North Hertfordshire College

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a statutory duty to ensure that there are satisfactory arrangements to assess the quality of provision in the further education sector. It discharges the duty in part through its inspectorate, which inspects and reports on each college in the sector every four years. The Council's inspectorate also assesses and reports on a national basis on specific curriculum areas and advises the Council's quality assessment committee.

College inspections involve both full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have specialist knowledge and experience in the areas they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member from outside the world of education and a nominated member of staff from the college being inspected.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are described in the Council Circular 93/28. In the course of inspecting colleges, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also summarise their judgements on the balance between strengths and weaknesses using a five-point scale. 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.*

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 0203 863000
Fax 0203 863100*

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 30/94

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE COLLEGE
EASTERN REGION
Inspected September 1993 – February 1994

Summary

North Hertfordshire College was created in April 1991 as a result of the reorganisation of further education in Hertfordshire. Since then it has successfully established a unified corporate identity, rationalised course provision and made major changes to its internal structures. The college offers a broad range of vocational, academic and recreational courses. Close links with industry, commerce and the local community are used to identify education and training needs. The college is well governed and well managed. Strategic planning is effective and comprehensive systems have been developed for the management of finance, general facilities and personnel. Teaching is well organised, but the quality of support and guidance for students varies. Students' achievements in external examinations are satisfactory. The college has a well-established quality assurance framework which is operating effectively, but the college has yet to identify performance standards and to ensure the systematic collation of information on its students. The college should develop more flexible methods of curriculum delivery, co-ordinate the management of student support services and improve resources for information technology.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
General & community education	2	Engineering, science & technology	2
Arts & creative services	2	Applied social studies	2
Business studies & management studies	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1   North Hertfordshire College was inspected between September 1993 and February 1994. A team of nine inspectors spent a week in the college from 7 to 11 February 1994. A further 63 days were used to inspect specialist aspects of college provision. Inspectors visited 224 classes, examined samples of students' work and held discussions with governors, staff, and students. They also met 15 representatives of local employers, schools and the community including the chief executive of the Hertfordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

2   The inspection was carried out according to the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. The framework describes a four year cycle. When this cycle becomes fully established, colleges will have the opportunity to respond to the findings of earlier inspection visits before their quadrennial inspection and the subsequent report. As the inspection of North Hertfordshire College occurred early in the cycle, the opportunity for such a response was not available.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3   North Hertfordshire College was formed on 1 April 1991 following a merger of the Stevenage and north Hertfordshire colleges as part of the re-organisation of further education in Hertfordshire. It is a large general further education college which draws students from Letchworth, Hitchin and Stevenage and the surrounding rural areas of north Hertfordshire. It is a major provider of recreational and community education and for this aspect of its work it makes use of over 80 local schools and community centres. There are three other general further education colleges in Hertfordshire.

4   The college has four main centres located in the three principal towns of north Hertfordshire. Three of the centres, Hitchin, Letchworth and Stevenage are close to rail stations. The fourth centre at Shephalbury is in a suburb about one-and-a-half miles from the centre of Stevenage. The greatest distance between centres is the 10 miles from Shephalbury to Letchworth. There are good road links between centres and all are easily accessible from the A1(M).

5   There is an extensive range of further education courses and some higher education provision managed through five large departments: applied social studies; arts and creative services; business and management studies; engineering, science and technology; and general and community education. There are 193 full-time lecturing staff and an additional 37 staff are on proportional full-time contracts. The equivalent of a further 69 full-time lecturing staff work part-time. There are 112 full-time and 121 permanent part-time staff supporting the work of the college in administrative, technical and clerical positions. A profile of staff, expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 1.

6   In the academic year 1992-93 there were nearly 20,000 students enrolled at the college. Of these about 1,550 were full-time and a further 480 followed courses of between four and 30 weeks duration. Nearly 2,500 students were released by their employers to study part-time. The numbers of enrolled students ranged from just under 1,400 in the department of applied social studies to over 8,700 in the departments of general and community education.

7   At the time of the inspection, the college had enrolled 14,820 students with a full-time student population of 2,200, including 310 students taking higher education courses. Percentage enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 2 and 3, respectively. The college has experienced a decline in total enrolments in the last two years. There has been a reduction in enrolments by students released from employment, consequently growth has been targeted at full-time courses and the number of full-time students has increased significantly. The college plans to increase the proportion of full-time students to 60 per cent of its enrolment by 1996. At 1 November 1993 the college had achieved 98 per cent of its growth target for 1993-94 in terms of weighted full-time equivalents and expects to exceed this over the full academic year. Full-time equivalent enrolments by curriculum area and mode of attendance, as at November 1993, are shown in figure 4.

8   The college in its mission statement identifies its role as providing quality education, training and recreation to meet the needs of the community it serves. The strategic plan emphasises the priority given to the continuation of the college's community role and its commitment to the provision of courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In pursuing its mission and strategic objectives, the college plans to expand student numbers by improving access to education and training, raise the level of student achievement and enhance the quality of its provision. There is an associate college agreement with the University of Hertfordshire and the college intends to increase its higher education enrolments over the next three years.

