

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**North
Oxfordshire
College and
School of Art**

April 1995

**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 FEFC's quality assessment committee.

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

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 49/95

NORTH OXFORDSHIRE COLLEGE AND SCHOOL OF ART SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected August 1994 – January 1995

Summary

North Oxfordshire College and School of Art, Banbury, is the major provider of further education in north Oxfordshire offering a broad range of courses to school leavers and adults. The School of Art attracts students from a wider area and there is a growing range of higher education work in this and other sections of the college. Education services are provided to two local prisons. The college has been successful in offering a range of courses to meet commercial demands. It works closely with the local community and has good links with local authorities, employers, schools and higher education institutions. It is well managed and well governed. Governors work closely with managers and are genuinely interested in the college. Planning is sound and there are effective quality assurance systems. Staff are well qualified and committed. There is good teaching in most subjects. Examination results on vocational courses and at GCSE are generally satisfactory and in some areas good. Results at GCE A level are below average for the sector. In engineering courses there are poor completion rates and examination results and the future of engineering in the college is under review. The college should make better use of market information to inform its planning and seek to give student support more consistently. It should further develop the use of its management information system and establish a programme for the replacement of capital equipment.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	2	Health and community care	2
Construction	2	Art and design	2
Engineering	3	Humanities	2
Business and management studies	3	Adult and continuing education	2
Secretarial studies	2		
Hotel and catering, including leisure and tourism	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1 North Oxfordshire College and School of Art, Banbury, was inspected during the autumn and spring terms of the academic year 1994-95. The college's guidance, enrolment and induction procedures were inspected for four days during the last week of August and the weeks beginning 5 and 12 September 1994. During the weeks beginning 17 October, 14 November and 21 November 1994, three full-time and six registered part-time inspectors spent a total of 30 days on specialist subject inspections. They visited 135 classes involving approximately 1,590 students and examined a broad sample of students' work. The inspectors also had access to extensive documentation about the college and its courses. In the week beginning 16 January 1995, two full-time inspectors and five registered part-time inspectors spent a total of 26 days assessing aspects of cross-college provision. A further three days were spent by a registered part-time inspector during the week commencing 9 January 1995 making a detailed evaluation of student achievement statistics.

2 During the period of the inspection there were meetings with members of the corporation, head teachers of local schools, students, college managers, staff and representatives of local industry and commerce, the Heart of England Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and local government. Inspectors also attended college and corporation meetings, and visited a student work experience placement and a school careers convention.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 North Oxfordshire College and School of Art traces its origins to the establishment of the Banbury Mechanics Institute in 1835 and the Banbury School of Art in 1861. After occupying a number of sites close to the centre of the town, the college moved to its present location in the 1950s. The main college campus is on two neighbouring sites separated by a busy road and close to the historic Banbury Cross. There is another site, some two miles away, shared with an 11-18 school.

4 The college lies within the area administered by Cherwell District Council. It mainly serves the rural areas of north Oxfordshire, south Northamptonshire and south-east Warwickshire. This area includes Bicester and Banbury, the largest centres of population.

5 The college is the main further education centre in north Oxfordshire. Within the area, there are five schools for 11-18 year old pupils. They mainly offer General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses but have recently introduced some vocational courses, particularly for the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ). The college has a post-16 centre for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who transfer from two special schools in the area. Higher education programmes are available through links and franchise agreements with

De Montfort, Oxford Brookes and Coventry Universities. The college also offers its own higher national diploma courses.

6 The work of the college is divided into four teaching divisions: art, design and humanities; business and community services; public and technical services; and science and academic support. In addition, there is an administrative division and a business development unit.

7 Employment in the area is principally provided by small firms. Over 80 per cent of them employ fewer than 20 staff and the majority less than 10. In recent years, employment in land-based industry has declined significantly. As a consequence, the college's agriculture and agricultural engineering courses were closed in the late 1980s. Most job opportunities are now in the service sector, in other public services and in the college itself. The national pattern of decline in manufacturing is evident locally and some craft level work in the college is proving difficult to sustain. The most notable example is mechanical and electrical engineering. The college has held extensive consultations in an attempt to determine a viable future for such technological education in the area. Unemployment in the Banbury area is almost twice as much as the Oxfordshire average which is currently 7.2 per cent. Minority ethnic groups form approximately 3 per cent of the population.

8 The college mission is to preserve and extend the community base of its provision. It seeks to offer a comprehensive range of courses in both general education and vocational studies, complemented by higher education and access to higher education courses. There is also a wide range of community and recreational work, a programme of self-financing courses and other specialist services.

9 Education in two prisons, Bullingdon, a category B training prison, and Oxford, a resettlement establishment, forms a significant part of the college's outreach work. An outreach worker operating from local community centres is employed. It is the college's intention to further extend its regional role.

10 At the time of inspection, the college had approximately 5,000 students, of whom 1,110 were full time. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. FEFC-funded enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. The college is the fifth largest employer in Banbury having 236 full-time equivalent staff including 93 full-time equivalent support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents is shown in figure 4. The staffing of the college, which is much changed since the late 1980s, now has a younger age profile and a smaller number of full-time lecturing staff.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

11 The college makes every effort to ensure that its staff and students are aware of its mission and of its commitment to the national targets for education and training. Further education colleges in Oxfordshire, working

with schools and employers, have agreed higher targets than those set nationally and the college reflects these in its plans for expansion. However, the college has not yet met its target for growth this year. At the time of the inspection, full-time enrolments were 5 per cent below those for the last full year, although part-time enrolments were expected to increase substantially.

12 A range of courses is offered in most programme areas, extending from foundation level to higher education. There are initiatives to develop or sustain centres of excellence such as the School of Art which is rapidly developing new courses. The Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) higher national diploma in graphic design is offered in conjunction with Buckinghamshire College. Access to higher education courses are linked with Oxford Brookes University and a compact has been made with Coventry University to enable students to proceed to degree courses across a range of subjects. A joint honours degree in visual arts and the history of art and design is offered in conjunction with De Montfort University. There are full-time and part-time courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a large community education programme which benefits from the support of Oxfordshire County Council. A college-owned company holds the contract for provision of education at the newly-opened Bullingdon prison, in addition to that for Oxford.

