

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**The Norfolk
College of Arts
and Technology**

March 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-96

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 27/97

THE NORFOLK COLLEGE OF ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

EASTERN REGION

Inspected March-December 1996

Summary

The Norfolk College of Arts and Technology, Kings' Lynn, offers a wide range of vocational courses to meet the needs of adults and school-leavers. Resources to enable students to learn on their own have been well developed and there is an extensive open learning programme which allows students to follow courses at times of their own choosing. The principal and senior management promote a consultative style of decision making and work effectively with the corporation. There is a comprehensive system of guidance and tutorial support and careful attention is given to the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are good examination results on most vocational courses and standards of teaching are high. There is a comprehensive quality assurance system which includes teacher observation. Staff are well qualified and flexibly deployed. The college should address: the initial underachievement of enrolment targets; the inappropriate entry criteria on a few courses; the less effective teaching in some curriculum areas; poor results on some GCE A level courses; the insufficiently critical self-assessment report; some accommodation which has poor access for people with restricted mobility.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		1
Governance and management		1
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		1
Quality assurance		2
Resources:	staffing	1
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Sciences, mathematics and computing	3	Health, social care and childcare	2
Construction	2	Hairdressing and beauty	3
Engineering	2	Art, design, media and performing arts	3
Business studies	2	Humanities	2
Hotel and catering	2	Basic education, including learning support and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
Leisure and tourism and uniformed services	1		

INTRODUCTION

1 The Norfolk College of Arts and Technology was inspected between March and December 1996. Fifty-two inspector days were spent on curriculum area inspections and over 37 on enrolment and induction procedures and aspects of cross-college provision. Inspectors visited 231 classes and examined students' work and college and course documentation. Meetings were held with students, teachers, support staff, senior managers, governors, employers, members of local development initiatives, and representatives of schools, higher education, the careers service, the youth service and voluntary sector, the local community and the Norfolk and Waveney Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 The Norfolk College of Arts and Technology, Kings' Lynn, began as a Technical School in 1894. The Norfolk College occupied its present site from 1961 and was renamed in 1973. It is a large general further education college, serving a catchment area covering large areas of Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire. However, most students are from the West Norfolk and Kings' Lynn area. The college competes with four other further education colleges, Peterborough Regional College, Isle College, Norwich City College of Further and Higher Education and West Suffolk College. The full-time participation rate for continuing in education in Norfolk has risen in recent years from 46 per cent in 1989 to 69 per cent in 1996. The college serves a diverse community. It draws students mainly from a population of 250,000 within a 35 mile radius. Eighty per cent of the region is farm land with agriculture providing 16 per cent employment, and manufacturing and small industries approximately 60 per cent. A considerable part of West Norfolk qualifies for assistance from the government and the European Union. The town of Kings' Lynn is the industrial, administrative and commercial centre of the area.

3 In July 1996 there were 14,615 students enrolled at the college. Of these, 2,468 were full time and 12,147 were part time. Seventy-eight per cent of students are over 19 and 64 per cent are over 25. Approximately 500 students are on distance learning programmes. There are 170 full-time and 200 part-time students attending higher education courses funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). In 1996, 223 students qualified for entry to higher education. During the last three years, full-time and part-time adult enrolments have increased but there has been a decrease in students aged 16 to 18. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. There are 205 full-time equivalent teachers assisted by 48 full-time equivalent staff supporting direct learning. Another 167 staff provide other support roles. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

4 The college describes itself in its vision statement as the 'dynamic, innovative, high-quality leader in education and training in the region -

the natural choice for lifelong learning'. It prioritises care and support to all students and works closely with the community. The strategic plan (1996-99) emphasises accessibility and flexibility in the curriculum portfolio to meet the needs of all customers and clients; and the development of links and partnerships with all sectors of the community.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

5 The college works collaboratively and well with local authorities, schools, employers and community groups. The problems of rural isolation have been addressed by patterns of attendance and modes of study which allow students to follow courses at times of their own choosing, through outreach provision, and by the funding of a transport service that enables students to travel to college daily within a 35 mile radius. Special travel arrangements are made for students who take part in evening events in the college. In addition, accommodation is arranged for up to 300 students who cannot travel daily to the college.

6 The college has an extensive range of education and training programmes which effectively meet the needs of individuals, the community and corporate clients. In 1995-96 over 650 courses were offered. There is a wide range of vocational programmes. The college offers 25 national vocational qualifications (NVQs), the majority at levels 2 and 3. The general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) programme of study is broad at intermediate and advanced levels. A variety of other vocational programmes responds to local needs and also attracts students nationally. There are gaps in provision at foundation level in hairdressing, mathematics, and art and design.

7 The college offers 27 full-time and part-time general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects. Most syllabuses are modular and some can be studied through open learning. GCE A level students can take the diploma of achievement which accredits a broader range of skills. Many students combine their vocational programme with general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and GCE A level studies. The college offers 10 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects and 11 GCSE subjects. There is a strong programme of sports and recreational activities available for all students. For some students this leads to the Duke of Edinburgh Award. There is access to extensive local authority sports facilities. There are 30 college teams and sporting success is widely publicised

8 Progression routes are clearly marketed and in almost all curriculum areas students can advance from pre-foundation to higher education. The college offers several higher education programmes, and productive links with Anglia Polytechnic University and the University of East Anglia have resulted in franchised first-year and some second-year degree programmes in nine subject areas. There is a popular access to higher education modular programme, including a unique medical access course which recruits nationally.

9 There is a broad programme for students with learning difficulties with 70 full-time students and 200 who attend part time, a doubling of numbers since 1990. 'Taster' sessions help students transfer successfully from school as do school link programmes. For students who require high levels of support good residential accommodation is provided at Plaxtole House, through effective collaboration with other agencies. In association with Norfolk County Council, the college offers an unusual county-wide training programme for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The college has relocated courses to make them accessible to students with a physical disability and provides specialist equipment, such as laptop computers, and the services of a learning support officer.

10 The college has developed a range of programmes to meet the specific needs of unemployed people. For example, for women returners there are European Social Fund programmes in childcare and modern office skills. Some computing provision offered on Saturdays, and during weekday twilight sessions, has successfully drawn in students who had not previously attended further education. In partnership with the Adult Education Service, the college runs courses at Thetford and a franchise arrangement at Sheringham.

11 In several schools there are individual learning programmes for students which have entry points throughout the year. Recruitment of adults has been improved by flexible timetabling arrangements and, at the time of inspection, more than 64 per cent of students were aged over 25. The modular Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national certificate in business studies has improved retention by giving students greater choice of when they study. The distance learning programme is successful and, in 1995-96, there were 505 enrolments on the 63 courses offered under this programme. Information technology courses are particularly popular.

12 Marketing has become more effective and careful analysis of labour market information has improved the college's responsiveness. Promotional material has been redesigned to meet the needs of different client groups. The use of a mobile exhibition unit to provide information is supplemented by successful advertising through the local press and radio and on open days. A small number of courses for adults were launched rather prematurely without adequate research and failed to recruit sufficient numbers. Some of the college's community partners, consulted during the inspection, felt that more targeted marketing was needed.

