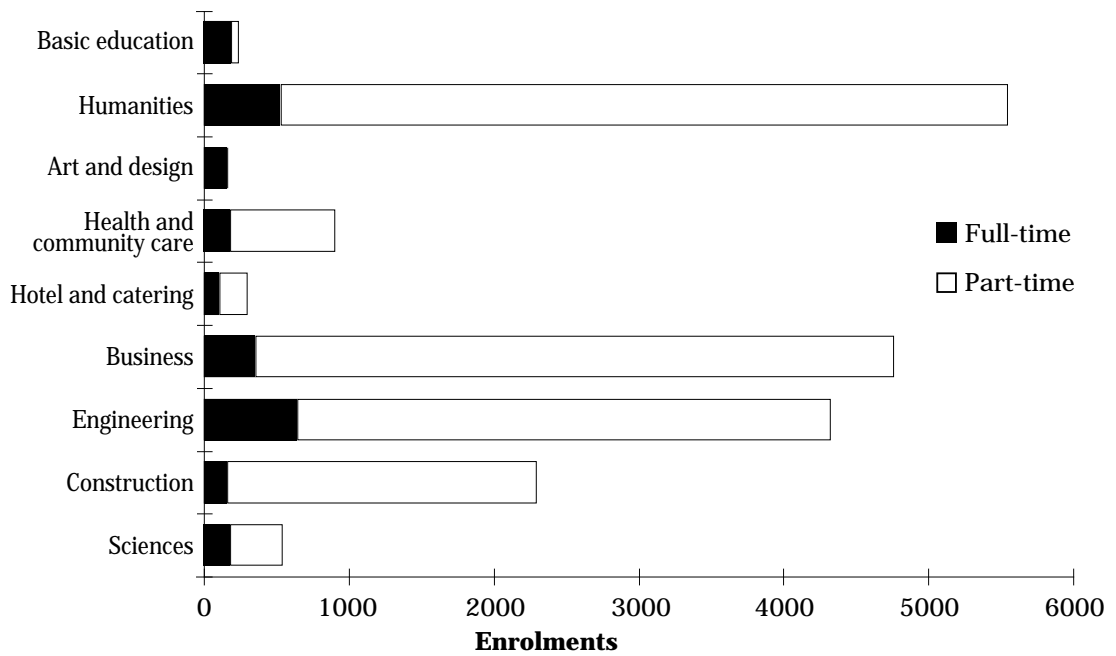


Figure 4

Manchester College of Arts and Technology: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