9   The total population of the north Hertfordshire and Stevenage area is approximately 190,000. About 5.5 per cent of the population are from ethnic minority groups, mainly of Asian origin. Major local industries, such as aerospace and defence, have suffered severe contraction in recent years and this has adversely affected the college's part-time recruitment. In October 1993, unemployment in north Hertfordshire stood at 7.6 per cent. In Stevenage the proportion is 10 per cent which is one of the highest rates in the county. Stevenage also has a high proportion of long-term unemployed. Thirty-nine per cent of unemployed people have been out of work for more than one year.

10   There are 19 secondary schools in the college's catchment area, all with sixth forms. The proportion of young people staying on in education beyond 16 is high. In 1993, the participation rate for Hertfordshire was

77 per cent. Included in this figure is the 25 per cent of young people who go on to further education.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

11   The college is responsive to the education and training needs of the locality. Opportunities are available to study a broad range of courses, up to degree level in some areas. Vocational courses prepare students for most areas of employment. There are strengths in business studies, and art and creative services and the college has a deservedly high reputation for its work in performing arts. Significant features of the college's provision includes the opportunities provided for young people and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through the college's close links with the community and social services. There is a wide range of GCE A level and GCSE subjects although not all subjects are available at each of the main centres. An extensive recreational programme is offered both at the main centres and in local schools and community centres.

12   Full-time student enrolments have risen significantly and at the start of this academic session the college adopted a policy of not charging fees to full-time students. Part-time enrolments have declined. The changing balance of enrolments in favour of full-time students has affected the college's strategic objectives. There is a variety of attendance patterns covering most areas of work which allows students and, where appropriate, their employers, to select the pattern which best suits their requirements.

13   The range and extent of provision for the large number of adult students returning to study is impressive. They have access to the full range of vocational courses offered. The access programme provides opportunities for those wishing to enter higher education. There are courses for adults to gain basic skills. There are well-established courses of education and training for adults and young people funded by the TEC. Students from minority ethnic groups are well represented on college courses. There is good provision of English for speakers of other languages.

14   The college has plans to provide modular programmes of study to complement and develop the present range of courses. A curriculum plan has been introduced which proposes the adoption of a curricular framework modelled on General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) developments. At present GNVQs have been introduced in art and design, and leisure and tourism, and NVQs are available in many vocational areas. These curricular initiatives require the development of flexible patterns of learning which allow students to work independently at times and places of their own choosing.

15   Marketing and publicity are co-ordinated through a central marketing section based in the college business development unit. The marketing policy is clear and is closely related to the mission statement and strategic

objectives. Good-quality publicity and promotional materials are available. Market intelligence is obtained from various sources and every effort is made to identify and anticipate local needs. The competitive environment and the uncertain level of support from industry and from other clients make it difficult for the college to predict enrolments accurately.

16　There is a good range of external contacts and links with local business, industry, the local authority, the Hertfordshire TEC, community groups and other further and higher education providers. The principal is closely involved with North Hertfordshire District Council and Stevenage Borough Council in planning education and training needs. There are regular meetings between the chief executive of the TEC and the college principals in Hertfordshire.

17　The quality of the links and the levels of co-operation with local schools are variable. There are some good working relationships: for example, to develop courses and to share the teaching of business studies. Relationships with schools are less effective in Stevenage than in Hitchin and Letchworth.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

18　The corporation has 16 members. Nine are drawn from professional and business fields, two from other major educational establishments, and five, including the principal, three staff and one student, from the college itself. The governors contribute substantially to the college's strategic planning and policy formulation and draw effectively on their professional, industrial and community contacts. The board conducts its business through five subcommittees which are well attended.

19　North Hertfordshire College is well managed. The governors and senior management work co-operatively as a team. They have successfully steered the college through a process of rationalisation and re-structuring following its creation from the merger of two colleges in 1991. Appropriate management structures and management styles have been developed to meet the demands of incorporation.

20　There is a high degree of co-operation between the governors and the senior management team. Residential workshops attended by governors and senior management have strengthened their working relationships. The workshops have focused on the challenge of bringing together the new college, incorporation, and, most recently, the structural changes required to achieve resource savings. The relationships are routinely sustained through informal contact and through senior management participation in the work of the corporation and its subcommittees.

21　The roles of college managers are clear and familiar to staff. The recently-re-organised management structure comprises a senior management team, made up of the principal, a deputy principal, five directors of studies, a director of facilities and a director of finance. In addition to their departmental roles, the directors of studies have assigned

responsibilities for the cross-college functions of curriculum, marketing, quality assurance, registration and student support. The deputy principal is responsible for personnel and strategic planning.

22   The senior management and departmental management teams adopt a corporate approach to decision making. Meetings are held regularly, are purposeful and have well defined agendas and action points. The senior management team is linked to the departmental management teams through the directors of studies, an arrangement which has helped to ensure effective lines of communication. The principal is committed to a policy of open communication with staff and students. Management is viewed by staff as accessible and responsive.

23   The college has reduced the number of levels of management. The new organisational structure has increased the responsibilities of section heads for operational management and curriculum development. Heads of section are effectively involved in the development of cross-college policies through working groups and membership of the academic board. However, the breadth of responsibilities of section heads for managing the curriculum and staff varies between departments. In the department of general and community education, section heads have to manage diverse courses across several sites and this gives them too heavy a management responsibility.