13 The college has productive partnerships with several organisations. Through contracts with the TEC it delivers training services for young people, unemployed adults, small businesses, and playgroup workers. HANSATECH Ltd has purchased training for 150 employees and also offers a venue for the college's mobile roadshow. The college collaborates with the North Lynn Community project and local authorities on training in health and social care. An assistant principal chairs the new Norfolk

Careers Service Company. The college works collaboratively with a number of public sector and private partners to develop programmes for the economic regeneration of the area. Employers contribute to advisory panels, provide work experience and are involved in curriculum projects. For example, graphics students have worked with a local museum to recreate an 1860s' wallpaper for a restored fisherman's cottage. The Midland Bank chose the college as a pilot for a student run banking service. On uniformed services courses, students have participated in a full civil defence exercise which involved managing a local simulated flood disaster. Hospitality students provide catering services at leading sporting, business and royal events. However, some college programmes such as mathematics and humanities have underdeveloped links with employers.

14 Links with schools are improving. In partnership with the Construction Industry Training Board, the college has established a curriculum centre which provides foundation GNVQ and NVQ level 1 programmes for schools. International links are strong in several vocational areas. Students have had work experience in the Czech Republic, Belgium and Uganda, and the college has provided English language tuition for students from Europe. Multi-media centres for young unemployed people are being established with European partners and international companies. Despite these initiatives, the college recognises a need for better co-ordination of international links and European funding.

15 The college is publicly committed to equal opportunities through a clearly-written policy which identifies responsibilities for its implementation and for monitoring each relevant issue. Student awareness is raised through projects. For example, childcare and engineering students designed a toy suitable for a child with a learning difficulty. Course teams are required to address equal opportunities issues as part of their review procedures, but several have failed to identify priorities for action.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

16 The college is well governed and managed. The corporation has 12 members including the principal and a representative from the TEC. Most members have a commercial or industrial background and offer a wide range of professional expertise. Currently, there are only two women on the corporation and the board is seeking to increase their representation. The board has decided to increase its membership to 15, one of whom will be a member of staff. Students' views are presented in writing at each meeting and may be supported by a student union representative who is always invited to attend. New members receive a detailed induction supported by an informative briefing pack.

17 Governors show a strong sense of common purpose, focus on strategic and planning issues, and are clear about the distinction between their roles and those of managers. A code of conduct and a register of members'

interests are in place. At a recent planning day the board identified factors critical to the success of the college and gave priority to students' achievements. The corporation manages its business efficiently. There are appropriate corporation committees with clear terms of reference. Governors invite staff to contribute to their meetings. Members monitor how successfully the college is meeting its strategic aims through regular reports, including financial statements. In a recent review of its own performance the board prioritised areas of weakness to be addressed.

18 Communication between employers, staff and the corporation is enhanced by 10 advisory panels. Lines of communication throughout the college are clear and understood by staff and students. There are regular staff briefing sessions, minutes of meetings are widely disseminated, and there is an informative college newsletter. The dynamic, open and consultative management style is appreciated by staff who feel their contributions are valued. Teachers and support staff are regularly consulted and encouraged to contribute to policy making decisions. There is a widespread sense of common purpose and a pride in the work of the college. The revised academic board is energetic, makes a significant contribution and has recently considered the implications of the Tomlinson Committee for the college. Staff and students participate fully in the work of the board.

19 There is an effective organisational structure. Strategic and operational matters and curriculum issues are managed effectively through regular weekly meetings of the senior management and curriculum management teams. The nine deans of school, responsible for the curriculum, meet regularly with course teams to review their work. Courses are managed effectively and agendas are planned termly in advance. Deans of schools have cross-college roles, for example induction, assessment and verification, and this has helped ensure consistency of practice across the college.

20 The corporation designed the framework for the strategic plan and subsequently held consultation and review meetings with a wide range of interested parties, including staff, the trade unions, the TEC, county and borough councils and key client groups such as schools, industry and commerce. The planning cycle has now become an established feature of the work of the corporation, the management and staff teams. Detailed academic, financial and operational plans and strategies have been produced to support the implementation of the strategic plan. There is an established and effective computerised management information system which provides data on student applications, enrolments, registration, attendance, retention and unit generation.

21 Extensive use is made of team targets, which are set annually and monitored by line managers. A wide range of performance indicators, covering such areas as student enrolment and retention, is employed. Some, for example, the effectiveness of core skills work, are not easily measurable. A minority of course directors were unclear about their precise targets and who had responsibility for improvements.

22 The appointment of a senior manager for finance has improved the link between strategic planning and the allocation of resources. The college's budget is developed from the strategic and academic plans. The staffing budget is carefully managed and monitored centrally. A range of teacher support posts has been introduced to produce more cost-effective tuition. Part-time staffing and consumable budgets are delegated. Budget holders are provided with monthly statements of income and expenditure.

23 The college reached its growth target in 1995-96 and exceeded its intended units of activity. This was a marked improvement on the 1994-95 position. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6, respectively. The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 was £17.76 per unit. This compares with the national median for general further education and tertiary colleges of £18.11 per unit.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

24 The college offers extensive information and guidance to prospective students. School students in years 10 and 11 and adults can attend 'taster' days and open days and evenings. Summer 'roadshows' helped to reach possible students who found it difficult to attend the college. These led to over 1,200 enquiries, 70 per cent of which were from prospective part-time adult students. Staff have conducted interviews in rural feeder schools and assisted with transport to visit the main site, a service which has been highly valued.

25 The quality of pre-course guidance is generally good and the majority of students join suitable courses. Norfolk Careers Services advisers give impartial guidance in college centres to help both adults and 16 to 19 year olds plan their course programmes. Students are interviewed by specialist staff. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their parents visit the college to discuss course choices. Surveys show that most students acknowledge the value of detailed pre-course information, including the standardised course leaflets which give advice about course requirements, content and cost.

26 Some students were inappropriately offered places on courses which included GCE A levels. Practice has varied between schools in the criteria they use for accepting candidates for GCE A level courses. Many first-year students on full-time GCE A level programmes withdrew or transferred in 1995-96. Of the 81 students who started in September 1995, 10 per cent transferred and 20 per cent withdrew. The college had set lower entry requirements for GCE A levels than for comparable BTEC national diplomas but has subsequently harmonised entry criteria. From September 1996 the college has an effective policy for the accreditation of students' prior learning. Thirty students in business administration/information technology and 25 students in motor vehicle had their prior learning accredited in 1995-96. In one instance, a candidate successfully gained an NVQ level 3 in both vehicle body repair and vehicle body refinishing within a period of 26 weeks.

27 There is a well-organised and effective induction programme which includes clear guidelines for course directors who can adapt the model for specific courses. Pictorial symbols give students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities better access to some college information. The introduction of staggered start dates for different groups of students has helped staff focus on the guidance needs of new first-year students. A few students commented that induction involved too much information and form filling. Transfers and withdrawals are analysed for each course and monitored by curriculum managers. Students can transfer to another course by consulting their personal tutor. Those less sure of options can obtain further information from a careers adviser.