13 The college's relationships with employer organisations are good and it has maintained useful advisory groups in its main vocational areas. Employers are particularly supportive in catering and construction. Employers from engineering firms are involved in discussions about the future of engineering in the college. The college has been notably open and forthright in conducting these consultations. Links between the recently-expanded hairdressing section and related businesses are developing quickly. There is a professional design unit in the college and a designer-in-residence on a freelance basis works with students on projects. The college is an active member of the education-business partnership and the local employers' network, both of which have been supported by the Heart of England TEC.

14 Through the business-development unit, the college has developed new markets, increased its income and raised its reputation in the business community. It has been a key participant in a project funded by the Department of Trade and Industry to encourage exporting among local firms following the closure of the nearby United States Air Force base. It has recently helped the Cherwell District Council to obtain funding to develop a deprived area of the town. A contract has been won to deliver a foundation programme in a higher education college in Thailand. All these projects have involved training for college staff, who have proved adaptable and flexible in responding to the needs of clients.

15 Long-standing arrangements for discussing post-16 educational opportunities with local schools have been maintained in the North

Oxfordshire Learning Partnership. Although there is competition for students from schools and other colleges, there is also co-operation. For example, linked timetables allow students from local schools to follow GCE A level studies at the college and vice versa. The college has signed a collaborative agreement involving colleges in Oxfordshire and the Heart of England TEC. The relationship with the Heart of England TEC is good. The college manages projects for the accreditation of prior learning, adult guidance and training credits. All of these provide additional opportunities for students and contribute to the responsiveness of the college.

16 Market information has had a limited influence on the college's long-term planning. Some new courses have been successfully mounted in response to student and employer demand, but these have generally been opportunistic developments. By working with the local employers' network the college maintains information on the local labour market. There are surveys of the Banbury area two or three times a year, taking a different set of training needs as the focus each time. A significant amount of new training business has been secured by the college, some of it taught at students' places of work. It has included courses in information technology, supervisory skills and languages. Client satisfaction is closely monitored. Staff are being trained as assessors for vocational qualifications to meet the rapid growth in demand for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs).

17 Publicity for the college's courses is managed by one of the divisional heads working with a marketing group. Most full-time students hear about the college through their families or their schools, whereas part-time students are more likely to use the prospectus or direct enquiry. The college puts considerable effort into liaison with local schools, sending staff to talk to meetings of parents and final-year pupils and to attend careers fairs. Although information about the college is distributed to all partner schools, not all of them invite college staff to talk to their pupils.

18 The college has worked hard to attract students from groups who are not normally involved in further education. A women's painting and decorating course has been started and courses for Asian women have been run in conjunction with the local community education council. A course in women's studies in art and design is also available. A day nursery has been opened to serve students with young children. While the college site presents obstacles to students with problems of mobility, staff have tried to be helpful by re-scheduling classes in rooms which are more accessible. Through its community education provision, the college caters for part-time students of all ages. There is an extensive extra-curricular programme for full-time students, many of whom come from isolated villages, where provision for leisure activity is limited.

19 The college's equal opportunities policy is well publicised. There are few students from minority ethnic groups but enrolments are monitored and divisions review their admissions practices in the light of this data.

There is a strong commitment to equality of opportunity among many staff and there is much good practice at divisional level.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 The corporation board has 15 members. Nine are from business backgrounds, one is the Heart of England TEC nominee, one a local head teacher, two are college staff and one is a student. The principal is also a member. The board has established three committees: audit; finance, employment and general purposes; and remuneration. They have clear terms of reference. There are high levels of attendance at governors' meetings, reflecting the commitment of members. Rates of attendance for the corporation board and for the finance, employment and general purposes committee, for example, were 80 per cent and 89 per cent, respectively, over the last 12 months.

21 Governors receive comprehensive briefing papers and are well informed. Board and committee agendas show that business is concentrated on the planning and control issues that are appropriate to corporation members. They understand their strategic role and avoid day-to-day operational matters which are the province of the principal and other senior managers.

22 Governors take an interest in the college that goes well beyond the demands of committee meetings. They attend college events such as prize givings and are often members of advisory committees. They are currently participating in a programme of governor training.

23 There is a thorough strategic planning process in which the college makes considerable effort to involve as wide a constituency as possible. There is evidence of useful contributions from many people within the college and from organisations and individuals outside it whose views are canvassed through personal letters and advertisements in the local press. The finance, employment and general purposes committee scrutinises a draft of the plan before the corporation board considers it for adoption and a summary is distributed to all members of staff. The planning structure has worked well in considering the future of mechanical and electrical engineering. All the interested parties have had the opportunity to comment.

24 Responsibilities for cross-college functions such as quality assurance, admissions and guidance, estates management and finance, are clearly allocated. A new post of personnel manager is being created. The postholder will also be responsible for health and safety. Temporary arrangements have been made to cover responsibility for equal opportunities and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

25 Job descriptions, organisation charts, committee structures and minutes of meetings demonstrate that the college has a clear management structure which is widely understood. Senior management team minutes

are concise but they would benefit from the consistent inclusion of timescales within which action should be taken. Following a period of significant restructuring the senior management team has been reduced in size and some members carry heavy responsibilities. It gives considerable importance to communicating effectively with staff. One means is through a new publication entitled 'Briefing', a monthly bulletin designed to give information about recent college developments, accompanied in each case by the name and extension number of the person responsible. It is distributed to all staff and has been well received.

26 There is a sound strategy for allocation and control of funds through 23 cost centres. Procedures for devolving budgets to teaching divisions have been in place since the 1993-94 financial year. The divisions are allocated budgets, based on their student numbers, to provide for full-time and part-time teaching, support staff, supplies, services and travel. Devolved budgets for the sections are now being introduced, and they will be effective from the next financial year.

27 The college has carefully analysed its financial affairs, has established a system of unit costing, and is dealing with anomalies. Rapid progress has been made in developing management accounts. These are carefully scrutinised by the corporation and play an important part in the decision making of the senior management team. Early signs of a possible shortfall in enrolments this year prompted a speedy response to reduce expenditure. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are given in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is £18.02 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £18.17.

