

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

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# **Northern College for Residential Adult Education**

**October 1995**

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**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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## **THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

### **GRADE DESCRIPTORS**

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

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

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# FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 126/95

## NORTHERN COLLEGE FOR RESIDENTIAL ADULT EDUCATION YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE REGION

Inspected September 1994 - June 1995

### Summary

The Northern College for Residential Adult Education is located near Barnsley in South Yorkshire. The college is successfully achieving its mission of providing access to education for adults who are educationally and economically disadvantaged. It has developed a wide range of recruitment strategies to reach targeted groups and responds effectively to requests for customised part-time courses. The college is well managed. Staff and governors are highly committed to the institution's ethos and mission. There are clear strategic objectives and positive responses to change. Teachers are well qualified in their subjects. Students on the full-time diploma programme achieve high levels of success. Relationships between students and tutors are excellent and students speak positively of the considerable benefits that learning in a supportive residential environment brings. Residential and administrative services are well organised. The college should develop effective methods of monitoring the implementation of policies and extend the use of performance indicators to evaluate its work. It should ensure that learning outcomes are recorded on its part-time courses and that appropriate accreditation is available to students. It should improve its learning support and guidance services, implement the information technology strategy it has drawn up and upgrade some of its accommodation.

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

<b>Aspects of cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
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	2
accommodation	3

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Humanities	2	Community education	1
Social studies	2		
Core skills	2		

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1 The Northern College for Residential Adult Education was inspected in three stages. Student induction was inspected in September 1994, specialist subjects were inspected between January and May 1995 and cross-college aspects were inspected in June 1995. Seven inspectors spent a total of 38 days in the college. They visited 62 lessons and examined a wide range of documentation provided by the college. They held meetings with governors, managers, staff and students. In addition, meetings took place with local authority members of the college company, and representatives of Sheffield Hallam University, South Yorkshire Open College Federation, local further education colleges, the voluntary sector, trades unions, community groups and local training and enterprise councils (TECs). Meetings were also held with external assessors and research consultants.

## **THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS**

2 The Northern College for Residential Adult Education is situated to the south-west of Barnsley, South Yorkshire. It is one of six residential colleges in England designated, under section 28 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, as eligible to receive financial support from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). It is one of eight such colleges in the United Kingdom. The Northern College for Residential Adult Education is the most recently established of these, admitting its first students in 1978. Government approval for the opening of the college followed plans formulated in response to the recommendation of the Russell Report on adult education that a long-term residential college for adults be established in the north of England.

3 The college was established under the auspices of a company limited by guarantee, formed first by a consortium of four South Yorkshire local education authorities (LEAs): Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield. The company now includes members from seven local authorities within the region and from a national trades union. There are plans to extend membership further.

4 The college is situated in the heart of a region experiencing rapid economic and industrial restructuring, the closure of coal mines and reduced employment in engineering, steel and other manufacturing. Throughout the region there are concentrated pockets of extensive and long-term unemployment and environmental decay. New jobs are being provided in the service and distribution industries, especially for women working on a part-time and temporary basis.

5 The aim of the college is to provide opportunities for residential learning to adults who have few or no formal qualifications and who experience other disadvantages. The college recruits mainly from the region but also recruits nationally. Many students are returning to education as a result of their participation in a wide variety of community groups, voluntary organisations and trades unions.

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6 The college's educational programmes cover two broad categories. First, there is a full-time course, of 30 weeks duration, leading to a range of awards, principally the Northern College Diploma. The college recruits students to this course nationally. The diploma is validated by the South Yorkshire Open College Federation and Sheffield Hallam University. The majority of diploma students are recruited from the lowest socio-economic groups. Secondly, there are part-time courses, lasting between two days and 10 weeks in length, for which recruitment is limited mainly to Yorkshire, Humberside and Derbyshire and to members of national trades unions. All courses are designed to be residential, or to have a substantial component of residence. Only a small number of students follow full-time or part-time courses as non-residents.

7 The management of teaching and learning in the college is through programme and curriculum teams, led by co-ordinators who report to the director of programmes and, subsequently, to the vice-principal who has overall responsibility for the college curriculum. This arrangement, introduced during 1994-95, is designed to support programme development, delivery and review. Programme and curriculum co-ordinators work in conjunction with managers from administrative and residential services. The college curriculum is organised into five areas, each of which include a number of discrete academic disciplines. For the purposes of the inspection, four areas were identified: social studies, humanities, core skills and community education.

8 At present, in common with the other long-term residential colleges, the college is not included in the FEFC-funding methodology. Funding allocations to date have been based on a 'roll forward' formula, adjusted for growth, efficiency and inflation. In 1993-94, the college received an allocation of £1,497,075 in exchange for 1,690 target enrolments. The college exceeded the target and in 1994-95 the FEFC allocation is £1,549,473 for 1,818 enrolments. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2 and by mode of attendance and curriculum area in figure 3.

9 At present, the college has a total of 89 full-time equivalent staff, including those who are part of the administrative and residential services of the college. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

10 FEFC-recurrent funding amounts to 47 per cent of the college's income. Finance for students following non-schedule 2 programmes, as defined in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, is provided by local authority company members, trades unions and other authorities and organisations. A breakdown of total income and expenditure for the 16 month period to July 1994 is given in figures 5 and 6. The college generates some income from trading activities, for example, from the letting of accommodation and from catering, but the volume of this activity has declined during 1994-95.

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## **RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION**

11 The college is successfully achieving its mission of providing access to education for adults who are educationally and economically disadvantaged. Over 50 per cent of students have no qualifications, are unemployed and come from social classes D and E, using the Registrar General's socio-economic scale. Over three thousand adults a year enrol on part-time courses and there are 75 students on the full-time diploma course which prepares students for higher education.

12 A coherent range of residential courses is offered within a limited framework of subjects. Diploma students can choose from a wide range of modules in social sciences and humanities. Core skills, including some information technology, is compulsory for all diploma students. The college acknowledges the need to introduce more subjects within the diploma programme. It has plans to develop additional information technology modules and to introduce foreign languages. Currently, no work experience is offered to students.