28 The college promotes a comprehensive range of accessible student support services. These include a medical centre, a full-time counsellor, two nurseries, a visiting solicitor and chaplain, a student union co-ordinator, and advice on accommodation, transport, and careers. The work of student support staff is much appreciated and valued by students. A local authority funded youth worker and a college-funded welfare benefits adviser run advice sessions in the student common room for six hours weekly during term time.

29 The tutorial system is effective. There are clear guidelines on the content of tutorials which follow a common format but there is scope for staff to adapt them to suit particular courses for 16 to 18 full-time students and adults. The standard of guidance in tutorials is good. Tutorial support is thorough and well organised. Students find staff helpful with individual problems and their parents spoke warmly about the approachability of tutors. Students found guidance on higher education particularly valuable. Tutors know their students well. Formal written reports are given to students when their progress is a cause for concern. A standard form, which grades performance, attendance, course and class work, is used by personal tutors to record students' progress. Students are encouraged to keep personal records of additional activities such as work experience and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Standard forms for recording student progress are not seen as appropriate for some curriculum areas and are not used consistently. Regular reports are not provided for all students, parents and sponsoring employers.

30 Students on all full-time courses up to level 3, except GCE A levels, are screened for literacy and numeracy using the Basic Skills Agency tests. In 1996-97, 1,087 students had been screened and the results had been analysed at course level. There are also arrangements for systematic diagnostic testing of students on appropriate courses. The college provides learning support in a variety of ways, including a drop-in learning centre and work integrated with vocational teaching. Good records of learning support activities are kept, supported by a computerised database. An evaluation of additional support in 1995-96 highlighted that retention had improved to 84 per cent for students receiving help with literacy and

numeracy. The college has identified the need for further improvements in the co-ordination of learning support across vocational areas and the need to analyse its effectiveness at course level.

31 There is a well-developed and effective computerised attendance monitoring system which involves optical mark reading of registers. In hotel and catering, a swipe card system is used to monitor workshop attendance. This system provides extensive management information for college managers, teachers and students. Attendance is monitored through data supplied to course directors and interviews are arranged with students who have a record of poor attendance. When attendance falls below 90 per cent letters are sent to parents and examination registration fees are reclaimed. Not all staff use the available data systematically to monitor attendance.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

32 Inspectors observed 231 teaching and learning sessions involving 2,567 students. Of these sessions 62 per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. In 6 per cent of the sessions weaknesses outweighed strengths. The overall attendance in sessions inspected was 77 per cent. On average 12 students were present in each class. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programmes of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Access to higher education	5	5	5	0	0	15
GCE AS/A level	5	13	12	0	0	30
Basic education	5	5	2	1	0	13
GCSE	0	3	7	1	0	11
GNVQ	8	11	6	3	0	28
NVQ	7	21	14	5	0	47
Other vocational	22	25	26	3	0	76
Higher education	1	2	2	0	0	5
Other	3	3	0	0	0	6
Total	56	88	74	13	0	231

33 Teachers show genuine enthusiasm for their subjects and have an appropriate level of professional expertise. Teachers build on good relationships with students to encourage a positive attitude to learning. Many effective sessions involved students in a variety of challenging tasks. Particular strengths were identified in a number of curriculum areas where students with learning difficulties or in need of additional learning support were successfully integrated. In the less effective sessions, insufficient

account was taken of the range of students' abilities in groups. Some teachers made little use of visual aids to reinforce learning and group work was poorly managed. In some sessions, teachers relied too much on their own contributions and did not involve students sufficiently in the work.

34 The teaching of computing was effective and students learned through a wide range of paper-based materials. Teachers used overhead projectors to reinforce information, ask stimulating questions and encourage group work. The teaching of mathematics was less effective. The work lacked variety, some students were not sufficiently involved and attendance levels were low. Adults value the flexible provision in mathematics workshops. Science teaching was effective when students were motivated through schemes of work being explained to them. Some science teaching failed to take sufficient account of students' differing needs and previous experience. Students were not always encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. Adult students, however, were highly motivated and valued the support received from teachers.

35 Construction teachers are enthusiastic and sometimes use projects in which they are currently involved to stimulate students. For example, one teacher, a practising architect, based a session on the design and layout of a small development of Georgian style houses and their parking requirements. The teaching of craft skills in construction was of a high standard. Teachers designed lesson materials to take account of different levels of ability. Students with learning difficulties developed useful practical skills. Assessment was carried out systematically and fairly. However, in a few theory classes students spent too long on one activity. Some teaching lacked variety.

36 In engineering, the teaching was stimulating and varied and students acquired practical skills and technical expertise. Lessons were well planned and supported by high-quality learning packs and structured practical sessions. The notes and resource materials given to students were of outstanding quality. In practical sessions, students worked diligently, aided by instructive task sheets. Teachers made effective use of overhead transparencies and videos, and their own industrial experience, to illustrate key points. Information technology was not used sufficiently to support teaching. Students received insufficient guidance on the development of BTEC common skills. Students were unclear about some assignment work and the timetable for submitting work.

37 Business studies students made good use of well-resourced facilities to develop information technology skills on NVQ administrative and secretarial courses. Students spent a substantial part of their time using computers, working independently through resource packs. Learning support staff provided individual tuition when needed. Teachers encouraged full-time students on GNVQ and NVQ programmes to use key skills centres to improve their numeracy and other skills. Most teaching was effective, well planned and supported by comprehensive schemes of

work and assessment. Teachers varied their teaching methods and were sensitive to the differing needs of adults, and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In less effective sessions, teachers did not always check that students were learning. In a few classes, the quality of visual aids used was poor and did not reflect a professional business standard. In a few lessons the teaching lacked variety and the work failed to challenge and hold the attention of students. For example, insufficient use was made of information technology in some part-time business studies courses.

38 Much of the teaching in hotel and catering was good. Courses were carefully planned and effectively managed and there was a good rapport between staff and students. Practical sessions were carried out competently and safely. Students developed communication skills in realistic working environments and worked alongside staff at public catering functions. An extensive range of self-study learning packs for NVQs encouraged students to work independently. Teachers helped students to develop their technical skills and to understand the links between practice and theory. In some sessions, teachers did not give students enough time to complete tasks independently. In some kitchen sessions, students were not developing practical skills of an acceptable standard.

39 In both theory and practical classes, the teaching on leisure, tourism and uniformed services programmes had many strengths. Teachers worked at a brisk pace and at an appropriate level for students. Teaching materials and set assignments were challenging and of interest to students. In a sports science anatomy class, students used a compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database to analyse the movement of athletes who were kicking a ball, playing golf, and running. Classroom activities are enhanced by visits, work experience and outdoor activities. Specialist key skills staff ensured that GNVQ key skills were taught effectively. Assignments were carefully worded and students understood assessment criteria. Feedback to students was detailed and helped students to improve their work.