24   The strategic plan provides a clear framework for the medium-term development of the college. The plan is translated into objectives and broad targets for each department and functional area, but it has not been fully translated into measurable targets. Similarly there are no associated performance indicators for evaluating the success of curriculum delivery or student support. It has also developed human resource and accommodation strategies in order to reduce its unit of funding. The college's unit of funding for 1992-93 was £3,216 per weighted full-time equivalent student. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges was £2,444. Summaries of the college's recurrent income and estimated expenditure are shown in figures 5 and 6.

25   The corporation, senior management and other budget holders receive regular monthly reports. Each member of the senior management team has well-defined budget responsibilities for both departmental and cross-college areas. The budgeting and financial control measures are not fully understood below senior management level and several departmental plans have not been costed. The college is rapidly developing mechanisms to ensure that management and decision making at course and programme level are properly informed about financial matters.

26   The college recognises the importance of improving management information on student achievement and curriculum delivery. At present, apart from student enrolment data, little college-wide information is available to support the measurement of performance. For example, information on student retention and student destinations is not routinely available at the institutional level. The college has established an

information systems strategy committee and is currently developing a comprehensive information strategy.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

27   The management of students' recruitment, guidance and support has undergone several changes in the last few years. The current division of responsibilities for admissions, counselling and guidance means that the various elements of support are not fully integrated.

28   The information on courses provided for prospective students is good. College tutors devote considerable time and energy to organising and marketing open days and attending careers and community events. There is an extensive programme to inform potential students of the range of courses offered. Impartial advice is available from the careers service and the college guidance officers. Many schools do not allow the college to present information directly to school leavers about the college and its courses.

29   There is an efficient central admission of applications. These are carefully screened and referred as appropriate to guidance officers or to course specialists. Most initial interviews are thorough and informative although a minority of tutors do not allow applicants sufficient time for questions. Specialist guidance staff are not always available to give considered and clear guidance to late applicants. Postal enrolment for some part-time vocational courses removes the opportunity for students to discuss their choice of course. Where interviews do not take place, increased opportunities for appropriate guidance are available in the early weeks of the course.

30   Recruitment and induction arrangements for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are effectively co-ordinated and monitored. The subsequent progress of students on specialist courses is monitored adequately. There are comprehensive and well-established links with local schools, the careers service, day centres and other agencies. The access centre provides detailed assessments of students with physical disabilities or sensory impairments. There is some good practice in the arrangements for supporting students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are studying on mainstream courses. However, the college recognises that such arrangements for identifying and supporting students are unco-ordinated and of variable quality.

31   In the best examples, students' induction programmes are comprehensive. Handbooks provide a useful introduction to the college and to the course. Tutorial sessions and class activities encourage students to get to know one another and the tutor. A screening process for students on some courses, including hairdressing and catering, has successfully identified those who require help with literacy and numeracy. The college should examine how identified needs will be supported. On a minority of courses, induction is less successful: insufficient information is provided about course content, and activities are less well organised.

32   Most students see their tutor regularly and are aware of the support available for both academic and pastoral needs. A minority meet their tutors rarely. Consistent monitoring is required to ensure that all students receive consistent standards of tutorial support and guidance. The college acknowledges that tutorial support for part-time students is less comprehensive than that for full-time students.

33   A counselling service is provided by four counsellors, who are also lecturers. They are each available for one day per week. Inappropriate rooming and the lack of an accessible and confidential appointments system limits the effectiveness of the service. Well-qualified guidance officers at each site provide specialist careers advice. The level of careers advice is adequate but some full-time and part-time students are unaware of the associated guidance and counselling provision available to them. An accommodation and welfare officer provides a valuable additional support for students.

34   The college has yet to develop a fully-comprehensive system for recording students' progress. Progress reports are issued for all 16-19 year old students. For students on the GCSE course, the first report is too late in the academic year to alert parents or carers to potential difficulties. The college encourages parents to contact the college and some departments hold formal parents meetings. All students are involved in planning their work and setting targets for action. It is intended that this will lead to a record of achievement. The process is well integrated in some vocational courses. For example in business studies and art and design, students have personal development plans which help them to take greater responsibility for organising their own learning. As yet, the descriptions of learning outcomes used on GCE A level courses are insufficiently detailed to form an adequate basis for recording achievement.

35   Systems for monitoring attendance are generally good. Registers are checked and the system for alerting tutors to absence is well documented. On some GCSE courses, however, tutors were unable to explain the long-term absences or withdrawals of some of their students.

36   The college invests generously in the students' union, funding two sabbatical posts. Student initiatives have led to an increased range of social facilities and sporting activities.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

37   Of the 224 teaching sessions inspected, 48 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses. 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 A/AS level		3	14	16	4	0	37
GCSE		1	5	9	2	0	17
GNVQ		2	2	3	1	0	8
NVQ		0	5	24	1	0	30
BTEC		3	20	21	5	0	49
Other		13	39	27	4	0	83
Total		22	85	100	17	0	224

38   Most teaching sessions were well managed. Objectives were clear and there were schemes of work in place. There were some good examples of schemes of work which identified teaching and learning strategies, together with details of assignment and assessment activity. In some areas, teaching schemes were not fully developed, consisting of no more than a list of syllabus topics to be covered.

39   Teachers were knowledgeable and experienced and, in most cases, they were able to relate their teaching to the abilities and experience of their students. Examples of good practice were observed where students' prior knowledge and experience were used to enhance learning.