13 Short community education courses are popular. The part-time provision focuses mainly on return-to-learn courses. There are also courses in creative writing, information technology, media and womens studies. The college has taken some positive steps to extend the range of subject areas it offers in the part-time programme. For example, some courses in arts, music, sports development and environmental science have been developed.

14 Provision extends from introductory and basic skills courses to higher education courses. Currently, full-time students can be awarded credits at higher education level 1 and, from September 1995, the college will introduce a first-year degree programme franchised from Sheffield Hallam University.

15 There is little formal accreditation on the part-time programme. Development work is underway to clarify the different levels of courses and to introduce accreditation where appropriate. However, insufficient attention is paid to vocational qualifications.

16 The college is an extremely responsive organisation. Trades unions, community groups, further education colleges and local authorities all speak highly of the college's ability to respond to requests efficiently and effectively. Part-time courses are individually negotiated and tailor made to meet the needs and interests of student groups. For example, a course for trades unionists from the Banking Insurance and Finance Union was planned in great detail to ensure it was appropriate to the particular bank and its working practices. Part-time courses are also run at times to suit the needs of adult learners, for example, at weekends and during the school holiday period, to fit the pattern of students' employment and family commitments.

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17 There are extensive and productive links with a wide range of agencies. In addition to the formal company partnership arrangements, the college liaises with over 200 local community and voluntary organisations. Links with local TECs are becoming increasingly effective and a number of joint initiatives have been developed. For example, the college has been involved in running some employee development schemes for local companies and has been involved in education programmes funded under the City Challenge initiative in partnerships with TECs and other agencies. The college also has effective links with various professional bodies and national adult learning organisations.

18 Until recently, promotion of the work of the college has been unco-ordinated. A thorough review of marketing has just been completed and has led to the formulation of a marketing strategy which is in the early stages of implementation. The college has been successful in identifying and responding to the needs of disadvantaged communities. This good practice is informing the strategy. For example, community development work in Grimethorpe has generated an interest in adult education amongst ex-miners. As a consequence, a number of successful courses have been set up. Several methods are used to publicise college provision, including local radio and the national and local press. The quality of printed publicity varies; some brochures do not use language which prospective students can understand easily.

19 College staff are well informed about changes in the labour market and population trends in the region. They use this information to identify needs which influence college provision. Development work is concentrated in areas which have the highest rates of unemployment. International links and research initiatives are also used to enhance the work of the college. For example, the findings from one project have helped college students to learn how to apply management techniques developed in businesses and the armed forces to community organisations.

20 College governors and staff are committed to the principle of equal opportunity in recruiting students. The college offers excellent opportunities for adults who were unsuccessful at school and have no educational qualifications. It has increased the participation of students from minority ethnic groups to just over 6 per cent, which is higher than the percentage of those from minority ethnic backgrounds within the regional population. However, it has not been successful in attracting students from minority ethnic groups to the full-time diploma programme. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is underdeveloped. The college systematically analyses data on recruitment to measure how successful it is in meeting its mission and takes action where appropriate.



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## **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

21 The board of governors replaced the college council of management in 1993 and has overall responsibility for the governance of the college. All company members are entitled to a place on the board and five currently serve on it. The board has 25 members, of whom five are women and two are from minority ethnic groups. Staff and students are represented. The board wishes to attract more members from the different communities and more women. The governors are strongly committed to the mission and distinctive ethos of the college. They represent a wide spread of interests and bring an impressive range of skills, expertise and experience to the college. They are actively involved in discussions and decisions about policy and strategy. There is an effective working relationship between the chair of governors and the principal. Governors are well briefed by the principal and receive comprehensive written reports at regular intervals. The board has a code of conduct and governors are considering the introduction of a register of interests. There are training sessions for the governors, including whole-day events, at which relevant issues are considered in detail.

22 The college has not fully developed effective ways of formalising and monitoring the implementation of its policies. For example, monitoring of its policy on equal opportunities is restricted to its practices as an employer, despite its commitment to equal opportunities in terms of curriculum and responses.

23 The style of college management is open and there is an effective flow of information from the senior management group to other staff. The senior management group comprises seven members, three of whom are women. Members of the group work effectively and co-operatively, supporting each other and sharing a common understanding of priorities, tasks and objectives. The strategic planning process is consultative. Managers meet with all members of staff before priorities are discussed and agreed by the governors. Strategic objectives are clear. Where action is required, a timescale is indicated and a named postholder is responsible for seeing that the action is carried out.

24 The college is undergoing significant change and the process is being managed effectively and sensitively. Changes include the introduction of a new management structure, increased numbers of students, new accreditation of courses and the introduction of staff appraisal. Staff are responding positively, for example, to the establishment of individual targets linked to class contact hours.

25 The new management structure is supported by staff at all levels. It has few tiers and is arranged as a matrix of overlapping functional responsibilities. One characteristic of the structure is the need for extensive team working. Given the small size of the college, this inevitably means that staff are members of a number of teams. The college is currently

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considering ways of reducing the time spent in meetings. All academic full-time staff are members of the academic board which advises the principal and produces regular reports for consideration by the board of governors.

26 There is a system of regular financial reporting to the policy and finance committee, which meets every three months. The company treasurer helps governors by providing them with reports on the college budget which are produced in an easily understood format.

27 A college project, 'value for money in residential learning', has been established and there is an agreed target to reduce unit costs by 10 per cent each year for the next three years. The reduction in costs is intended to be achieved, in part, by an increase in the numbers of students. The project is helping staff to consider a wide range of costing issues including models for calculating unit costs in a residential setting. Unit costs were not being used at the time of the inspection.

28 There is an acknowledged need to develop performance indicators to cover more aspects of college activities. This has been discussed by the governors and is being considered by the quality committee of the board. Governors are considering the type of targets which could be attached to tasks assigned to members of the senior management group. At programme level, co-ordinators have income targets expressed in terms of student enrolments, but they do not hold budgets. This separation of responsibility for operational planning from accountability for costs has disadvantages.