40 The teaching in hairdressing and beauty therapy was of variable quality. The best teaching covered relevant topics, offered up-to-date information and actively involved students. Most teachers gave positive feedback to students on assessed work which was always returned on time. However, not all teachers marked students' work thoroughly. Mature students valued the flexible design of a course that had the option of being completed in one year instead of two. Some teaching was not adequately planned, and group work was not encouraged. Teachers made insufficient use of learning packages, multi-media and video. On some courses, students were not able to develop key skills to an acceptable level.

41 Much of the teaching in health, social and childcare courses was good. Course documentation was detailed, and assignment briefs were

full and imaginative. Learning programmes were enhanced by visits and residential courses. Some good teaching materials have been developed by teachers. The development of key skills was integrated with vocational programmes. Students received positive written feedback on their assignments; a well-designed grid was used for this on BTEC courses. In one session students who lacked self-confidence were encouraged by the teacher to give effective short presentations to the rest of the group. However, some classes were not well managed, relied too much on input by teachers and gave students few opportunities to contribute. Some teachers did not use written handouts or visual aids to help students understand complex materials more easily.

42 The better teaching in art and design was challenging and well prepared. Other sessions were poorly structured and the work lacked pace. Good teaching was observed in art history and photography where there was effective use of technical handouts and supporting reference material. Drawing tuition was effective. Students' work was displayed in corridors but to a lesser extent in studio areas. On some courses, years one and two students were taught together and this had disadvantages for some students. Some assignments focused insufficiently on the quality of the end product. On the other hand, the 'fashion catwalk show' enabled students to show their individual creativity. Opportunities have not been taken to use specialist information technology on some courses.

43 Some teachers in media and performing arts were dynamic and well organised. Careful attention was paid to creating a safe working environment. The best work was challenging and stimulated students to explore new ways of working. Students, in an acting class, explored an experimental approach to developing character using 'physical theatre' techniques. Other work was less successful, and teachers did not manage groups involved in several different tasks effectively. Study skills were not prioritised in some classes and a group of BTEC first diploma students were given insufficient guidance on how to make notes as part of a journal they had to keep. Some sessions were dominated so much by the teacher's input that students were not actively involved in the work. Some classes have low numbers and this restricts the capacity for effective group learning.

44 Teaching on access and teacher training courses was stimulating and informative. Staff were well prepared and students responded positively to a variety of teaching methods which included exposition, class discussion and group work. Written work was carefully marked and comments were used positively to help students improve. In some classes teachers moved too quickly to new topics without giving students enough time to understand complex materials. Foreign language teaching was of variable quality. There were good examples in some classes of teaching in the foreign language but in other classes there was insufficient emphasis on oral work.

45 The quality of teaching in English, history and communications was good. In most lessons the work had pace and teachers used a variety of learning activities. In a GCE A level history class, in order to understand Hitler's beliefs more fully, the students were given a collection of art and literature sources and asked to identify those which he would have banned and those he would have encouraged. Some good team teaching was observed and teachers used well-produced handouts, assignment briefs and teaching materials. Effective use was made of video, especially in GCE A level English literature. Students' work was marked promptly and regular feedback was given to students. However, in some lessons students' previous learning was not always considered and this led to some repetition. Small group work was not always managed well and some students who finished quickly were left with little to do. Some assignments were too bland to test students' analytical and critical skills.

46 In psychology, law, sociology and geography courses various teaching methods were used, including work in pairs and groups, videos, worksheets and exposition. Geography teachers made good use of maps. Interesting handouts, which included self-assessment activities, were issued in law and psychology. For example, students, investigating schizophrenia, were asked to compare their first impressions of patients' symptoms, recorded on video, with their judgements formed from specialist medical diagnosis. Assignments were marked conscientiously and accurately graded although, in some subjects, insufficient guidance was given on how to achieve improvements. In some lessons, the work lacked pace and students were not stretched by the tasks set. Some students did not fully see the relevance of what they were doing. In most classes teachers did not use graded materials to take account of different levels of ability within groups.

47 There was some particularly creative and imaginative teaching in foundation studies programmes. Teaching materials were used which took account of different levels of ability and most teachers used a multi-sensory approach. Students worked collaboratively and learned in realistic working environments. One teacher used an enterprise project to help students understand market research, costing, quality control and sales. Learning support workers helped students individually with technical problems. Basic skills teaching was integrated routinely with practical projects. Students assessed their own progress and reflected on their own experience. Information technology was not used sufficiently in foundation studies teaching. A few teachers chose inappropriate activities that confused students. Some vocational teachers are not trained to understand fully how learning difficulties and/or disabilities can affect how students learn.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

48 Students carry out practical work competently and with a high regard to safety. On vocational programmes they gain high levels of practical

skills. These range from manual skills in construction to levels of physical fitness in sports and performance skills in drama, music and dance. There are many examples of students developing effective communication skills through group work, for example, in construction and catering. Some students are not developing effective communication and information technology skills and a few lack the confidence to participate orally. Appropriate standards in written work are not being achieved by some students, for example in hairdressing and beauty.

49 Most students on vocational programmes gain the qualification for which they enrol. In the last two years 87 per cent of students, aged 16 to 18, in their final year of study at advanced level, achieved their qualification. This places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on data in the 1995 and 1996 tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). In 1996, 74 per cent of the students on intermediate vocational courses were successful. This also places the college in the top third of colleges in the sector on this performance measure. GCE A level courses represent a small part of the college's overall provision. There are good GCE A level results in some subjects, but overall students' achievements on GCE A level programmes are poor. In 1996, 140 students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE AS/A level examinations scored, on average, 2.8 points per entry. This places the college in the bottom third of colleges in the sector on this performance measure based on the data published by the DfEE.

50 In science, 70 per cent of students in 1995 successfully completed the access course. On the medical access course over 94 per cent of students gained a distinction or merit and, since 1994, all completing students have progressed to higher education. Examination results in GCSE science are above the national average but retention rates in GCSE and GCE A level science subjects have been low. For example, only 26 per cent of the 1994-96 cohort of GCE A level biology students completed their course. Pass rates in GCE A level biology and chemistry are also poor at around 40 per cent. In mathematics and computing, students produce assignment work of an acceptable standard. Results for GCSE computer studies have been above the national average for the last three years, but examination results in mathematics at both GCSE and GCE A level are below the national average.

51 In construction, students produce high-quality practical work in all craft subjects. Students are knowledgeable about safety procedures and generally apply them in practical sessions. Pass rates on most construction courses are better than national averages and are particularly good on courses run in conjunction with the Construction Industry Training Board. Achievement rates in NVQ level 2 plumbing are low and, following a national trend, some students are taking three years to achieve the award. The pass rate on the national certificate in building and civil engineering has varied between 46 and 71 per cent during the last three years.

52 Examination pass rates for two-year engineering courses have been consistently above 70 per cent over the last three years and are similar to national averages. Pass rates for one-year courses are below the national average. Students' success on the Institute of the Motor Industry's certificate in management course resulted in the college being ranked sixth in the country in 1994-95. Retention rates on one-year courses are generally better than 75 per cent, but the number of students progressing to the second year of advanced courses has declined significantly and is low. Some students have gained local and national awards and one student with severe learning difficulties achieved local public recognition for obtaining his City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 383 motor vehicle certificate. Students are acquiring appropriate technical expertise and their practical work is of a high standard. They are competent in handling tools and equipment, including computer-aided design software. However, some students have not developed their communication skills to the required standard.