40   A variety of teaching and learning approaches were employed which appropriately reflected the different needs of students and the requirements of the examining and awarding bodies. Most science classes were lively and interesting, with investigative work at the core of the lesson. The accompanying inputs from teachers were clear and well presented. In general education courses, teachers provided students with varied and challenging tasks. Group work provided opportunities for learning at different levels and allowed students to work at their own pace. In many of the language classes, students thrived on discussion, making good use of the target language.

41   In a small number of classes, students' learning was inadequately supported, teaching strategies were inappropriate or students were insufficiently challenged. In a few GCE A level and GCSE classes, tutors failed to grasp opportunities to check students' understanding or to reinforce learning. There were some computing lessons where the syllabus content was inappropriate, preparation inadequate and the teaching methods unsuitable. Several of the classes in hairdressing and beauty were undemanding and conducted at too slow a pace.

42   Many of the teaching sessions for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who were following specialist courses were well planned and students were clear about the purpose of activities. Students following individual learning programmes were generally well motivated. Overall, the teaching and the promotion of learning in these sessions demonstrated

more strengths than weaknesses. However, there were occasions when students were bored by the low level of activity, or where teachers failed adequately to address students' differing needs.

43   Assignments and projects for assessment were generally well organised. In Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) business and finance courses, the use of integrated assignments based upon realistic business tasks provided an effective framework for learning and focused appropriately on the development of common skills. In business administration, there was an appropriate achievement of competencies both at college and on work placement. A particularly innovative feature of the BTEC business and finance programme was the use of the higher national certificate students' work organisations as the basis for work placements. In art and design, written project briefs were not of an acceptable standard and some were poorly presented. In some cases, assessment criteria were missing. In engineering, there should be greater uniformity in the presentation of instructions for tests and in the assessment of project work.

44   Marking of students' work is constructive and provides adequate feedback to students. Most students receive regular coursework and assignment work throughout their programmes of study. Clear records of progress are kept. In delivering NVQs in business administration, there is a good system for keeping records: the progress of individual students is monitored closely. Some students failed to complete their homework tasks.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

45   Students are highly motivated and appear to enjoy their studies. Those spoken to during the inspection expressed satisfaction with their courses. Staff-student relationships are good and students speak highly of their tutors and of their college experience.

46   In mathematics and science, students were well motivated and demonstrated appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding. Students' achievements in engineering, science and technology practical work were generally satisfactory and in many cases good. In art and design, teaching staff had high expectations and this was reflected in the quality of students' work. The standard of work in fashion and textiles was particularly high. In social care and social work classes, students were developing good professional practices.

47   The majority of students had adequately-developed presentational and study skills. In many classes, students had opportunities to work co-operatively in groups and were developing effective interpersonal skills. Where students contributed to small-group or whole-group discussions they seemed confident and articulate. In some areas, students required additional help in note-taking and writing.

48   Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on specialist courses were effectively working towards nationally-recognised

qualifications and there were clear routes for progression. For adult students on these courses, there was relatively little accreditation available and progression routes were problematic and vague. In some basic education classes, there was no clear assessment strategy although student files demonstrated clearly the progress students were making.

49 Students' levels of achievement on vocational courses are generally satisfactory and often good. In 1992-93, 89 per cent of the college's 170 students, age 16-18, in their final year of study for the BTEC or City and Guilds of London Institute national diploma achieved their awards. This performance places the college in the top 30 per cent of all institutions within the further education sector. Results on a range of business management and professional courses also compared favourably with national averages. However, the proportion of students successfully completing the national diploma course in computing was low; and some students do not achieve their full qualifications in the NVQ in hairdressing after two years of full-time study.

50 In 1992-93, there were 1,500 GCSE examination entries. A large proportion of these were for students aged 19 and over. The percentage of GCSE passes, grades A-C, was 49 per cent for all students compared with a national average for all students of 52 per cent. On the GCE A level programme, the pass rate for A-E grades was 58 per cent. This compares with a national average for all students of 80 per cent and an average of 66 per cent for institutions other than sixth form colleges within the further education sector. The average points score of students age 16-18 entered for two or more GCE A levels (where A=10, E=2) was 8.1, a performance which places the college in the lower half of institutions within the sector.

51 The college has not systematically collected data on course completions, qualifications and destinations. Destination statistics for 1992-93 have been collected for 667 students who gained awards. These show that a high proportion of them progressed to further or higher education or to employment.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

52 The college's commitment to improving the quality of its work is reflected in its mission statement and strategic plan.

53 A course review system originally developed by the Hertfordshire local education authority in conjunction with colleges is currently in operation. A feature of the approach is the use of surveys of student satisfaction at three stages of their courses. The results from these surveys are available at institution, department, section and course levels. Students' views are also collected as a result of their participation in course team meetings. In some cases, course teams are unable to make effective use of the results of student questionnaires as they are insufficiently detailed to provide measures of satisfaction at course level. The views of employers, industry and community groups are gathered in ways which reflect the specific nature of the links with each department.

54   A key feature of the course review and monitoring scheme is that 'ownership' of the course review documentation rests with the course team, which collects and collates relevant information. Course teams provide section heads with information and action plans, and these form the basis of the section's annual report. The course review scheme operates most effectively for full-time courses. It is less effective for modular and subject-based programmes. In a small number of cases, course teams have not received adequate feedback in response to issues for action they have raised.