29 Much management information is recorded and collated manually. The computer-based system has been an acknowledged problem for the college until recently. Manual recording of information, mainly of the full-time students, is thorough and comprehensive. In-house computerised databases are in place for part-time student records. Finance records are linked to the Barnsley Metropolitan Council system but the intention is to introduce an in-house financial record within a year. Awareness raising and training is helping staff to begin to make use of management information for planning purposes, but some staff are not yet fully aware of the potential of this approach to management. Evaluation of the effectiveness of management information is also at an early stage of development.

#### **STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

30 The college is welcoming and sensitive to the needs of adults, the majority of whom have had little opportunity for formal education since leaving school. The college provides a supportive learning environment well matched to students' needs.

31 A particular strength of the college is the range of methods used to reach and recruit the groups identified in the college's mission statement.

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The main strategy is outreach work. The college's network of partners and its links with other organisations ensure that information and advice are given to people in their local communities. College liaison staff work in designated geographical areas to keep in close touch with community groups, local authorities and other agencies and this has been effective in breaking down hostility to education and establishing trust. The arrangements provide students with an effective bridge from the community to the college and back again to the community.

32 Students are helped to make informed decisions about attending the college through attendance at community events, day visits, conferences and taster days. Free attendance on courses, the provision of a children's centre and a recruitment policy requiring no formal entry qualifications, all encourage students to come to the college. Recruitment is also by word of mouth from previous students. Students often return for further periods of study; between a third and a half of those recruited onto the diploma course previously attended part-time programmes. Recruitment targets are set and monitored for programme areas and categories of students.

33 The induction programmes for students on full-time and part-time programmes are well planned and thorough. They help students to familiarise themselves with the college's mission, understand the programme for which they have enrolled and get to know their fellow students. At the start of each residential programme, adjustments to courses are negotiated with the students. Opportunities are provided for information to be shared so that experiences can be used effectively during the course. On the diploma course a well co-ordinated and varied programme makes full use of students' own experiences.

34 The college's philosophy, which is to encourage students to build on their individual strengths, is much valued. The working relationships between tutors and students are particularly good. Tutorial arrangements for full-time students involve a high level of personal support. Each full-time student has a course tutor and a personal tutor. Although some of the arrangements are informal, tutors see this level of support as an integral part of their work. Part-time students also receive effective support. Some part-time residential courses have no timetabled tutorial provision and, as a consequence, some opportunities to offer guidance to students are missed. Tutors are always available if students request a meeting and students are appreciative of the friendly approach and quick responses of tutors. A diploma student told inspectors that as a result of consistent help from his tutor he had progressed from writing one word answers to be able to produce a 10,000 word essay. A duty tutor is regularly available to deal with students' problems in the event that their own tutors are not available. A recently-established central student services provision is now in place. It is at an early stage of development.

35 Well-informed tutors provide advice on higher education opportunities, though no member of the staff is qualified and trained to

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give careers advice. Specialist careers advice is provided through a service level agreement with Barnsley careers service. For students on the community programme guidance is offered on an outreach basis. Most part-time courses include a 'next steps' session on careers, but many students require more effective careers guidance than is presently provided. The student services centre has limited computer-based guidance systems; it does not have a national database of courses.

36 Arrangements for counselling are inadequate. There are two part-time college counsellors. Both are qualified social workers but lack counselling qualifications. Their work is highly valued by students but they lack a designated room for meeting students and they are allocated insufficient time to respond to students' needs.

37 Appropriate residential and childcare facilities are available to parents with children aged from six months old to 14 years. The quality of the childcare service is high and the service is sometimes oversubscribed.

38 The benefits to students of learning in a residential environment are considerable. Some examples quoted by students included the opportunities to study over extended periods of time in a quiet, stress-free and supportive environment; to learn from peers; and to share life experiences with tutors and students from similar backgrounds. Many students commented positively on the value of the opportunity to be able to step outside their usual environment and to consider themselves, for the first time, as learners.

39 The college is considering how to develop aspects of residential learning. Careful consideration is given to the student's residential placement in order to maximise the benefit gained from the experience. For example students who have older children are placed in adjoining rooms, and full-time and part-time students are not segregated but have rooms alongside each other. These arrangements allow students to share experiences and to support each other. A few students commented on the poor quality of some of the facilities and the lack of space, particularly for students with older children.

40 Learning support generally is at an early stage of development. Materials for flexible forms of learning, and for learning support activities outside classes, are limited. Students do not have a specialist room where they can use resources which are specifically designed for them to work on independently, with support from tutors. There is a policy covering the initial assessment of full-time students' basic skills. The lack of a policy for students on part-time courses leads to inconsistent practice. Although there is some discussion of group needs prior to the start of the part-time programme, there is limited additional support for students who have identified such needs in their learning plans.

41 Students' records of achievement are not well developed. The college is aware of the value of their use to students, particularly on some short

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courses where formal accreditation may not be appropriate. There are some instances of good practice within the college and staff are considering ways to extend this to help part-time students develop a portfolio of their achievements.

42 Full-time students' attendance is carefully monitored. Those who fail to attend are contacted. The approach is friendly and supportive and students appreciate the concern shown by tutors. Students are well informed of their rights and responsibilities.

### **TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING**

43 The standard of teaching is generally high. Strengths outweighed weaknesses in 81 per cent of the sessions inspected and the rest of the sessions, with one exception, had a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Community education achieved a particularly good profile of grades. The grades awarded to the sessions inspected are shown in the following table.

#### **Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study**

<b>Programmes</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Access to higher education		6	13	7	1	0	27
Non-schedule 2		11	7	2	0	0	20
Other		3	10	2	0	0	15
<b>Total</b>		<b>20</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>62</b>

44 Course documentation for full-time and part-time programmes is thorough. Schemes of work are detailed and give information on aims, content, methods to be used and learning outcomes. Lesson plans do not always give sufficient attention to what the students are expected to learn.