28 The college has a computerised management information system capable of producing enrolment and financial information. Heavy demands are made on the system by senior managers with the result that other staff do not always receive the service they require. Examination statistics have not yet been computerised but this is now beginning to take place. Enrolment targets are set and carefully monitored and low retention rates are investigated. Destinations are carefully tracked and these help inform student guidance, the course planning cycle and the provision of appropriate work experience placements.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

29 The college has a central admissions unit which provides effective information and guidance services. Academic divisions retain some involvement and this sometimes results in inconsistent practice. There is a handbook which offers advice on interviewing and associated documentation to support staff in their work. Briefings for pupils at local schools are co-ordinated by a senior staff member. Advantages accrue from a single point of contact but some applicants might benefit from earlier access to subject specialists. A wide range of helpful literature is

produced by the college including good-quality prospectuses, course leaflets and a college newspaper.

30 There are efficient arrangements for enrolment, although some of the documents provided for students are over complex and poor signposting makes it difficult for them to find their way around the college. The quality of full-time and part-time student induction programmes is high. The library, study centre staff and county careers officers make positive contributions. A few induction programmes for full-time students are too long. In contrast, some part-time evening students feel relatively neglected. A more extensive induction programme for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is to be introduced next September.

31 Students' curriculum entitlement is clearly specified and there are appropriate learning agreements. A study skills handbook assists students in taking full advantage of their courses. Accreditation of prior learning occurs informally on some courses to ensure that students are working at the right level but there are no formal procedures for this service. Arrangements for students to transfer from one course to another within the college are generally effective.

32 Full-time students receive good tutorial support. Tutor groups meet for an hour each week. Part-time day students receive guidance during normal teaching periods, but evening students receive patchy tutorial support. The college does not have a unified system of tutor records and these vary considerably in quality. The college is developing further tutor guidance materials.

33 The student services unit provides effective personal counselling services, careers advice and study support. There are links with social workers and with medical and careers specialists. Occasionally, delays occur in making routine appointments for students and the one counsellor sometimes finds difficulty in keeping up with the demand. The library is well stocked with vocational and higher education careers material. Students appreciate the quality of the service offered by careers advisers.

34 The college has identified some 50 students on mainstream courses with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Their needs are increasingly well identified and met. Study support covers dyslexia, hearing impairment, basic education and adult literacy. There are English and mathematics workshops and a well-equipped, open-access centre.

35 The student services unit is also responsible for the student association and for sports and leisure activities. The student association is active and ably supported by college staff and its student executive. There is no formal schedule of meetings between the executive of the student association and senior college managers. The association gives generous support to local charities and also works hard to encourage members with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to use its facilities. Sports and leisure activities are well developed.

36 The college has a charter, a fair deal agreement and a series of publications to explain its admission, grievance and appeal procedures. It publishes annually a well-presented students' handbook and is honouring the majority of its pledges to students. In a few instances, however, information was not readily available to students as promised. Overall, students expressed their satisfaction with the college charter and its allied agreements.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

37 Of the 135 sessions inspected, 69 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses, and only 4 per cent of sessions had more weaknesses than strengths. This is well above the norm for colleges so far inspected. The inspection grades awarded during the inspection are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		2	6	5	1	0	14
GCSE		0	5	4	2	1	12
GNVQ		2	11	5	2	0	20
NVQ		6	22	6	0	0	34
Basic education		1	2	0	0	0	3
Access to higher education		1	7	0	0	0	8
Other vocational*		2	26	16	0	0	44
Total		14	79	36	5	1	135

Note: * includes mainly intermediate and advanced courses.

38 Course teams have devised coherent programmes of study with clearly-identified aims and objectives which, in many cases, have been discussed and negotiated with students. Lecturers are aware of their students' learning needs and respond intelligently to suggestions for change. Good planning is also found in programmes designed specially to meet individual students' needs. For example, in a skilfully-conducted initial interview in adult basic education, a prospective student discussed his learning needs with a tutor. After thorough discussion of what the student wished and needed to achieve, a detailed programme of work was agreed which set out learning objectives and how they were to be met.

39 There are sound schemes of work for most courses and lessons are generally well planned. In science and mathematics, teaching schemes could be better co-ordinated to avoid the over-emphasis on some parts of the syllabus at the expense of others. In engineering, the schemes of work are little more than a list of topics although individual lessons are well planned. The planning of work in beauty therapy is particularly detailed and effective.

40 Relationships between students and lecturers are good. Students feel valued and are treated as adults. The relaxed atmosphere in some engineering classes encouraged students to ask questions and to enter into discussion, and this helped to build up their knowledge and understanding. In information technology, students were particularly keen and interested when working on assignments or discussing topics in small groups.

41 Teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching techniques and the best of the teaching was lively and effective. In one motor vehicle engineering class, part-time students were identifying differences between single and multi-point fuel injection systems. The lecturer used overhead projector slides to help explain the theory and workings of each system. Students responded well to questions designed to check their levels of understanding. The lecturer had set out parts of the system which were passed around the class for students to examine and discuss. Finally, students were taken in groups into the workshop to look at a modern engine. Throughout the session the supportive atmosphere made students unafraid to ask questions and make mistakes. In a GCSE English language class, the lecturer dealt sensitively with issues of punctuation in preparation for a report-writing exercise. Humour and open encouragement were used to create an atmosphere of trust in which students felt sufficiently confident to speak up and try out their ideas.

42 In some of the weaker lessons, lecturers' questioning of students was inadequate or obscure, class activities lacked variety, the subject matter was unchallenging or lecturers simply failed to motivate students. Much of the teaching in engineering was sound but dull. The more able students were often frustrated while lecturers satisfied themselves that everybody had understood the basic principles. In science, mathematics and business studies, students were not given enough opportunity to work in small groups or to discuss issues. Some of the teaching in leisure and tourism lacked vocational relevance.

43 In art and design, and in secretarial and business studies, there was little use of audio-visual aids in situations where they would have helped to develop students' understanding. In contrast, teachers on health and caring, motor vehicle engineering and humanities courses used such aids frequently and successfully.

44 The quality of teaching in practical subjects is high. The use of realistic working environments for hairdressing, beauty and catering is particularly valuable. In business studies and secretarial workshop sessions, staff shifted easily from teaching the whole class to helping individual students with their own work. In art and design classes, tutors made good use of their professional experiences to illustrate how things should be done and give students encouragement.

45 The recording of students' achievement is detailed and comprehensive. The divisions use various systems and formats and a working party is currently developing a common system for the whole

college. In secretarial and business studies, some students require better guidance on how to organise their portfolios of work. In business studies, there were a number of well-designed assessment activities, but students' portfolios revealed a paucity of marked work for the autumn term. In leisure and tourism, some of the assessment tasks were not sufficiently taxing. Students' work is usually promptly assessed in a fair and constructive manner. Students benefit from teachers' careful written comments. In construction, teachers use a variety of assessment methods and deadlines for returned work are set down on the worksheet.