55   Recently, procedures have been introduced for the internal validation of new course developments and the regular re-validation of existing programmes. There are plans to strengthen the annual course review and validation procedures by the introduction of an audit group which will conduct regular inspections of courses. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of these new developments. The combined processes of course review, surveys of student satisfaction and the work of the validation and audit groups form the quality assurance framework for the college.

56   The arrangements for quality monitoring provide a flexible and rigorous framework. However, the college has not identified quality standards nor has it assembled the various aspects of quality measurement into a fully comprehensive system. Valid and reliable information on the number of applications for courses, enrolments, withdrawals, student achievements and destinations is required to inform the quality improvement process. At present the information is not available.

57   The staff-development programme is an integral part of the college strategy to achieve the Investors in People award. The college has identified priorities for activity which reflect both national and local concerns. A key priority at the moment is assessor training to support the introduction of GNVQs and NVQs. Staff receive comprehensive and regular information on internal and external staff-development opportunities and events, and speak highly of the college's support for staff development. All development activities are recorded and evaluated.

58   A bi-annual staff appraisal scheme, which includes classroom observations of teaching staff, has been introduced, but is not fully operational. Training and development needs arising from the appraisal process are to be included in individual action plans. A weakness in the present arrangements is that there is no formal link between the needs identified by the appraisal process and other quality measures at departmental level.

59   A sub-group of the college academic board has been set up to produce a college charter in response to the national further education charter. The sub-group has substantial student representation. The college charter will include a section on student responsibilities as well as their rights. As yet there are no consistent procedures to deal with student academic appeals and general complaints. Work is being undertaken to ensure

policies and structures are in place so that the requirements of the charter can be met.

RESOURCES

60   The strategic plan outlines the need for a major change in resource allocations to provide wider access and a range of more flexible arrangements for delivering the curriculum. The college has successfully managed a significant reduction in staff levels and is currently examining a number of options for increasing the efficiency with which it uses accommodation. Further refinement of the procedure for allocation of resources is needed to ensure a more uniform availability of learning resources.

Staffing

61   There has been a careful and sensitive handling of staff redeployment following the formation of the college. Comprehensive personnel procedures have been established and there is a detailed staff handbook which is being up-dated to reflect recent changes. All new permanent staff receive some induction and have a departmental mentor. There is a long-term strategy for upgrading the qualifications of the staff in all departments in order to be in a position to extend the college's higher education provision.

62   There are 230 permanent, mostly full-time, teaching staff and 500 part-time staff. This compares with 269 permanent and 462 part-time staff a year ago, reflecting the college's strategy to increase the proportion of part-time staff. Many of the part-time staff are involved in supporting the college's extensive recreational programme delivered in out-centres. The 230 permanent staff undertake 90 per cent of the teaching programme on the main sites. The number of support staff has remained constant at about 233.

63   With few exceptions, all staff are qualified to deliver the current course provision. The number of computing staff is barely adequate to support the courses offered.   There is a comprehensive training programme to overcome shortcomings, for example craft instructors are encouraged to improve their teaching skills under the Hertfordshire Personal Development Scheme. Technician and support staff are being deployed in a flexible manner, but the level of technical support remains inadequate in some areas. In particular, the college should review the level of technician support for computer maintenance.

Equipment

64   Courses are supported by sufficient equipment.   Engineering equipment is up-to-date and provides good support for courses in electronics and new areas such as microwave technology. The absence of fume extraction equipment in the main motor vehicle workshop leads to unsatisfactory working conditions. Equipment for hairdressing is not of an appropriate standard to reflect current professional practice. There is

an adequate supply of general equipment and materials to support teaching. Most departments have sufficient overhead projectors and screens, although in a few cases rooms lacked suitable black-out facilities.

65   The provision of library and learning resources is uneven across the college sites. A library is provided at each of the four sites. Those at Stevenage and Shephalbury are small for the numbers of students using them. Each library offers a range of learning support materials relevant to the curriculum on offer. Book stocks are generally satisfactory with the exception of the holdings for motor vehicle engineering on the Hitchin site. The range of engineering periodicals at Stevenage is good. The libraries also have audio-visual facilities, access to computer equipment, on-line CD-ROM databases, and open learning packages. The college subscribes to the Hertfordshire College and University library network which provides an efficient computer-based inter-library service.

66   The college has identified the need to develop its library facilities to provide effective learning resource centres on each of the sites. A learning resources co-ordinator has been appointed and some progress has been made, particularly at the Hitchin site. However, considerable development is required to create the facilities envisaged for supporting GNVQs and NVQs, and to provide basic skills workshops.

67   Students on a number of courses experience difficulty in gaining access to computers. In some areas, the computing hardware and software is in need of updating. The college has about 350 computers provided in classrooms and learning resource areas. These are distributed widely between and across sites resulting in insufficient computers to support some areas of work; for example, hotel and catering courses and social studies. The learning resource centre at Hitchin provides access to two networks of 60 up-to-date computers and a good range of learning resources. The college has identified the need for similar facilities at Stevenage. The development of an information technology strategy should address some of these difficulties.