45 Relationships between staff and students are positive and class management is generally good. Occasionally, students arrive late or are inattentive in class. Nearly all teachers demonstrate sound knowledge of their subjects and have a clear teaching style. There is a strong academic culture, staff display enthusiasm for their disciplines and they have high expectations of their students. On the part-time programme, teachers succeed in developing excellent working relationships with students over a very short period of time. They brief themselves well on the backgrounds of students in the group. On full-time and part-time programmes staff are skilful at drawing on students' experiences and making constructive use of these.

46 Teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching approaches, which include lectures, groupwork and verbal question and answer sessions. For example, in a session focusing on trades unions the teacher gave a clear exposition of traditional and partnership models of union organisation, drawing on the practice of direct action in America and

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including an interesting example of picketing churches to influence the views of the congregation. This was followed up by groupwork to look in more detail at the issues raised.

47 In order to develop core skills such as communications, students are encouraged to make presentations, sometimes on video, and to follow these with individual and group analyses of their performances. Full-time diploma students are given plenty of opportunities to develop research skills appropriate to the kind of work they will be required to undertake in higher education. There is an effective integrated approach to the use of the library involving teachers and library staff. All full-time students are assessed on project work which includes a presentation. One group of students used a questionnaire they had devised on the effects of computer games on young children. This involved the development of students' literacy, organisational and information technology skills. Some students reported difficulties in gaining sufficient access to information technology equipment.

48 In the community education programme there is an appropriate emphasis on team-building skills. Initial, ice-breaking exercises are used effectively to put students at their ease at the start of the programme. Teaching is challenging, stimulating and aimed at extending students' confidence and experience. There is a range of handouts of high quality which include exercises on group dynamics that could be used for work within local communities. Community education programmes are carefully negotiated with the student group before they arrive at college; staff check that the agreed programme still meets students' needs and, where necessary, further adaptations are made.

49 In all programmes, the learning materials used in classes are of high quality. Information is up to date. There is a comprehensive resource pack for history students which includes a wide range of primary and secondary sources. The materials that have been put together for a part-time writers' course are of the highest quality.

50 Teaching plans do not address systematically the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are examples of good practice involving some individuals and groups. For example, one student with learning difficulties was given large print handouts and a flip chart with pictures was used to signify information. In a group where three of the students suffered from fatigue-related illnesses, the pace of the work took this into account and breaks were well timed to allow students to keep up. However, there is generally scope for more audio tapes and videos, more large print books and for the use of information technology as an aid to learning. In order to fulfil its strategic plan, the college should continue to develop the experience and expertise of staff to ensure that students with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities are able to participate effectively in classes.

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51 In some classes on the full-time diploma programme there is a lack of clarity about learning objectives and insufficient checks on students' progress. The emphasis is on teaching rather than on students' learning. On some modules insufficient attention is given to the development of learning which involves students working by themselves using resources designed for this purpose. Different levels of ability and understanding are sometimes not well catered for. As the college aims to recruit students with little previous formal learning, it is important that lesson plans are clear and shared with students so that they understand the thematic links which are being made within, and between, modules. In history, for example, students said that a handout giving a simple chronological guide would help them to organise their work more effectively. In literature lessons teachers helped students to understand complex concepts or language that was unfamiliar to them, but this was not done so successfully in some humanities and social science lessons.

52 Assignments on the full-time course are set regularly and a common marking scheme is used to ensure consistency. Marking is generally detailed and thorough, and there are supportive written comments from tutors indicating how improvements could be made. In a few instances, the comments were too brief to be helpful to students.

#### **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

53 Students on the full-time diploma course have achieved high levels of success. Retention rates are good and a high proportion of students gain their qualifications. College statistics record that in 1993-94 there were 48 students enrolled for the new one-year programme and 92 per cent were awarded the diploma; a significant number also gained credits at higher education level 1. Forty-three out of the 45 students who were awarded the diploma went on to higher education. The year 1993-94 was particularly successful but results have also been good in previous years. In 1991-92 there was an 82 per cent retention rate, and 75 per cent of the students progressed to higher education and in 1992-93 there was a 90 per cent retention rate and 81 per cent of students went on to higher education.

54 The majority of the full-time students enrolled for 1994-95 are well motivated, work diligently and speak about their studies with enthusiasm. The emphasis given to core skills at the start of the full-time course enables most students to make significant improvement and to reach a good standard, especially given their previous lack of formal qualifications. However, the main emphasis is on communication skills. The extent of students' difficulties with numeracy and information technology has sometimes been underestimated. The college is taking steps to address this. Thirty out of the 75 diploma students enrolled this year have taken mathematics modules and a mathematics workshop is now available once a week. There are plans to introduce additional information technology modules next year.

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55 Oral skills are generally well developed. In social sciences students are able to apply their knowledge and understanding in discussion. In the majority of sessions inspected they were able to work effectively as part of a group using clear and structured task briefs supplied by tutors. For example, a core skills assignment required students to work in pairs to give a presentation to the tutor and the other students, which included an oral summary and use of audio-visual aids. The standard of presentations was high and students worked in their own time to meet deadlines and to achieve the required standard. In a group project on the Internet, students gave an articulate and sophisticated analysis of the political implications of the new technology.

56 Standards of written work on the diploma programme are generally sound. Students' give well-structured responses to the questions asked and provide clear evidence of their ability to apply their knowledge. Many, but not all students, are able to show an appropriate level of analysis and evaluation both in their verbal comments and in their written assignments. In a few cases, emotive language was used inappropriately and there were some problems with basic sentence construction. Students' work files demonstrate good note-taking skills.

57 Students on the community education programme are achieving new skills and are able to apply what they have learned within their communities. They are gaining confidence as people and as learners. Students appear to enjoy their sessions and fully involve themselves in discussions and exercises. They speak enthusiastically about their courses and how they had benefited from them. There were many examples of good practice. In one session, students were set the task, working in pairs, of illustrating each other's strengths on a flip chart. They were then asked to find evidence to support these strengths and to present a positive profile of their partner to the group. Taking the first step to come to community education has inspired and encouraged some students to go on to other learning opportunities at the college or elsewhere.