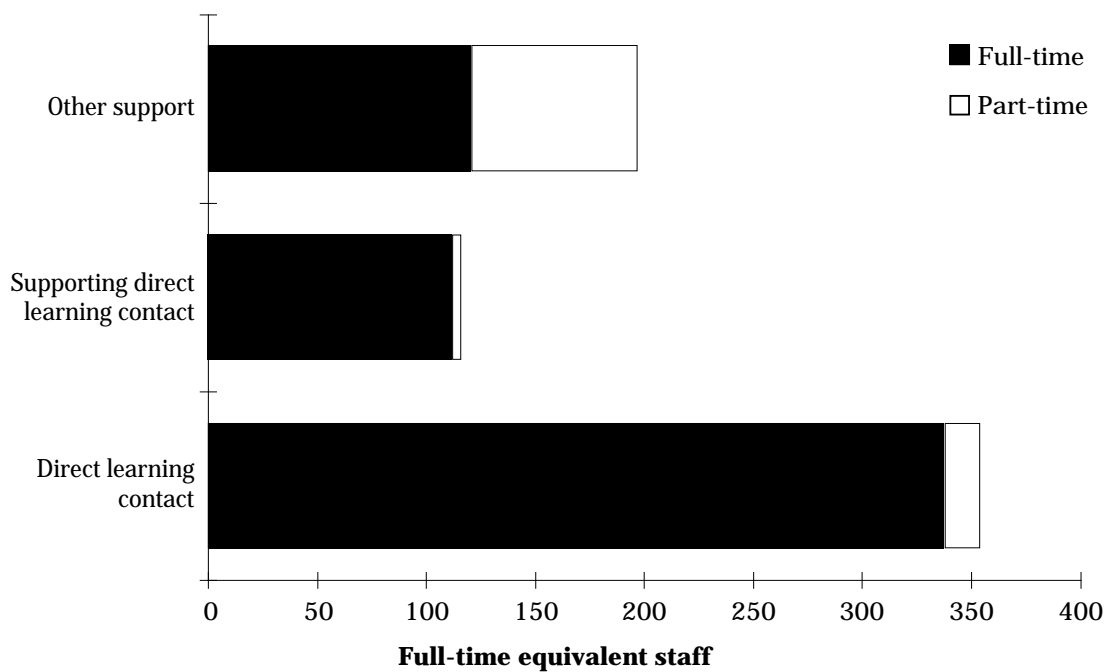
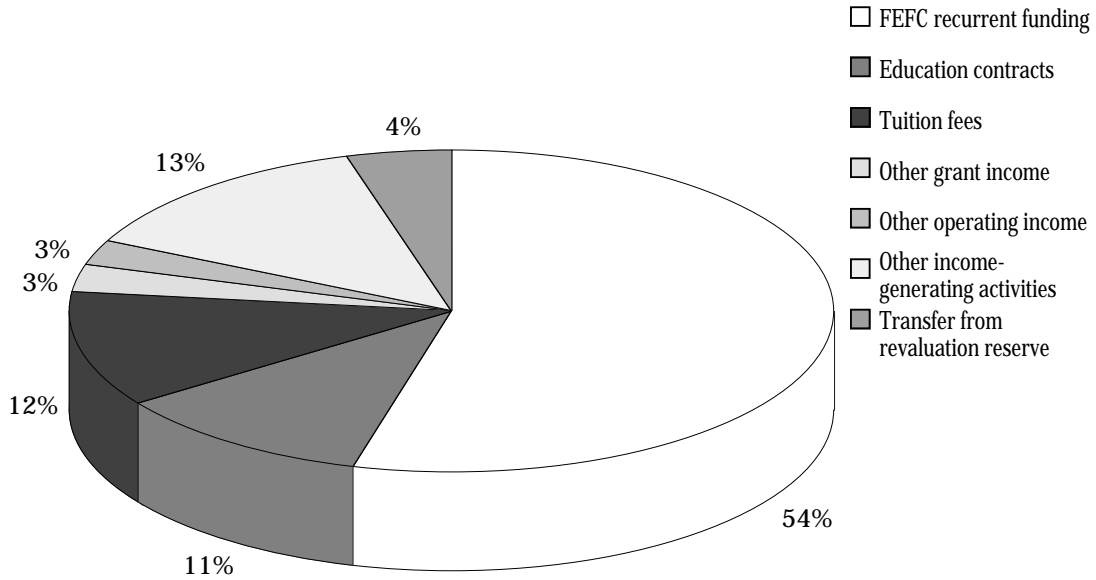


Figure 5

Manchester College of Arts and Technology: income (for 16 months to July 1994)

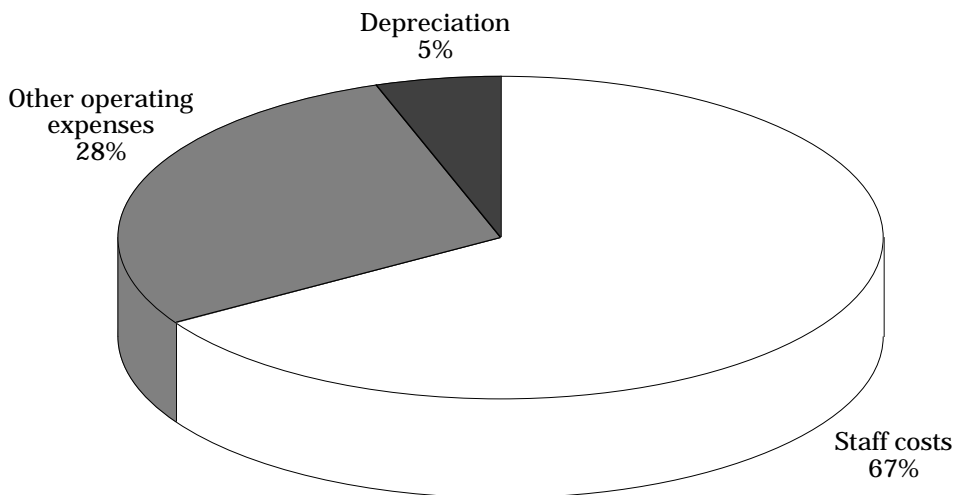


Income: £31,255,000

Note: this chart excludes £110,000 capital grants and £117,000 investment income.

Figure 6

Manchester College of Arts and Technology: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £29,775,000

Note: this chart excludes £123,000 interest payable.

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
August 1995