Accommodation

68   The college buildings were constructed between 20 and 25 years ago. They are generally well kept and clean, and provide a welcoming environment for students. Standards of maintenance of the sites and surrounding areas are good. The split sites necessitate considerable travelling for some members of staff, although most students and staff need attend only one site for their work. The college has engaged external consultants and is currently preparing an accommodation strategy which will lead to a rationalisation of its accommodation assets. Space is efficiently utilised at Stevenage but under-utilised at the other three centres.

69   Following a major fire at the Hitchin centre in 1991, the library has been extended as part of the rebuilding, to form an excellent learning resource centre. Better access has also been provided for students with restricted mobility. At the other sites, the accommodation is not

appropriate to support the development of methods of learning which encourage independent study. Access for wheelchair users is also restricted. There are good sports facilities available at each of the sites. At Hitchin, the college makes use of a community sports centre and students have access to a youth wing managed jointly with the youth and community service.

70   Most of the teaching accommodation is adequate and much of it is well decorated and furnished. There is little visual display. Many courses and subjects do not have base rooms. The accommodation and facilities for the job club are particularly good. In general, there is sufficient accommodation for the numbers of students. Some overcrowding occurs in areas used for teaching hairdressing and catering. There is a degree of untidiness, and lack of attention to the appropriate layout of furniture and equipment, in the areas used by art and design, and by hairdressing and beauty students.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

71   North Hertfordshire College has undergone a period of rapid change and is making good progress towards achieving the aims and objectives contained in its mission statement and strategic plan. The strengths of the college are:
*   its responsiveness to the local community including employers
*   the provision of a broad range of courses which provide good opportunities for progression and access for students with a wide range of entry qualifications
*   the active approach to marketing
*   a corporate style of governance and management and effective strategic planning
*   comprehensive systems for the management of finance, personnel and learning facilities
*   well-organised teaching
*   well-established quality assurance framework
*   a clear strategy and commitment to quality by staff at all levels
*   well-qualified teaching staff and comprehensive support for the professional development of all staff.

73   The college should address the following issues:
*   the continuing development of more flexible methods of curriculum delivery
*   a co-ordinated approach to the management of all student support services
*   the systematic collection and analysis of information on student admissions, completions and destinations
*   the identification of performance standards
*   the development of the quality assurance framework to include the collection and use of all performance measures
*   the adequacy of information technology resources
*   improvement in GCE A level examination results.

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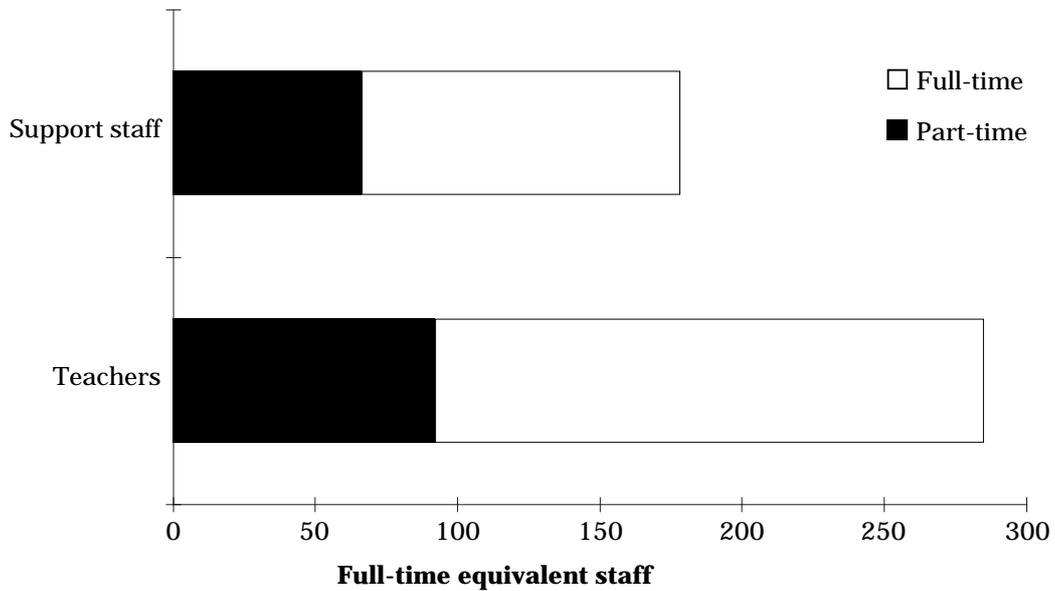
Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

Figure 1

North Hertfordshire College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at February 1994)
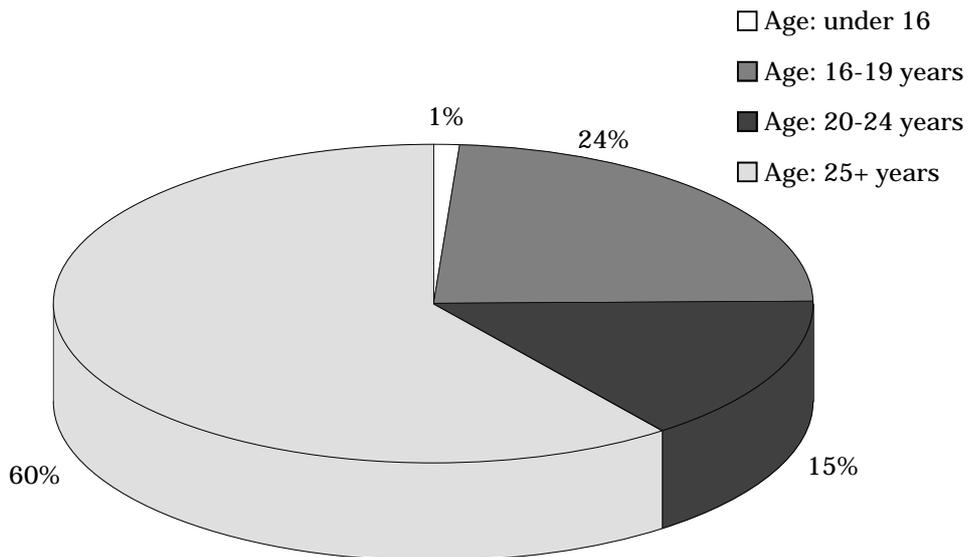