58 Short residential courses are particularly effective in developing team work and leadership qualities. Students learn skills such as those associated with managing a committee and speaking to a group. They are acquiring knowledge, for example, about how to keep accounts for a housing project. Several spoke of the new experience of being away from home and how the residential nature of the course allows them to concentrate on their studies.

59 There is insufficient attention paid to recording students' achievements on the part-time programme. Learning outcomes are often set for the group as a whole and individual success is not always assessed or recorded. The college is intending to address this situation by devising units to be accredited by the open college. It should also consider whether students are able to gain the most appropriate qualification, for example in information technology.



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60 Students performed well on the three part-time courses that led to formal accreditation in 1993–94. The information technology for women course enrolled nine students who between them achieved 36 open college credits at level 3 and eight at level 2. Open college levels 3 and 2 are generally regarded as equivalent to General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) respectively. On a women’s studies course 31 level 3 and two level 4 credits were awarded to a total of 13 students. Some students on the full-time diploma course have expressed concern that the standards reached in achieving these credits are not always fully understood by other institutions or by employers. The college is aware of this issue and is seeking ways to overcome the problem.

### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

61 The college is building on some well-developed quality assurance practice to establish a comprehensive framework for all its operations. A quality committee of the board of governors sets the policy on quality assurance and the vice-principal has overall responsibility for this work. He chairs the educational standards committee set up by the academic board to monitor teaching and learning, including college services where they impinge on teaching and learning. There is some overlap between the roles of the quality committee and the educational standards committee. The college is currently trying to address this.

62 There is a comprehensive policy for quality control of courses, especially on the diploma programme. There is strong emphasis on the importance of students’ evaluations of provision. On the diploma course evaluation is carried out three times a year, contributing to course tutor reports and into a well-developed review process involving the whole teaching team. A student committee provides a formal channel of communication between diploma students and tutors. Reviews and student evaluations cover each module thoroughly and there is detailed evaluation of responses.

63 Interim and annual reports on the diploma programme are submitted to the educational standards committee and the quality committee; they include progress against targets set for retention and achievements. The programme is also subject to external moderation. The college’s response to issues raised by this process is very positive. There are many examples of changes introduced as a result of internal and external evaluation, for example the foundation module was reduced in length and greater attention is being paid to numeracy skills.

64 Quality assurance procedures are less comprehensive for the part-time programme but a number of measures are in place. Discussions and questionnaires are used at the end of each course to gather students’ views as part of a review carried out by course teams. Follow up research

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has been introduced to find out how useful a course has been after students have left the college. Recent research, involving detailed interviews of student groups whilst they are at the college, has helped staff to collect qualitative data on all aspects of the college as it is experienced by part-time students. All of the findings are used to inform future planning. Curriculum teams produce an annual report. There is also follow-up outreach work and reports are made to particular partner groups, for example, through the company liaison teams. College staff receive feedback about the effectiveness of part-time courses from local authority community groups and other partners.

65 There is scope to improve the performance indicators used to measure success on the part-time programme. For example, data on progression and achievement are not comprehensively collected or routinely reported. The college should also address the issue of developing performance indicators for its work with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

66 Residential and administrative services staff have devised a number of measures to evaluate the quality of their work. In the children's centre, parents' comments are analysed each week and appropriate action taken where necessary. There are formal termly meetings of the children's centre group, which includes parents' representatives. The catering services keep a complaints/comments book and actions taken as a result of these are recorded. The premises manager carries out a regular check on the progress resulting from requests for repairs from staff and students. These procedures have now been brought together in a comprehensive quality assurance manual for the residential and administrative services which sets out targets and performance indicators for each staff team. The manual has been put together by staff in each section and there is a high level of staff involvement in the process.

67 A guide to good practice in teaching and learning has recently been produced. Academic staff are working in pairs to observe each other's lessons against an agreed set of criteria and to offer comment and support. Staff also work in pairs to increase consistency in the application of standards used for assessing students' work.

68 A formal appraisal system has now been agreed for all college staff. Training has been carried out for appraisers and appraisees. Implementation has started at management level and the college target is that all staff will be appraised during 1995-96. The college intends to gain the Investors in People award but is at an early stage in this initiative.

69 There is a strong commitment to staff development. Governors and staff have benefited from considerable training on issues arising out of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and there has been an emphasis on preparation for inspection. Staff are also taking courses related to their individual needs, such as subject updating for academic staff and National

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Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training for childcare and administrative staff. New staff are given a useful induction pack and are then supported by the team they are attached to and their line manager. Group induction sessions take place when there are sufficient new staff to make it viable. The college has started to systematise its staff development and link it more closely to the strategic plan. There has been insufficient training in guidance for, and methods of working with, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

70 A student charter was produced in July 1994. It includes a clear complaints procedure but few measurable targets. It was drawn up in consultation with students, staff and governors and was distributed to all full-time students and to staff. Copies are also available from student services. The college has now reviewed its charter with the student union and has recognised that it is too long and that the standards of services students should expect are not always clearly expressed. A second version is now in draft and this will be given to all part-time as well as full-time students. The charter's effectiveness and use by students is reported to the quality committee.

71 In accordance with the requirements of the inspection process the college has produced a self-assessment report. All sections of staff were required to produce a document indicating the strengths and weaknesses in their area of work, and this process has led to some effective self-evaluation. The summary document uses the inspection framework and includes a section on strengths and issues affecting the college as a whole. The college's judgments accorded with those of inspectors in most cases. The college has commissioned a number of independent research projects to help it evaluate the effectiveness of its current provision and to develop new courses.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Staffing**

72 Teaching staff are well qualified in their subjects and have extensive experience in adult education. All staff who teach on the diploma course have a first degree, the majority have higher degrees or other additional qualifications, and many are active in consultancy and research. Less than one-third have a formal teaching qualification.