53 Students on secretarial and business courses are able to work independently in the realistic-learning office environment. Retention rates on business studies programmes are high, many being over 90 per cent. The level of successful completion in the grouped secretarial award programmes, and on management and supervisory courses, has been high. In 1996, students taking the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) diploma in administrative procedures obtained the best results in England for the administrative paper. However, there were poor levels of successful completion on the GCE A level in business studies (48 per cent) and on the NVQ level 3 administration course. Some NVQ students enrol with no intention of gaining the full award. However, many successfully complete individual units.

54 Results on public services, outdoor activities and sports courses were significantly better than national averages. In the 1995-96 session, 62 per cent of students entered for GCE A level sports studies obtained grades A to C, 20 per cent above the national average for further education colleges. Over 90 per cent passed the GCSE in physical education; an improvement of 25 per cent on the previous year. On most courses, retention rates, pass rates and progression are good. Students are well motivated and their written work is carefully presented. Students also achieve the required standards in appearance, and enjoy opportunities to develop their physical fitness, teamwork and to obtain additional qualifications. However, results on the smaller GNVQ leisure and tourism programmes were poor, and only 38 per cent of students on the advanced programme gained the full award.

55 Students completing hotel and catering courses often obtain valuable additional qualifications. In 1996, all first-year NVQ and GNVQ students successfully completed a basic food hygiene course. Students' assignment work on GNVQ and NVQ reception courses is of a high standard. Effective practical teamwork is especially evident between restaurant and reception

students. A second-year reception student worked with first-year students to co-ordinate all restaurant and function bookings. Students learn to communicate and deal with the public effectively. Retention rates were poor on several courses in 1995-96, for example, the GNVQ in hospitality and catering at advanced level, and the C&G cookery. Only 40 per cent of students who had enrolled at the beginning of the C&G cookery certificate course were ultimately successful, a reduction of 15 per cent on the previous year's result. Some students do not record their achievements in their NVQ portfolios.

56 In health, social and childcare courses many students used information technology skills to enhance the presentation of their assignments using a variety of fonts, images, and diagrams. Students spoke and wrote well. An indication of good planning, and effective links between theory and practice, was shown when a group of mature women analysed the properties of salt dough before carrying out practical work. Results on the GNVQ in health and social care at advanced level and the NVQ in care at level 2, were better than national averages. Results were variable on many courses: for example, the pass rate for one group of childcare students was 86 per cent, whilst for another group it was only 44 per cent. Some students on NVQ programmes take too long to complete the full programme. Some retention rates on both social care and childcare courses were low; 69 students out of an original 109 completed their NVQ programme in 1995-96.

57 In hairdressing and beauty therapy, students achieve good standards of work in practical sessions, but some students worked only on blocks and were not developing appropriate professional standards. One beauty therapy student gained a national award for her work on electrolysis. Nearly all mature students in hairdressing, and all students in body massage and aromatherapy, complete their courses, but many do not gain the full award. In 1995-96, successful completion rates on full-time courses in both hairdressing and beauty therapy were below national averages, varying between 31 and 58 per cent. Although students often use information technology skills to improve the presentation of their work, some written work does not reach the required level for the course.

58 Retention rates for students attending BTEC diploma courses in media and performing arts courses have continued to improve. For the BTEC first diploma, retention has risen from 74 to 100 per cent between 1994 and 1996. Results on most courses are in line with national averages. There has been a decline in pass rates on the BTEC national diploma in performing arts. Students develop confidence through group work and this improves their practical performance skills. The dance company in residence provides students with opportunities to perform publicly alongside professionals. Students are not developing sufficient expertise in study and information technology skills. Students have achieved some good results in art and design courses such as BTEC foundation art and

design, and ceramics but there are low numbers entering for the examination. Pass rates in photography and on an access course improved significantly between 1995 and 1996. Many students progress from intermediate to advanced courses within the college. Results in GCE A level art courses are below the national average. Pass rates for students on GNVQ intermediate courses have declined during the last year.

59 In English, history and communication studies, students made effective use of information technology to improve the presentation of their well-organised folders. One group of history students showed perceptive analytical skills when looking at 'bias' by comparing interpretations by historians of different nationalities of the causes of the Second World War. Mature students were able to use sophisticated language skills in a creative writing autobiographical exercise, but some language and literature students had difficulty in analysing texts and writing well. Results on many courses matched national averages but there were poor results in GCSE English language, where only 20 per cent of students passed. Pass rates were below national averages in GCE A level geography and psychology, and GCSE sociology and geography. In 1996, nearly all daytime access programme adult students passed their course and over 70 per cent progressed to higher education. Results on the evening access course were also good. Access students show good oral skills in group discussions. Some have difficulties initially with written work but many make rapid progress. Students on C&G and postgraduate teacher training programmes successfully achieve their goals. Not all language students develop effective oral skills, but an evening class of beginners made rapid progress in developing confidence in using the spoken language.

60 Students on basic education courses develop the confidence to act independently and promote their own work. In 1996, there was a 100 per cent pass rate for examinations of the English Speaking Board and for C&G preliminary cooking. Pass rates in preliminary cooking competences were above 85 per cent. There was a 100 per cent pass rate in C&G wordpower and numberpower at foundation and level 1. Students are involved in successful enterprise projects where they make and sell the work produced in workshops. However, few mature students are managing to gain employment at the end of their courses.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

61 There is a strong commitment from senior managers to improving the quality of provision. There are well-documented policies and procedures for the internal validation of new courses, course monitoring, and review, and staff appraisal. The head of the quality assurance unit has overall responsibility for quality assurance and is supported by a team of internal quality auditors who assess how effectively the quality procedures are implemented. Reports from internal auditors are also used to disseminate good practice throughout the college. The college has

achieved the British Standard EN ISO 9002 and there is an external review of the effectiveness of the system through audit by the British Standards Institute.

62 There is effective monitoring of courses and course directors maintain comprehensive course files. Team meetings, which include student representatives, are held regularly to evaluate the effectiveness of courses and review action plans. At school level, there is a summary report which pulls together the evaluation of groups of related courses. Course reviews carried out during 1995-96 were of variable quality in terms of their rigour and the coverage of key issues. At a college-wide level, there is a curriculum standards committee which conducts a more detailed review of a sample of courses to assess standards.

63 Questionnaires are used extensively to gather feedback from students, parents, teaching staff and employers. Surveys of students' opinions are carried out at least once a year, and for many courses each term, and results are analysed by course teams. Student satisfaction surveys are also undertaken by other key services such as the learning centre. Surveys of staff views have led to improvements such as the implementation of common appraisal and induction systems for academic and support staff.