Full-time equivalent staff: 464

Figure 2

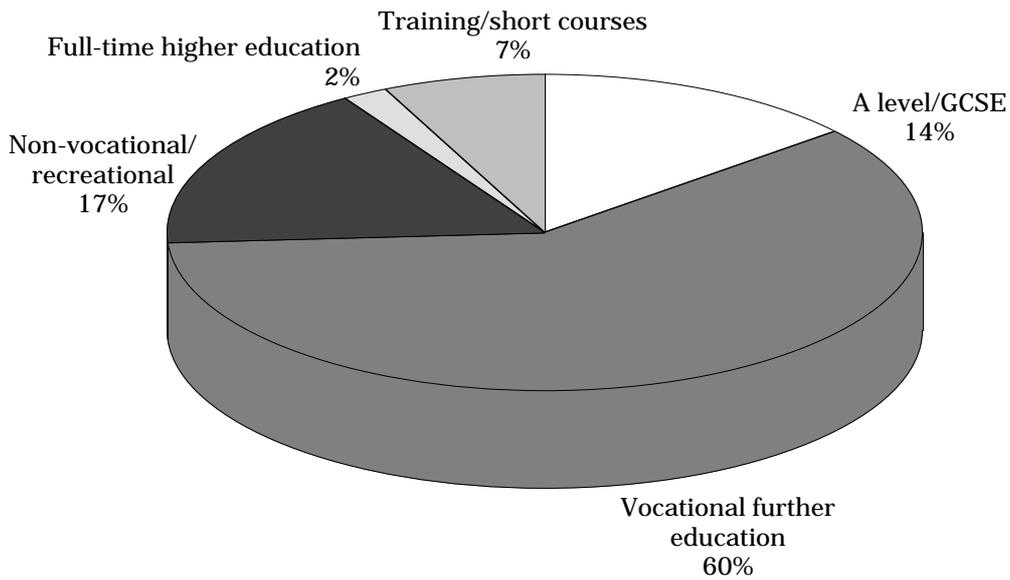**North Hertfordshire College: percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)**

Enrolments: 14,820

Figure 3

North Hertfordshire College: enrolments by level of study (1993-94)