73 Staffing levels are appropriate and teachers are effectively deployed. There is a low rate of staff turnover and a high level of commitment to the ethos of the college amongst staff.

74 A good level of clerical, administrative, and technical support is provided to teaching staff. Library and information technology staff are appropriately qualified. Residential services, such as accommodation, catering and reception, are well managed and well staffed. All members

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of staff within the college have a dedicated and caring approach to their work.

### **Equipment/learning resources**

75 Classrooms are adequately equipped with overhead projectors, screens, whiteboards and flip charts. Audio-visual equipment is readily available on request. There is a well-equipped media studio and good use is made of video facilities in core skills teaching and on a variety of short courses. For example, trades union delegates use them to develop negotiating skills and to improve their effectiveness at disciplinary hearings.

76 The main information technology resource room contains a good range of modern computer hardware and software, and provides the opportunity for both group and individual study. Access to some machines for private study is limited when information technology classes are taking place. An additional room provides some information technology facilities on an open-access basis, but these are in need of upgrading. There is a ratio of one workstation to four students, based on a complement of 75 full-time students and 50 part-time students who are in college at any one time. However, difficulties of access at certain times are made worse by the lack of information technology equipment within the residential accommodation. The college has drawn up plans to improve this situation.

77 The library is well stocked with up-to-date books, journals and other resources. The current bookstock comprises 30,000 items, and an additional 5,000 reference books are available in an adjoining library. One hundred and sixty-five journals are currently taken on subscription, as well as three national daily and two local newspapers. A growing collection of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database software is available on the library's three multi-media workstations. Social studies students reported difficulty in obtaining books for some modules.

78 There is adequate study space. A room for quiet study is accessible 24 hours a day, except when language and mathematics workshops are being held. However, the library itself is not open after 20.00 or on Sundays and this restricts access for students in residence. There are good links between library staff, academic staff and students, and current bookstocks are reviewed jointly on a regular basis.

79 There is scope for greater use of information technology and library resources in the curriculum. For example, the use of information technology and library resources is poorly developed in community education. A comprehensive strategy is being developed which aims to achieve a wider use of information technology across the curriculum.

### **Accommodation**

80 The college is located on a site of significant importance in terms of its history, architecture and landscape importance. The college is housed

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in a grade 1 listed building, formerly a mansion, with grade 2 listed outbuildings and monuments set in extensive formal gardens and surrounding parkland.

81 The main building contains offices, classrooms, staff rooms, libraries, and catering and residential facilities. The accommodation is well looked after. Teaching rooms are spacious, comfortable and well furnished, and they provide an attractive environment conducive to learning. The building itself requires repairs to timbers, plumbing and other essential services.

82 One of the college's two purpose-built teaching blocks, built during the 1960s, is in need of basic maintenance; the other has major structural defects which preclude its long-term use. The classrooms in these buildings are adequately furnished and of an appropriate size.

83 A recently-refurbished residential block provides a good standard of accommodation, but other residential accommodation is of poor quality and remains unpopular with students. The geography of the site and the design of existing buildings present major difficulties for students with restricted mobility, although the college has done much to alleviate this and staff are highly sensitive to students' needs. Some areas of the site remain inaccessible to students in wheelchairs.

84 Facilities for students include a canteen, a common room, a bar and the college gardens. There are good car parking facilities close to the main building, including reserved spaces for disabled drivers and for female staff and students. The entrance hall in the main house is welcoming, but signposting for some rooms and buildings is not clear.

85 The college has a detailed accommodation strategy which includes a substantial capital refurbishment programme designed to upgrade the residential, teaching and non-teaching accommodation over the next three years. This includes plans to provide access to all parts of the site for students with restricted mobility, to increase residential accommodation by some 28 per cent, to improve accommodation for information technology and library resources, to install modern heating plant and catering equipment, and to improve sports, social and recreational facilities.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

86 Northern College for Residential Adult Education is successfully achieving its mission of providing access to education for adults who are educationally and economically disadvantaged. Its strengths are:

- an impressive range of recruitment strategies to reach targeted groups
- an effective response to requests for customised part-time courses
- governors and staff who are highly committed to its ethos and mission
- effective governance and management

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- clear strategic objectives
  - positive responses to change
  - excellent relationships between tutors and students
  - the benefits to learning which students derive from a supportive residential environment
  - well-qualified teachers
  - high levels of student achievement
  - well-organised residential and administrative services
  - a comprehensive policy for quality assurance.

87 In order to improve further the quality of its provision the college should:

- develop effective methods of monitoring the implementation of its policies
- extend the use of performance indicators to evaluate its work
- ensure learning outcomes on its part-time courses are recorded and that appropriate accreditation is available
- extend the range of subjects it offers
- improve its learning support and guidance services
- implement the information technology strategy it has drawn up
- upgrade some of its accommodation.

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## FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at June 1995)

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  - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (as at June 1995)

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  - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at June 1995)

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

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  - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

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  - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

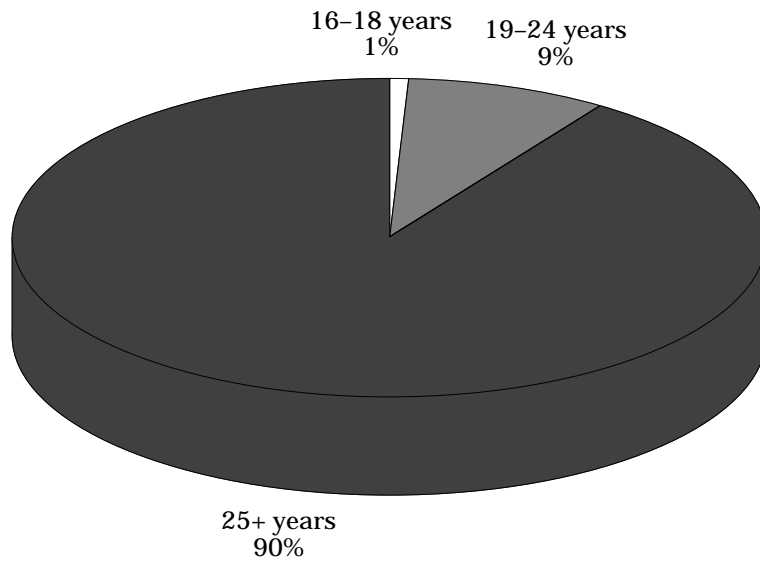
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**Figure 1**