46 When teaching adults, lecturers adopt lively and enthusiastic approaches and show appropriate sensitivity where students lack confidence. In art and design, adult courses are a particularly valued part of the overall programme and the mix of mature and younger students contributes to the success of the work.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

47 Students enjoy their studies and are proud of their achievements. This was illustrated by a former art student who had studied on the college's access to higher education course, and was following a degree course. She presented her portfolio of work to the division's industrial advisory committee. The work was of a high quality and she spoke eloquently of the contribution the college had made to her education and personal fulfilment.

48 Most students are properly introduced to study skills and core skills as integral parts of their courses. Construction students' portfolios provided evidence of a sound grasp of mathematics and its application to problems in building. By contrast, in science and mathematics, students' information technology skills were poor. Practical work is usually conducted safely and carefully. In construction, safety is central to all activities. In all the practical classes inspected teachers emphasised students' own responsibilities for health and safety. The work of business studies students and their understanding of the business world would benefit from increased contact with local companies and an opportunities for work experience.

49 Seventy-five per cent of the 87 students, aged 16-18, in the final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education's 1994 performance tables were successful. This compares with a range of 72 to 95 per cent across the five other further education colleges in Oxfordshire and with a national average for all institutions of 81 per cent. These results place the college among the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. However, two-thirds of the college's students are 19 years of age or over and results for these students are better than for 16-18 year olds.

50 In the division of art, design and humanities, average pass rates have been at or above 80 per cent for the last two years. In 1993, there were

particularly high pass rates for the BTEC first diploma in design (87 per cent), the BTEC national diploma in media (92 per cent), the two access courses (100 and 90 per cent) and the 'moving on' courses for adults (97 per cent). In 1994, pass rates were similarly high in the BTEC diploma in general art and design (90 per cent), the BTEC first diploma in design (87 per cent) and the BTEC foundation diploma in art and design (89 per cent). The access and 'moving on' courses all achieved 100 per cent pass rates. Student completion rates for vocational and GCE A level courses in the division have risen significantly in the past two years. In contrast, GCSE retention rates have fallen from 70 per cent in 1993 to 57 per cent in 1994.

51 In the division of business and community services, pass rates for students achieving one or more vocational modules fell from 81 to 73 per cent between 1993 and 1994. However, many students achieve at or above national norms in secretarial studies, health and caring, catering and in some business studies. For example, in 1994, there were particularly good pass rates for the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry NVQs in business administration (63 and 94 per cent), the National Nursery Examinations Board diploma (84 per cent), the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) certificate in community care (100 per cent), the Institute of Housing national and advanced certificates for wardens (100 per cent), the C&G care for children certificate (100 per cent) and the C&G NVQ level 2 beauty (89 per cent). The NVQ level 2 in catering registered a 100 per cent pass rate. The same courses had achieved similarly good results in the previous year.

52 In business studies, there have been some poor results. The pass rate for GNVQ intermediate in business fell from 63 per cent in 1993 to 50 per cent in 1994. Passes for the Institute of Supervisory Management certificate fell from 67 per cent to 33 per cent. Student completion rates in the division for vocational courses have fallen from an average of 84 per cent in 1993 to 74 per cent in 1994. Those for GCSE and GCE A level subjects have risen from 61 per cent to 67 per cent and from 51 per cent to 59 per cent, respectively, over the same period.

53 In the division of science and academic support, examination results on the science access course have been good at 80 per cent and 75 per cent in 1993 and 1994, respectively. All the students who were successful progressed to relevant higher education courses. Completion rates for GCSE subjects in the division fell from 66 in 1993 to 59 per cent in 1994, but completion rates for GCE A level subjects have risen slightly.

54 In the division of public and technical services the pass rate for students achieving one or more vocational modules has risen from 44 per cent in 1993 to 62 per cent in 1994. However, these figures mask considerable variations between courses. In 1994, there were 100 per cent pass rates in carpentry and joinery NVQ level 3, in plumbing NVQ level 2 and in the advanced craft course in plumbing. Although a range of

modules were achieved, no student completed the painting and decorating NVQ level 2 and only 9 per cent gained a brickwork NVQ. There were poor pass rates on engineering courses: the BTEC national certificate in electrical engineering (14 per cent), C&G 383 part 1 (23 per cent) and C&G 383 full time (15 per cent). In 1993, students performed badly on the BTEC national diploma in engineering (27 per cent) and C&G 383 full time (13 per cent). There were also poor results in C&G 236 part 1 (48 per cent) and C&G 383 level 3 (42 per cent).

55 Although average completion rates in the division are around 74 per cent, retention rates for engineering students were generally very poor. On BTEC national courses student losses over the two years of the course have been particularly high with many students not enrolling for year two. These low levels of retention are a cause for concern. On the BTEC national diploma, only 25 per cent of those who started the course passed; on the national certificate (mechanical) 43 per cent passed, on the national certificate in electrical engineering 12.5 per cent passed, and on the C&G 383 motor vehicle 12.5 per cent passed.

56 The division of public and technical services also manages courses at Her Majesty's Prison Bullingdon and Her Majesty's Prison Oxford. At Bullingdon, for example, the education department caters for some 300 men. Three hundred and thirty-three qualifications were achieved in 1993-94, including college certificates in practical skills, C&G certificates, professional qualifications, GCSE, GCE A level and Open University foundation and level 2 courses. One student passed the first year of a London University external degree and another gained a place at Cambridge University to read physics. In 1994, college staff at Bullingdon received a centre of excellence award from the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit.

57 In the academic year 1993-94, the college had 795 full-time and part-time enrolments for GCSE and GCE A level subjects. The 108 students, aged 16-18, entered for GCE advanced supplementary (AS) and A level examinations in 1994 scored on average 2.4 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college among the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education.

58 In 1994, 61 per cent of all students entered for GCE A level examinations achieved grades A-E. This is close to the 1994 provisional national average for sector colleges of 68 per cent. In 1993, the results of only three of the 17 subjects taken in the college were better than the national averages and these were English literature (96 per cent), media studies (83 per cent) and law (79 per cent). Four subjects were markedly below the national figures, namely geography (40 per cent), physics (33 per cent), chemistry (47 per cent) and mathematics (17 per cent). In 1994, four of the 16 subjects offered had results better than the national averages.