64 A standard framework for ensuring consistency in internal assessment for vocational courses has recently been introduced and its effectiveness will be monitored through internal audit. The college has also introduced a system of internal validation for all further education course proposals that require external validation. A small panel of the curriculum standards committee scrutinises course proposals. The internal validation system does not benefit from inviting external subject specialists to evaluate course submissions.

65 The setting and monitoring of targets is assuming greater importance in the quality assurance system. For each curriculum area, explicit targets are now set for enrolment, retention, progression and examination pass rates. Where possible these are based upon national averages. There is active monitoring of students' achievements at college and corporation level. The curriculum standards committee collates data on students' achievements and deans of school present data on students' achievements to the corporation members and draw up plans for improvement. For example, GCE A level and GCSE results have been reviewed for two consecutive years. This has led to the introduction of a modified entry criteria for the full-time GCE A level programme. At present, the college does not use any system for analysing students' achievements in relation to previous attainments through comparing students' actual results with those predicted.

66 A college charter has been produced that meets the requirements of the *Charter for Further Education*. The student handbook, which contains an abridged version of the charter, is distributed during induction. A large-print version of the handbook is available for students who are partially sighted. The staff handbook also includes the charter. Students

are aware of the charter which is posted widely throughout the college. There is also a well-designed procedure for responding to students' complaints with a requirement to respond formally to complaints within 10 days.

67 A self-assessment report, with an action plan, was produced for the inspection after a whole college consultation exercise. The text of the report is insufficiently self-critical and does not address all the main issues set out in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Issues in the action plan do not emerge clearly from the text of the report. The college self-assessment report does not reflect the rigour of the internal audit procedures or the requirement for critical self-analysis promoted by the senior management team. Nevertheless the college's planning cycle does incorporate a self-critical approach to college matters.

68 The college runs franchised courses in association with 15 off-site collaborative providers. This work constitutes about 10 per cent of the college's FEFC-funded provision in 1996-97. Each off-site collaborative provider receives an information pack and a detailed college contract which requires compliance with the college's quality assurance guidelines. Whilst there is effective monitoring of the off-site collaborative provider courses with regular monitoring visits by staff, the review and evaluation processes have not been fully integrated with the college's quality assurance system.

69 Staff development is linked to the priorities in the strategic plan. Forty per cent of the training budget is devolved to schools to meet identified subject training needs. Staff training is carefully evaluated and there is an in service training committee which reviews expenditure and the staff-development report of each school. All new staff receive a well-organised induction, and support from mentors, following fully documented procedures. The college operates a comprehensive appraisal system for all staff which is used to identify individual training needs. For teaching staff this includes an element of classroom observation. The college has recently achieved the Investors in People standard and this reflects the importance given to staff training and development.

RESOURCES

Staffing

70 Staff are used effectively. The college has a range of teacher support posts which enable teachers to be deployed flexibly and provide good support for students as they work independently. For example, 20 skills tutors provide one-to-one and group support to students in the information technology workshop and a wide range of learning environments. They also help develop learning resources. Twenty learning support officers provide technician support and student supervision in workshops. This extended technician role is working successfully, although in construction and engineering, the task of supervising students has left insufficient time for the preparation of practical materials in support of teaching.

71 Teachers generally have appropriate experience for the courses they teach, and almost all have a teaching qualification. Many have vocational experience relevant to their current work, although this is now dated in a few areas such as science. Part-time and fractional staff bring knowledge of current working practices to course teams. This is particularly evident in areas such as hairdressing and beauty therapy. Part-time teachers and support staff are successfully integrated with course teams. Good progress has been made in ensuring that there are assessors and verifiers in most curriculum areas.

72 Management, teaching and business support staff work closely together across the college. For example, there is a college services team which monitors the condition of accommodation and equipment and the need for refurbishment. Managers and technical staff in computing work with teachers to monitor networks and provide an excellent advisory service to staff and students. There are comprehensive personnel policies and practices. Recruitment procedures are clearly defined. A comprehensive database provides information on staff qualifications and trends in staff absence. Job applications are monitored in terms of disability, ethnicity and gender in accordance with the college's equal opportunities policy.

Equipment/learning resources

73 There are good levels of equipment in many areas and, in some cases, it is of current industrial standard. In art and design, both digital imaging equipment and a well-resourced photographic darkroom are available. An up-to-date media suite comprises a television studio, sophisticated lighting, and editing facilities. An integrated design, print and reprographic facility allows staff to produce professional teaching aids and marketing materials. The college has received donations from industry, such as bar fittings and carpeting in the training restaurant. In some curriculum areas equipment is inadequate. In the hair and beauty salon, equipment does not meet industrial standards, and in hotel and catering some kitchen equipment is dated.

74 The college has a campus-wide computer network of over 300 industrial standard machines with a good range of software, including CD-ROMs. The overall ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is 1:9.5 and the computer network bandwidth has been expanded to allow faster operations and enable access to new applications. A well-researched college information technology strategy informs the development of multi-media facilities and video-conferencing. Open access to computers and facilities for students to study on their own are available in the main learning centre, and elsewhere throughout the college. Although access is generally good, there are occasions during the core teaching day when students are unable to use a machine.

75 Book, periodical, audio, video and information technology resources are integrated with an attractive, modern learning centre. The centre

seats 390 students and has facilities for private study, open learning, access to computer workstations, key skills workshops and a large range of independent learning materials. There is a stock of over 50,000 items which includes books, cassettes, CD-ROMs, slide sets, subject folders and videos. The college has been in the forefront in developing paper-based resources to enable students to learn on their own and was a founder member of the Further Education National Consortium. In most areas, book provision is suitable for students' needs and in English set texts are supplemented by videos of recent films and productions. There is a computerised system for retrieving, issuing and cataloguing resources which includes a good search facility.

Accommodation

76 The college's main site houses a range of buildings which date mainly from 1958. Gaywood Hall, a Victorian mansion, one mile from the main campus, is used mainly for courses in health and social care. Plaxtole House includes a conference centre and hall of residence. The college owns off-campus playing fields and land for an overflow car park. There is a detailed accommodation strategy with a preferred plan for improvements. The main campus road system does not give adequate provision at peak periods for the movement of coaches, other vehicles and pedestrians. The reception area is located away from the main parking areas and this is inconvenient to students, staff and visitors. Although there is adequate access to teaching accommodation in the Tower Block, the lack of suitable lifts in some buildings prevents access for people with mobility difficulties beyond ground floor level. Significant efforts have been made to improve access within the resources available.

77 Much of the accommodation provides an attractive learning environment which is clean, well decorated and well maintained. In recent years several parts of the college have been remodelled and refurbished. Improvements include an integrated learning centre, a training restaurant, a sports science laboratory, a photographic processing room, and a dedicated area for the teaching of adults on access and higher education courses. The college acknowledges the need for further improvement. The science laboratories are unsuitable for integrated theory and practical teaching. The demountable classrooms are an unsatisfactory learning environment, despite improvements in social facilities and decor. The location of Gaywood Hall denies some students easy access to learning resources and other facilities on the main campus.