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**Northern College for Residential Adult Education: percentage enrolments by age (as at June 1995)**



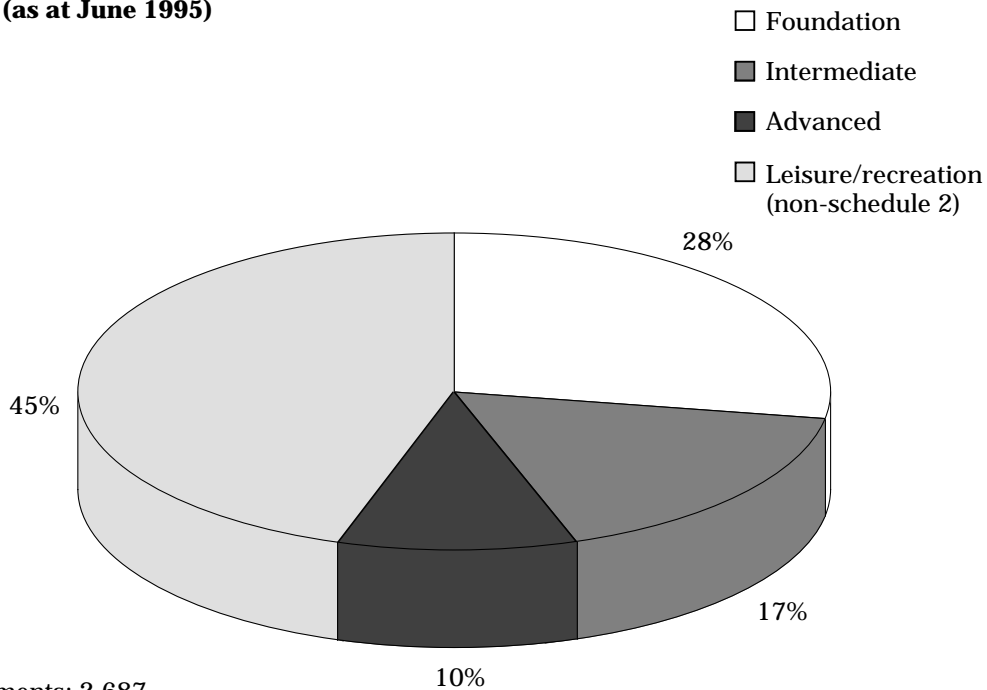
Enrolments: 2,687

*Note: this chart excludes three enrolments aged under 16.*

**Figure 2**

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**Northern College for Residential Adult Education: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at June 1995)**