These were English literature (93 per cent), art (90 per cent), media studies (71 per cent) and French (100 per cent). Six subjects which had poor results were history (40 per cent), geography (50 per cent), physics (57 per cent), mathematics (52 per cent), chemistry (29 per cent) and law (11 per cent).

59 In 1994, 63 per cent of all students entered for GCSE examinations achieved grades A-C. In 20 of the 25 subjects available at the college, A-C pass rates were above national averages. Nine of these had A-C pass rates of 20 per cent, or more above the national averages. These were film studies, child psychology, mathematics, English, chemistry, French, German, law and human biology. In most cases these figures improved from the previous year. In 1994, geography (11 per cent) and business studies (14 per cent) had poor results. In 1993, there were low pass rates in history (25 per cent), geography (10 per cent), business studies (9 per cent) and chemistry (14 per cent).

60 The college collects data on student progression and destinations. Of the students who left in 1993-94, 21 per cent are in employment, 27 per cent have progressed to further education courses and 41 per cent have entered higher education either at the college or elsewhere. Two per cent are unemployed, 1 per cent are on youth training or employment training courses and the destinations of 8 per cent are unknown.

61 All divisions recognise student achievements through prize and award ceremonies. In the School of Art there is an annual exhibition of students' work and the rebirth of the school as a distinct entity was marked by an exhibition at the Banbury Arts Centre. An annual event is organised jointly with the division of science and academic support to recognise the achievement of access students and, in the most recent occasion, the minister of state for further education presented certificates. Catering students had a particularly successful year in 1993-94 by winning, for the third year in succession, the prize for the best senior exhibit in a national catering competition. The college's 'Woodpecker Products' was the only team enterprise company in the county for students with learning difficulties to offer young enterprise activities. It was sponsored by the Prince's Trust and Banbury charities.

62 Students have a good record in individual and team sports. Last year, two students won the East Anglian physical education in colleges badminton competition and the mixed hockey team won their tournament. GNVQ students won the college's memorial five-a-side football tournament. One student achieved the Duke of Edinburgh's gold award.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

63 The college has a clear and well-documented quality assurance policy which has been in existence for three years and has undergone annual reviews. The quality system is consistent across the college and was developed from a well-funded quality assurance project. Time has allowed good practice to become established.

64 The annual cycle of quality monitoring and evaluation is well organised, with all programmes carrying out reviews. An annual questionnaire for full-time students, delivered at the guidance and induction stage, provides data for the review. Similar questionnaires are given to part-time students every three years. There are also annual questionnaires for full-time students on the college's facilities, learning support and other collegiate matters. Half of the part-time students contribute to this survey. Targets for student satisfaction are set in each area and these have recently been raised to between 80 and 90 per cent approval of each service.

65 The academic board and its committees operate well. Quality improvement groups have been established for staff development, recording achievement and support staff quality systems. The work undertaken by these groups is well organised and productive.

66 Responsibility for quality is held by two members of staff. A member of the senior management team guides the system and ensures that its outcomes are acted upon. The quality manager is responsible for day-to-day operations and works to a clear brief and a detailed definition of quality requirements. She is responsible for preparation of the summary data from surveys and manages the monitoring of customer complaints and suggestions for improvement from students. Audits take place periodically to check that results are being achieved.

67 Each division has a panel which meets to review the previous year's monitoring and evaluation reports. It also considers points arising from interviews with course leaders. The process generally works well and allows involvement by all the staff concerned. The majority of monitoring and evaluation reports, however, do not use statistical data from the central management information system and further development of targets and performance indicators should be undertaken.

68 The quality system is better developed for some courses than others. Year-on-year comparisons are not always made, action plans drawn up by course leaders are not always monitored by their managers and data derived from student questionnaires are not always used in planning new developments. In some cases, the return rate for student questionnaires is low and this reduces their value and reliability. Students' involvement in quality matters is welcomed by them and by the college. It is not consistent across divisions, however, and their participation should be further encouraged and monitored.

69 There is a well-documented staff-appraisal scheme for lecturing staff which has been in operation for over a year. It is the college's intention to extend the scheme to cover support staff during the current year. Fifty-four per cent of lecturers have so far been appraised. The intentions of the scheme are clear, and it includes targets for future performance linked to professional development needs. In several instances, however, the identified staff development has not materialised.

70 The staff-induction programme meets the main needs of new lecturers and support staff but the programme is not as effective for those joining the college during the course of the academic year as for those who join at the beginning of the year. A mentoring scheme to support new staff is useful but informal. Lecturers new to teaching are encouraged to follow a course of teacher training.

71 The staff-development budget is small. In 1993-94, excluding any special project funds, expenditure was £21,358. The college intends to increase this to 2 per cent of income by 1997, or around £120,000. There is no clear connection between staff development and the objectives of the college but divisions are now preparing their training plans to match the strategic plan. An annual staff-development report is presented to the academic board for evaluation.

72 Staff and students are well aware of the college charter. It has recently gained an award from the secretary of state for education and this has encouraged staff. Systematic monitoring of the charter has not yet begun but it will be undertaken by the quality manager. The college's self-assessment report produced for the inspection gave a frank and accurate account of strengths and weaknesses. There was evidence of efforts to ensure that all levels of staff in the college were involved in drawing up the report. Considerable planning and resources went into the process, demonstrating a real concern for quality issues.

RESOURCES

Staffing

73 Teaching staff are appropriately deployed to provide a good service to students. Monitoring by managers ensures that lecturers are effectively used and that gaps in coverage are identified. The student:staff ratio has moved from 6:1 to 15:1 over the last five years.

74 The college has a personnel unit headed by an administrator responsible to the college estates and service manager. Policy and procedures for the appointment and promotion of staff are published and there are clear guidelines for creating new posts. There is an equal opportunities policy for staffing matters. There is detailed information on the gender distribution of lecturing and support staff, but recruitment from minority ethnic groups is not monitored. Half the eight members of the senior management team are women. About 60 per cent of the full-time academic workforce are men and 40 per cent women. Support staff comprise 20 per cent men and 80 per cent women.