78 The college owns and makes daytime use of a large sports hall managed by the district council. The main gymnasium is equipped for basketball, trampolining, badminton and five-a-side football. In addition, there are squash courts and a weight-training room. The sports hall provides a good realistic working environment for students on uniformed services and sports courses. Facilities for outdoor activities are good, and include 22 sailing dinghies, 26 kayaks, a rescue boat and climbing and

mountaineering equipment. Facilities for students are generally good. The student common room is well decorated and houses student union offices. The student services area is central and accessible. A college shop is located in the learning centre and a banking service adjacent to the training restaurant. The college refectory area was refurbished in 1994 and provides a good service. The hall of residence in Plaxtole House has 62 bedrooms, 10 of which have been adapted to house ambulant students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

79 The strengths of the college are:

- its responsiveness to individual, community and business needs
- flexible patterns of attendance and modes of study for students
- the well-informed, effective and committed corporation
- the dynamic, open and consultative management that values all staff
- effective planning and deployment of resources
- extensive and effective pre-entry information and guidance
- the well-organised and systematic induction for all major programmes
- comprehensive support for students
- the teaching and learning in most programme areas
- the positive outcomes achieved by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progression on to mainstream provision
- good results on most vocational courses
- the comprehensive quality assurance and audit framework
- the effective linking of teaching observation, appraisal and professional development
- flexible deployment of staff
- comprehensive resources to support independent learning.

80 In order to improve provision further the college should address the following issues:

- the underachievement of some enrolment targets
- inappropriate entry criteria on a few courses
- the less-effective teaching and learning in some curriculum areas
- the poor results on some GCE A level courses
- the insufficiently critical self-assessment report
- some unsuitable accommodation with poor access for people with restricted mobility.

FIGURES

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

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

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

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)

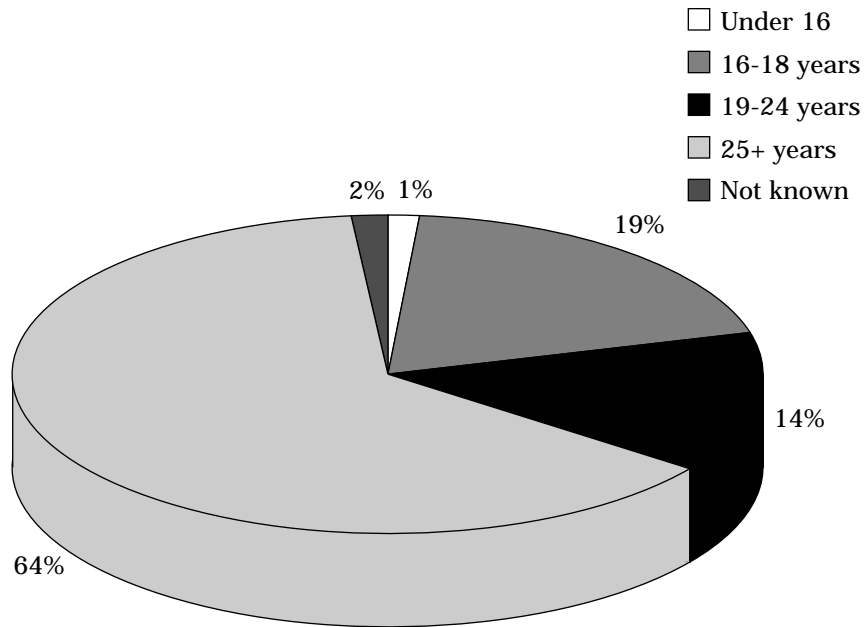
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

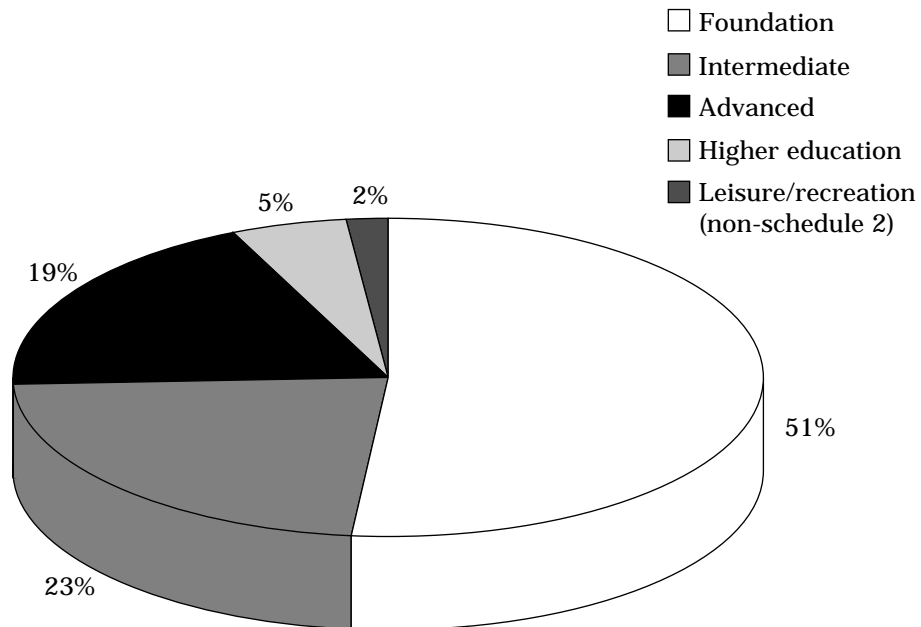
The Norfolk College of Arts and Technology: percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 14,615

Figure 2

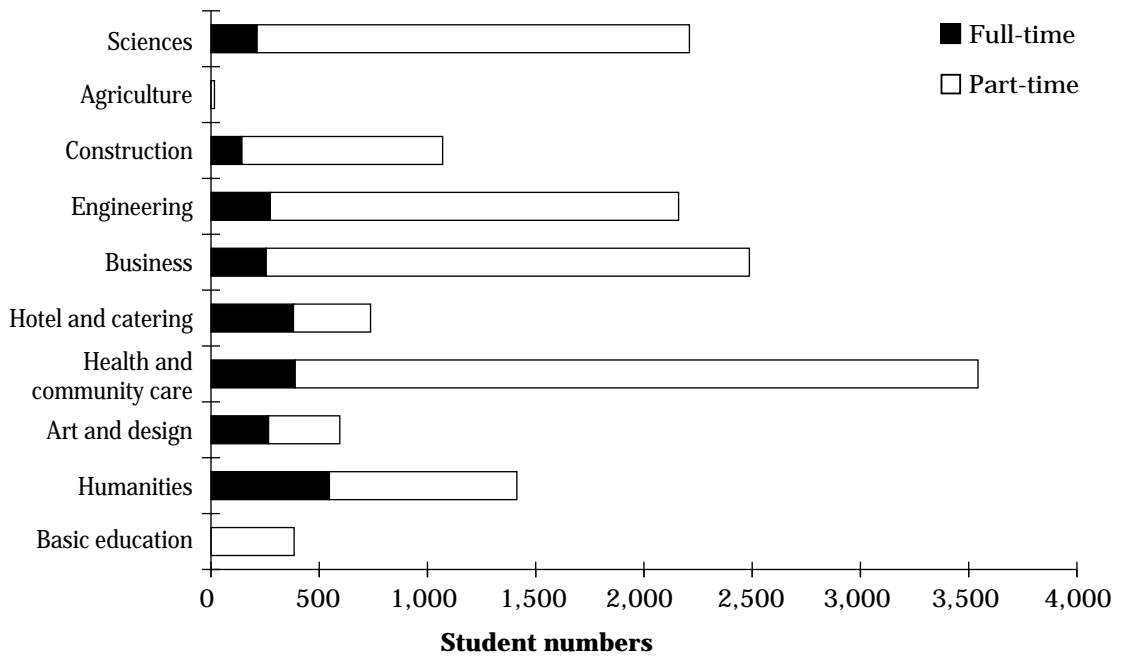
The Norfolk College of Arts and Technology: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 14,615