Full-time higher education
2%

Training/short courses
7%

A level/GCSE
14%

Non-vocational/
recreational
17%

Vocational further
education
60%
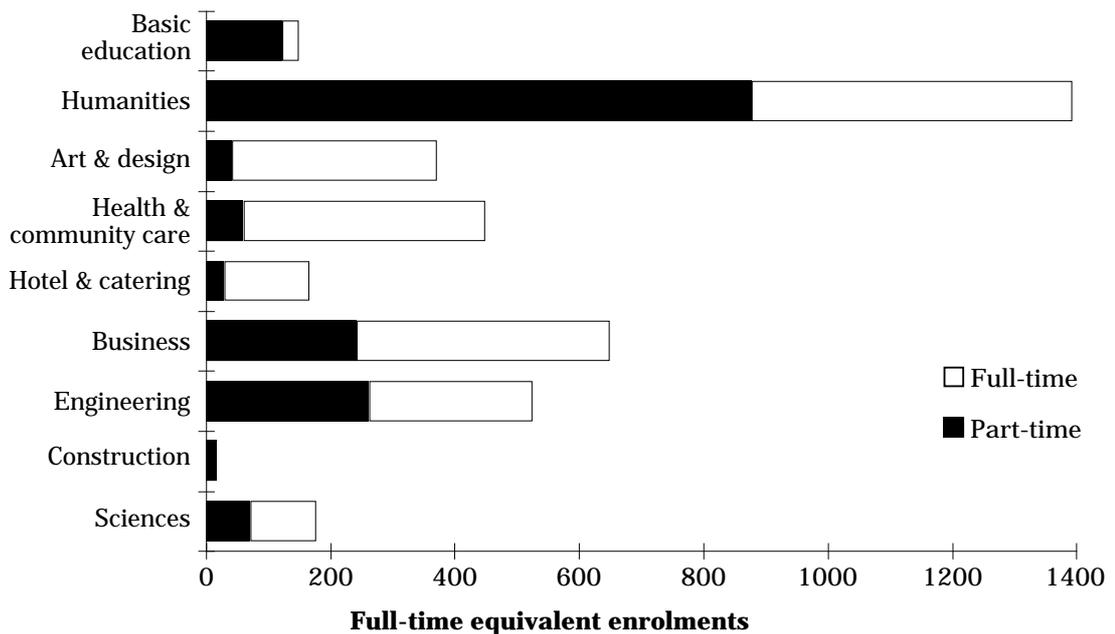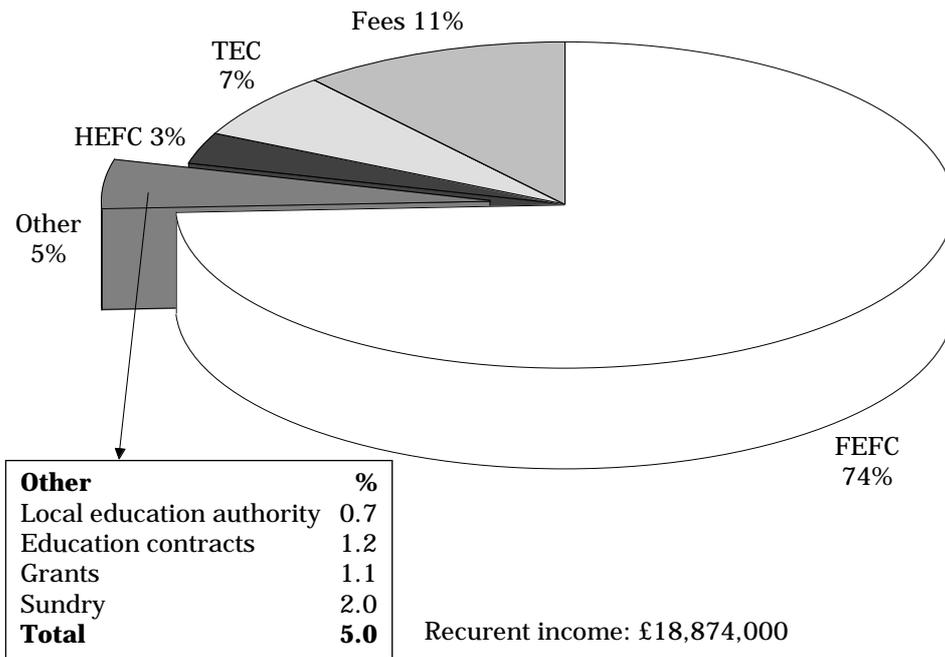
Enrolments: 14,820

Figure 4

North Hertfordshire College: full-time equivalent enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)

□ Full-time
■ Part-time

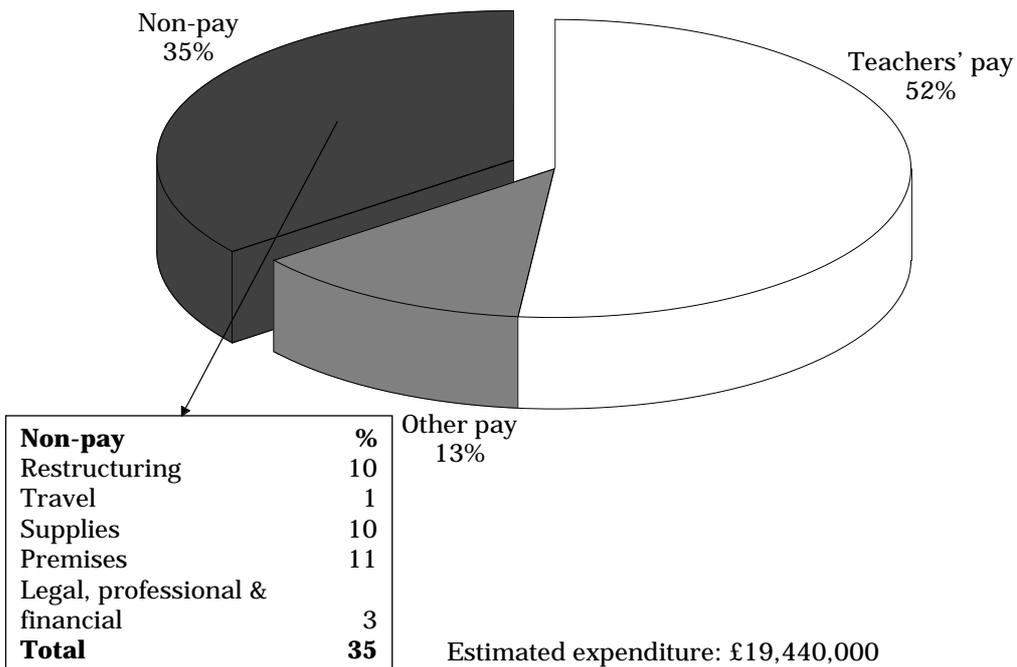**Full-time equivalent enrolments**

Full-time equivalent enrolments: 3,900

Figure 5

North Hertfordshire College: recurrent income (16 months to July 1994)

Fees 11%

TEC 7%

HEFC 3%

Other 5%

FEFC 74%

Other	%
Local education authority	0.7
Education contracts	1.2
Grants	1.1
Sundry	2.0
Total	**5.0**

Recurent income: £18,874,000

Figure 6

North Hertfordshire College: estimated expenditure (16 months to July 1994)

Non-pay 35%

Teachers' pay 52%

Other pay 13%

Non-pay	%
Restructuring	10
Travel	1
Supplies	10
Premises	11
Legal, professional & financial	3
Total	**35**

Estimated expenditure: £19,440,000