75 Most lecturers work as both subject specialists and personal tutors. Lecturers are enthusiastic, well qualified and appropriately experienced for the work they do and they are committed to their students. About 80 per cent of staff hold a degree or equivalent higher education professional qualification and the remainder are appropriately qualified for the subjects

they teach. There are some gaps in specialist expertise, for example in leisure and tourism. Seventy per cent of full-time lecturers have a recognised teaching qualification; 30 per cent have an appropriate Training and Development Lead Body award as an assessor or verifier.

76 Part-time lecturers make an important contribution to the college and its courses by bringing with them their current industrial and commercial practice. An induction pack covering college policies and divisional procedures is provided to new part-time lecturers.

77 Support staff play a key role in the college. They are particularly important in craft and practical areas such as art and design, construction, engineering, information technology and the sciences.

Equipment/learning resources

78 The college has a good range of general-purpose teaching aids, including overhead projectors, screens and boards. In a few instances, audio-visual aids are inadequate and boards need to be replaced. In most cases, classrooms are suitably furnished. There is carpeting in some rooms and corridors.

79 Specialist equipment is adequate in most curriculum areas. It is of good quality in some aspects of art and design, catering, computing and construction. In leisure and tourism there are insufficient texts and other written support material. There is a shortage of equipment for photography and some items of equipment for art and design are old and rarely used.

80 The college has documented its equipment holdings. However, it does not have an overall picture of its equipment needs, and there is no capital equipment replacement programme. The divisions and the central administration bid for funding and it is from these bids that a purchasing list of capital items is decided by the senior management team. This is submitted to the corporation for approval. The capital equipment budget for 1994-95 is £81,000.

81 The quality and availability of information technology facilities are good within the study centre, in some aspects of business studies and in art and design. There is poorer-quality provision for construction courses. The college does not have a purchasing policy for computers and software. There are about 170 personal computers accessible to students, but about 40 of these are outdated models which are not able to run some modern software. The college has recently purchased 50 new computers and plans to continue to upgrade computer facilities. The ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers is about 11:1.

82 The library service is good. The quality of the bookstock and other materials is satisfactory in most curriculum areas. There are inadequacies in health and caring, leisure and tourism and in business studies. The library is small but there is adequate room for the books and for the storage

of materials. It has a good range of equipment including a computerised catalogue system and a micro-fiche reader. There is a computerised careers search facility in the adjoining careers library. The bookstock is small, at 16,000 volumes, but there is a good range of appropriate periodicals and journals. The 1994-95 annual budget for books and periodicals is £18,000 or £12.86 per full-time equivalent student. In the current year, the divisions have contributed a further £9,000 for the purchase of books for higher education courses. The librarian responds to requests from staff for book purchases. If the requests for books exceed the funding available, new courses are given priority. There are 67 study spaces in the library. They were rarely fully occupied during the inspection.

83 A study centre, located near the library, has 48 additional study spaces. The centre is well equipped with information technology, compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases, teletext and video-viewing equipment. The centre is the main facility for open-access information technology. There are eight machines with printers available to students who are required to register their attendance and use of the information technology facilities in order that the time spent using the service can be monitored.

Accommodation

84 The college has three sites, all close to the town centre of Banbury. The two main sites are about 100 yards apart and straddle the busy Broughton Road. A third site is two miles from the main campus, located on Ruskin Road and occupying former school premises.

85 The complex of buildings on the two Broughton Road sites was purpose built in phases extending from 1950 to the mid 1980s. Buildings on the other campus were constructed during the 1940s. The buildings on the main sites are a mix of low-rise permanent buildings and prefabricated blocks. There has been significant investment to upgrade and maintain these temporary buildings but many are over 20 years old and the college is gradually replacing them.

86 Access for students with problems of mobility is restricted to the ground floor of most buildings. There is no access for students in wheelchairs to some hatted classrooms or to one block on the west site at Broughton Road. A day nursery is located in hatted accommodation on this site and has access for students and staff with restricted mobility. The steep slope of the west site makes it difficult for students in wheelchairs to move around it without assistance.

87 The layout of the main campus is confusing to visitors. It is not easy to determine the location of teaching blocks. Signposting should be improved. The reception area is attractively furnished and projects a good image to potential clients and students.

88 The quality of internal decoration in some buildings is good. Wall displays are used to good effect. The campus is cleaned regularly and

there is little evidence of vandalism. In a few areas rooms are poorly decorated, and there is broken furniture and general clutter.

89 Specialist accommodation is generally of an appropriate standard. The quality of the accommodation for motor vehicle engineering is good, but it is less so in mechanical engineering. The machine workshop is drab and the poor layout of equipment gives it an untidy appearance. Accommodation for construction is generally good, although one workshop fails to meet examining body standards. In art and design, and in the beauty and hair salons, there are difficulties related to the scattered specialist facilities. There are storage shortages in catering and the layout of the home economics kitchen could be improved.

90 The refectories are bright and clean and there is space for about 200 students. Staggered breaks ensure that most students can eat comfortably. A student centre is used for leisure activities and vending machines are available there. Staff workrooms vary in quality. Some are small and crowded whilst others are well furnished and comfortable.

91 All teaching accommodation is controlled by the divisions and in the absence of a central utilisation survey it is difficult to establish how effectively the college uses this resource. It has carried out a survey of space requirements in relation to student enrolments and has outlined its accommodation strategy very well. A detailed evaluation of the buildings has been carried out which identifies priorities for action. The main proposals are to improve access for students and staff with restricted mobility, to replace the prefabricated classrooms with a new building, to introduce a centrally-operated rooming policy and, in the longer term, to provide more space. The college has a schedule of decoration and repair for its buildings. Health and safety issues receive appropriate attention.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

92 The particular strengths of the college are:

- good teaching
- a committed and enthusiastic staff
- good governance and management
- a close working relationship with the local community
- well-documented systems for guidance and support
- an effective quality assurance system
- good planning, underpinned by good supporting information.