Figure 3

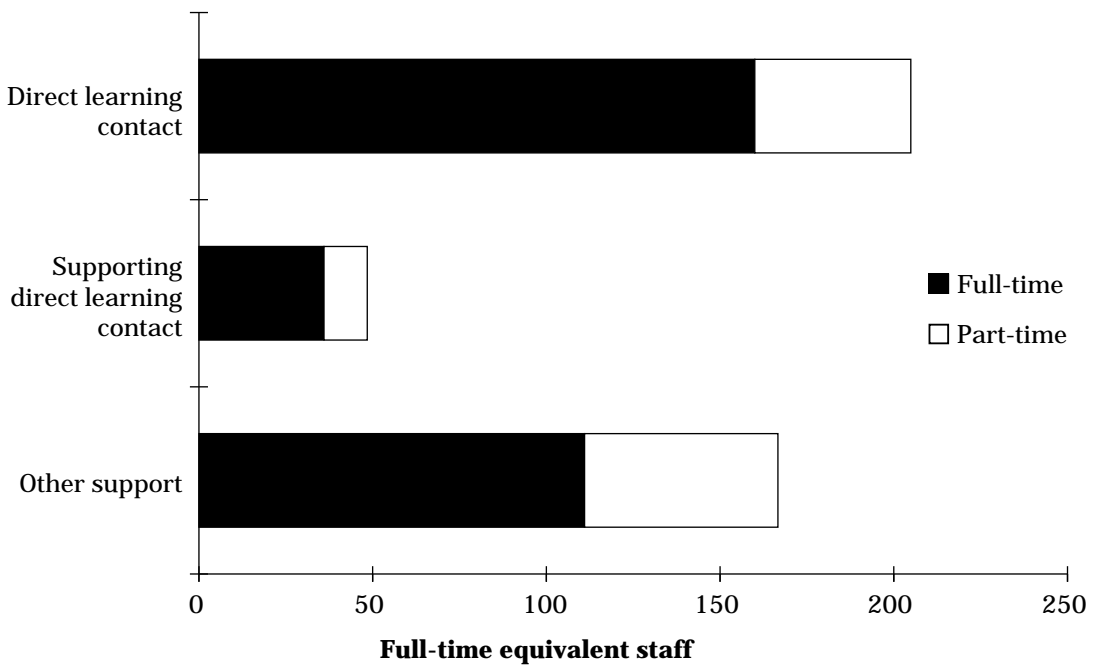
The Norfolk College of Arts and Technology: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 14,615

Figure 4

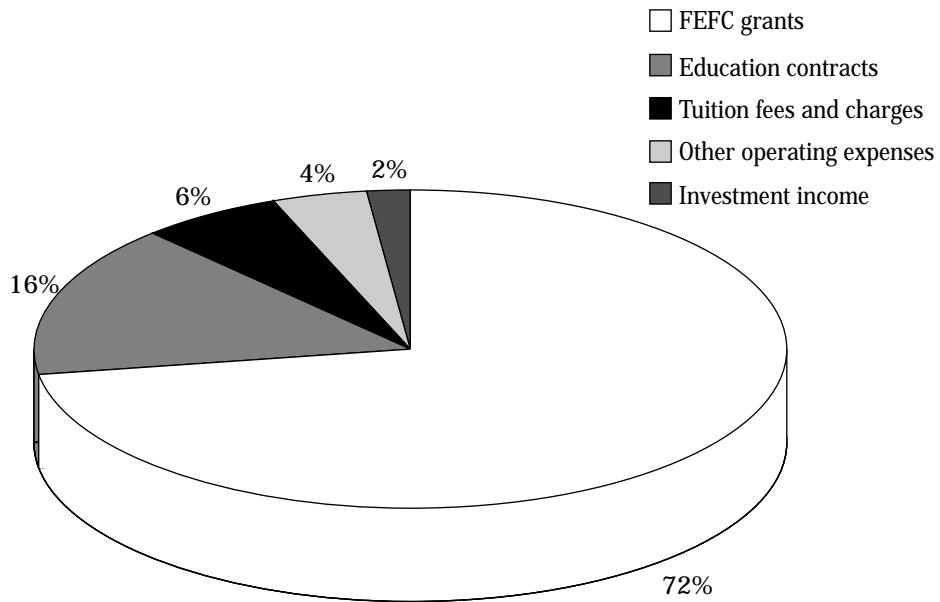
The Norfolk College of Arts and Technology: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 420

Figure 5

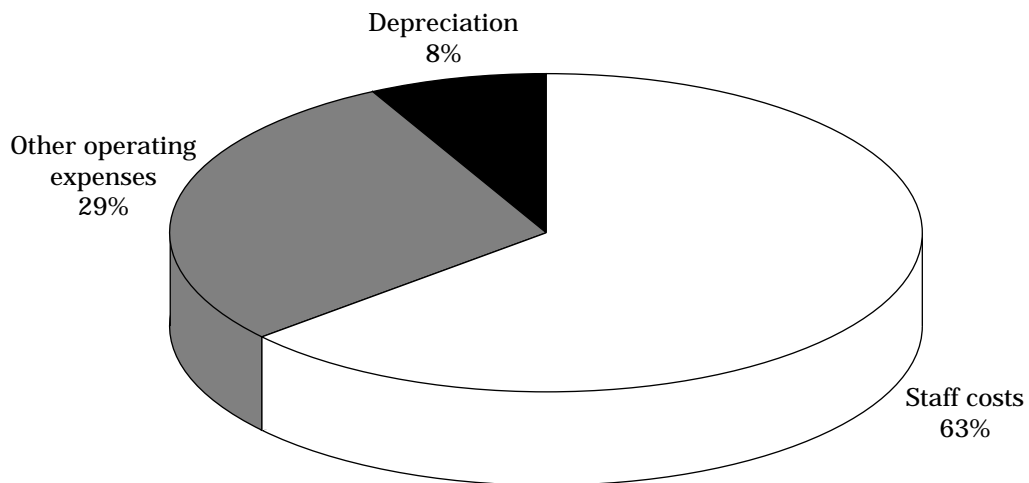
The Norfolk College of Arts and Technology: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £11,863,000

Figure 6

The Norfolk College of Arts and Technology: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £12,125,000

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