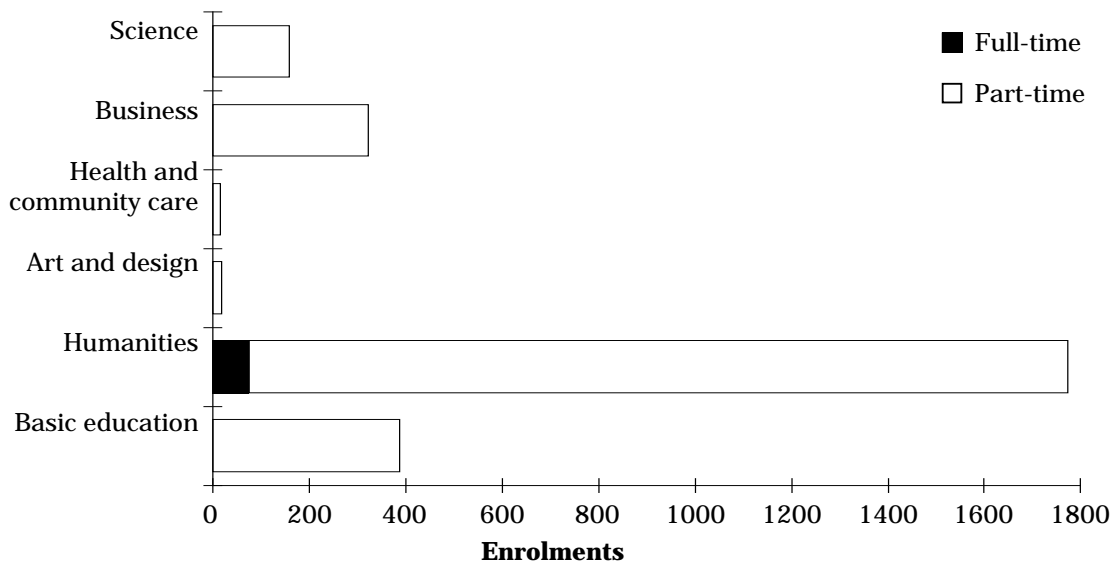
Enrolments: 2,687



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**Figure 3**

**Northern College for Residential Adult Education: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at June 1995)**

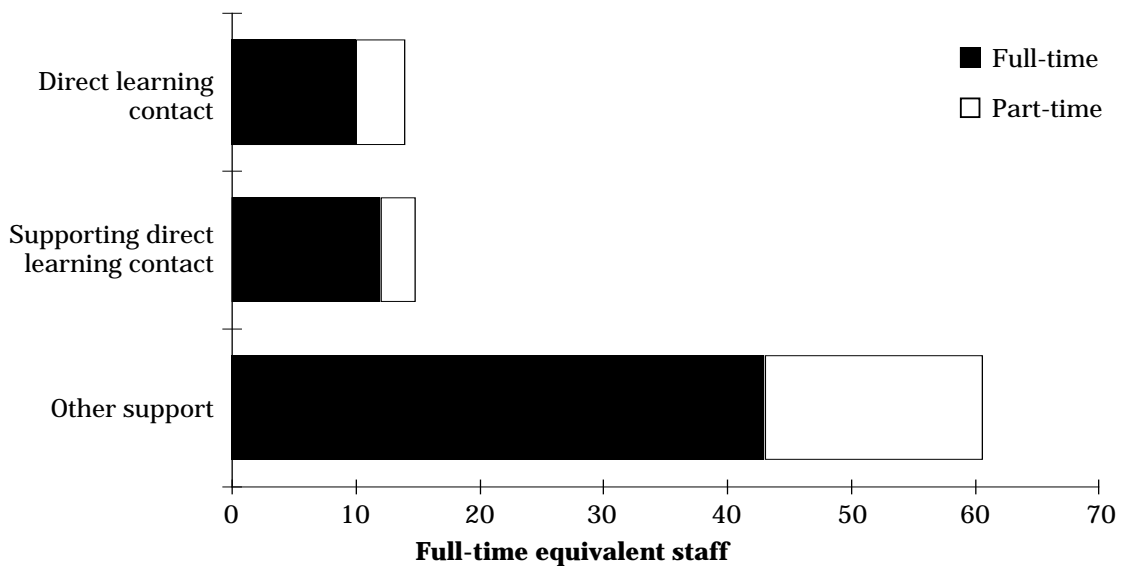


Enrolments: 2,687

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**Figure 4**

**Northern College for Residential Adult Education: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)**

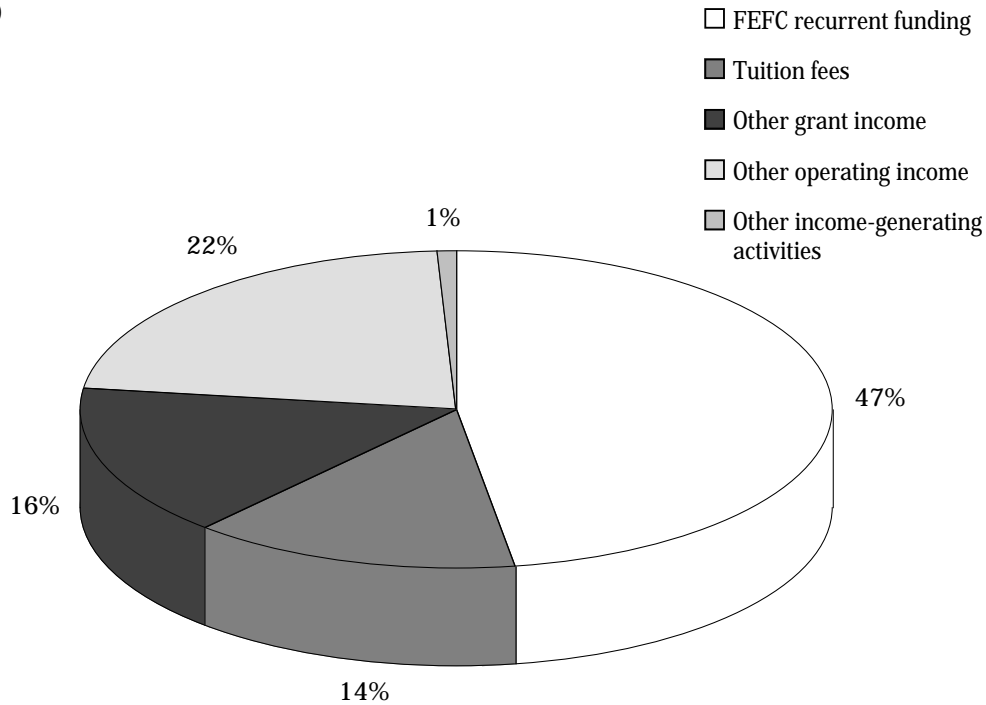


Full-time equivalent staff: 89

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**Figure 5**

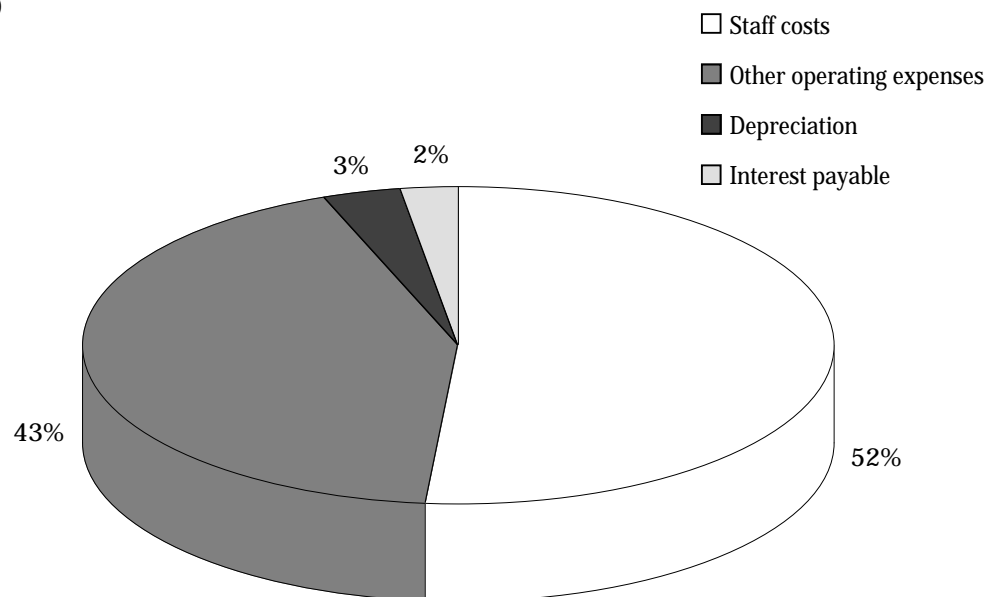
**Northern College for Residential Adult Education: income (for 16 months to July 1994)**



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**Figure 6**

**Northern College for Residential Adult Education: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)**



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