93 If it is to build upon its existing strengths the college should address the following issues:

- the further development of its management information system, including space utilisation data
- better use of marketing information
- the future of the engineering curriculum
- some poor examination results at GCE A level
- improvement in the retention rates on some courses
- the development of consistent student-support systems
- the establishment of a programme for the replacement of capital equipment.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at November 1994)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (as at November 1994)

 - 3 FEFC-funded enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1994)

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

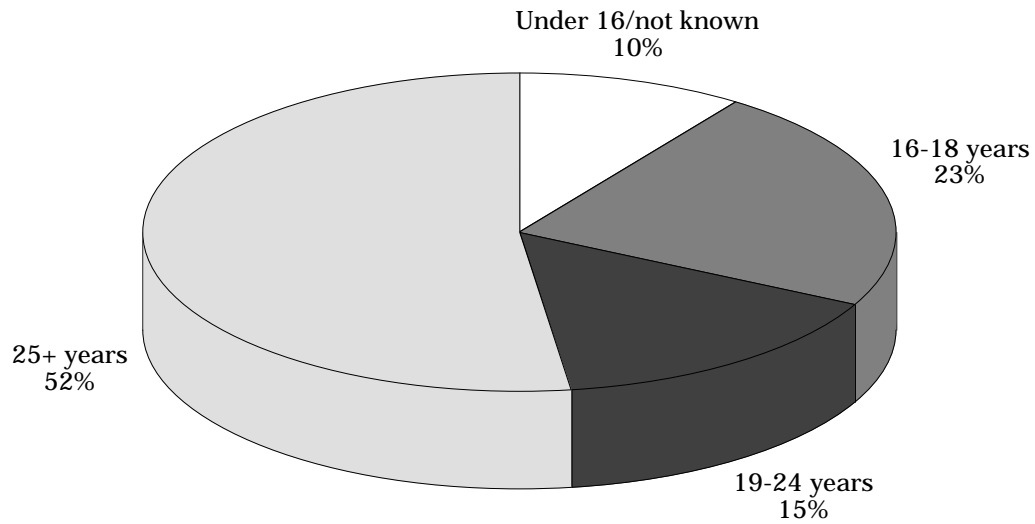
 - 5 Estimated income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Estimated 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

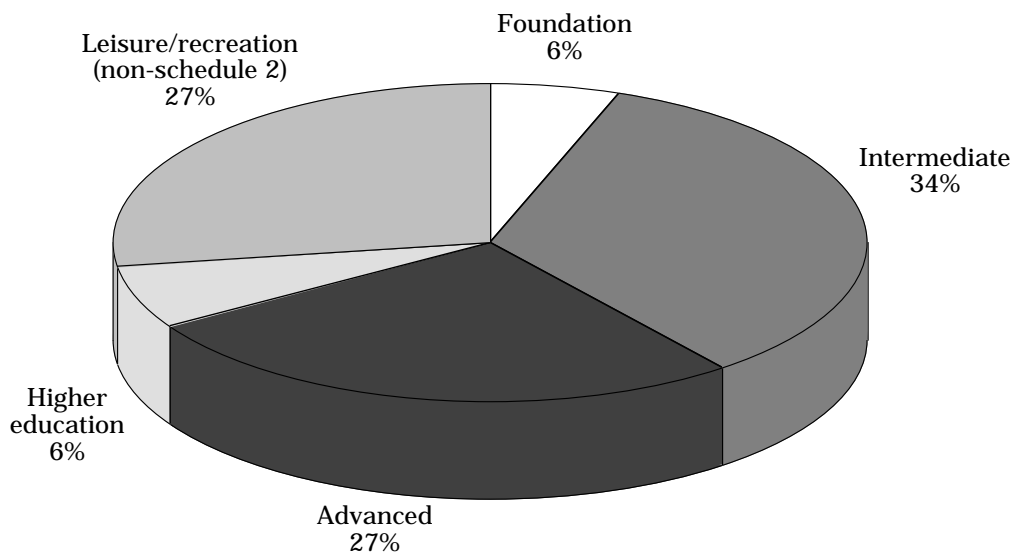
North Oxfordshire College and School of Art: percentage enrolments by age (as at November 1994)



Enrolments: 4,967

Figure 2

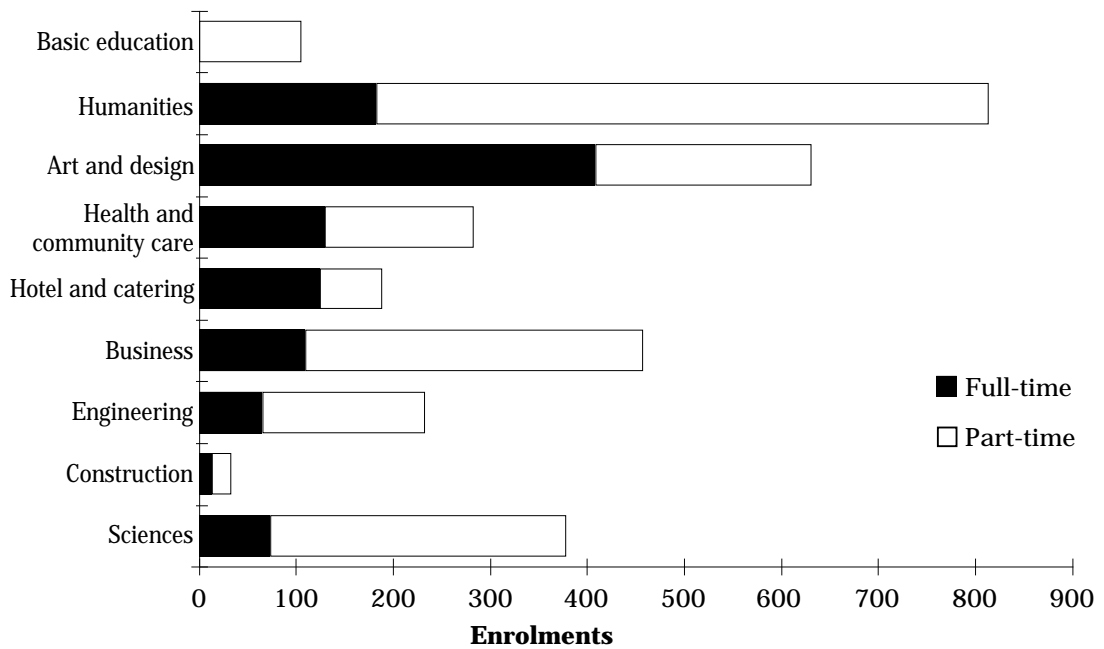
North Oxfordshire College and School of Art: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at November 1994)



Enrolments: 4,967

Figure 3

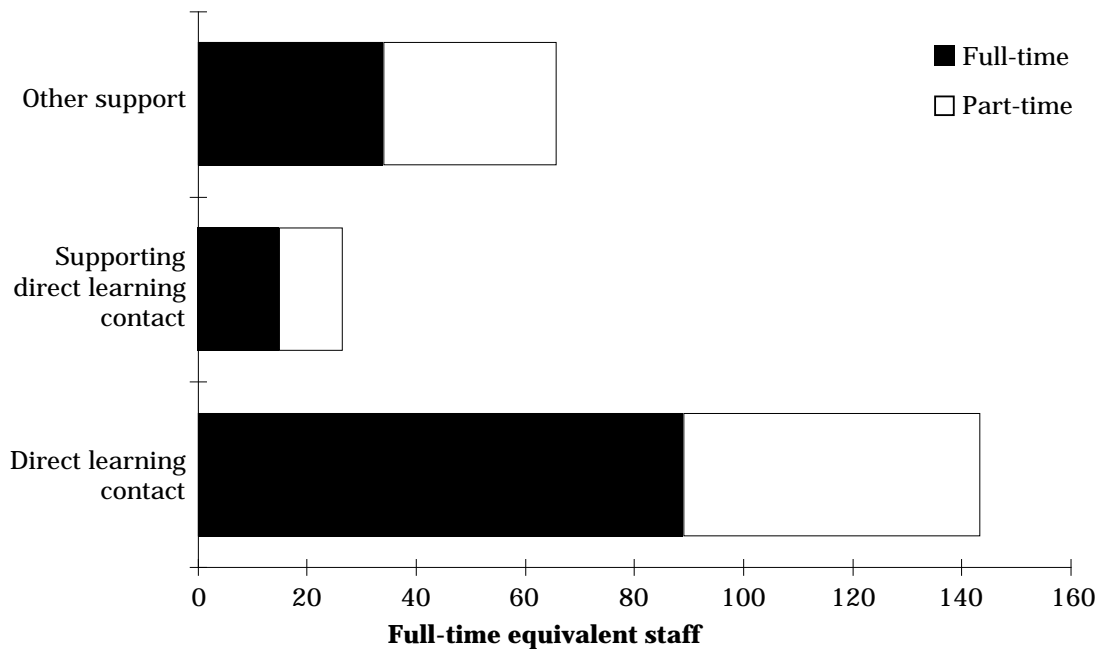
North Oxfordshire College and School of Art: FEFC-funded enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1994)



FEFC-funded enrolments: 3,126

Figure 4

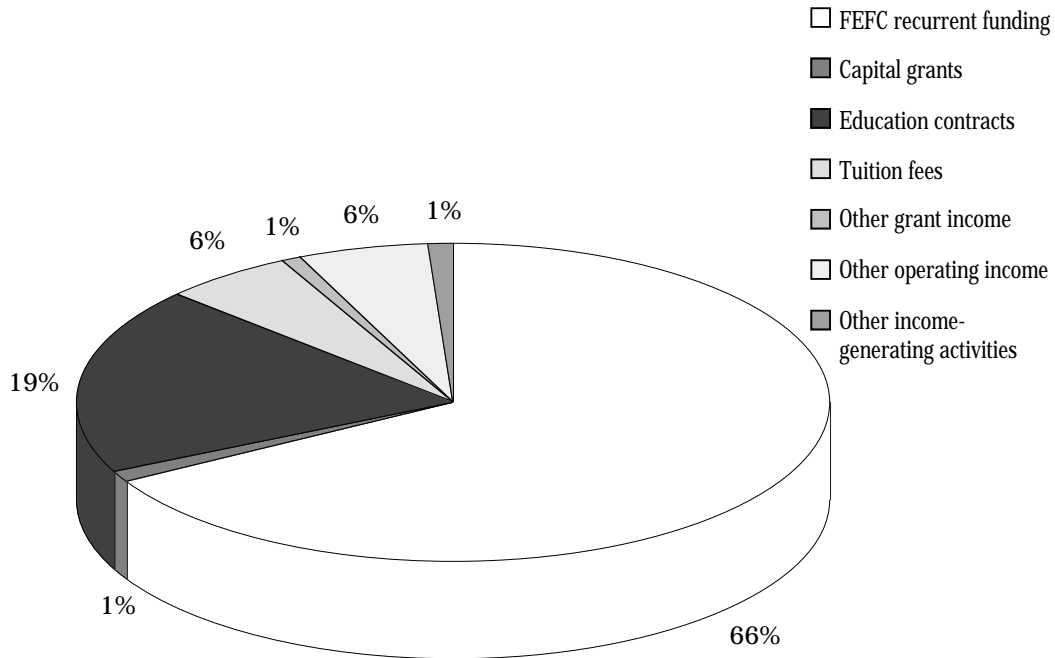
North Oxfordshire College and School of Art: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1994)



Full-time equivalent staff: 236

Figure 5

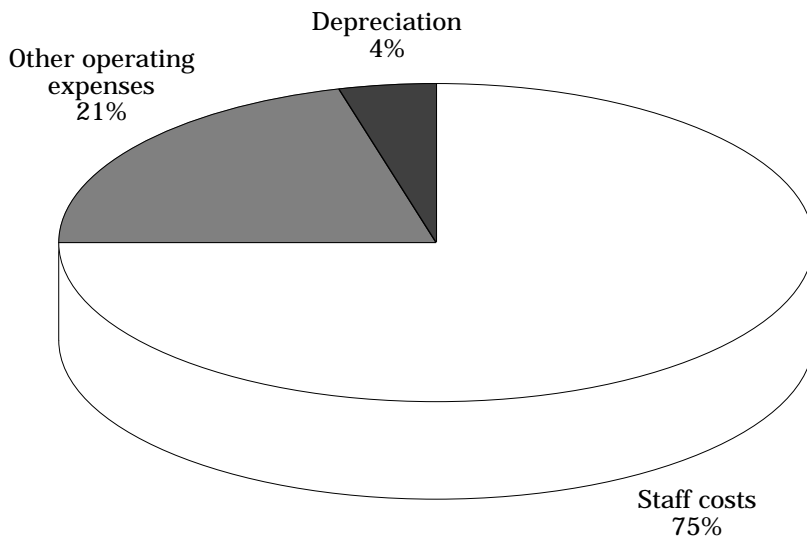
North Oxfordshire College and School of Art: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Estimated income: £6,409,000

Figure 6

North Oxfordshire College and School of Art: estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Estimated expenditure: £6,518,000

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