

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Ruskin College

June 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-96

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 74/97

RUSKIN COLLEGE
SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected September 1996-March 1997

Summary

Ruskin College, Oxford, is a residential adult education college attended by students from all parts of the country and from overseas. It has an impressive record of providing access to education for people with few prior educational achievements. There are strong links with the trades union and labour movement and the local community. Governors are effective and have a clear understanding of their role. Students clearly benefit from studying in a residential setting and from a well-established pattern of tutorial teaching. They receive strong support from the staff and achievement rates are high. The college should clarify the roles and responsibilities of the principal and general secretary; review decision-making processes in the college and clarify the roles of committees and operational groups; review the composition and reporting arrangements for the finance and resources committee; identify more clearly the processes by which strategic objectives will be achieved; encourage the further development of teaching skills; improve the quality assurance arrangements; improve access for people with restricted mobility; and improve marketing.

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

Curriculum area	Grade
Humanities	2
Labour and social studies	2
Complementary studies	2

INTRODUCTION

1 Ruskin College, Oxford, was inspected between September 1996 and March 1997. A team of seven inspectors spent 35 days in the college. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected in September 1996. Teaching and learning was inspected in November 1996 and January 1997. Aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in March 1997.

2 Inspectors visited 44 classes and examined students' coursework and a wide range of college documentation. They met with college governors, managers, staff, students, and representatives from the trades union and labour movement, adult education organisations, the local community, the Heart of England Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), and other education and training providers.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 Ruskin College was founded in 1899 as a college of residential adult education. It is based on two sites, three miles apart, in the city of Oxford. Founded by two young non-conformist Americans committed to social reform, the college sought to integrate the two traditions of independent working class education and university extension courses. From the start the college had very close links with the labour movement, working with trades unions, the co-operative movement and working men's clubs to provide residential education for working people. Initially all the students were men. The first women students were admitted in 1919. Since its foundation, the college has become widely known nationally and internationally.

4 The college 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). The two main sites are at Walton Street near the city centre and at Ruskin Hall, Headington, on the outskirts of the city. Teaching takes place at both sites. The main administration centre and the college library are located at the Walton Street site. The historically strong links with Oxford University, and more recently with Oxford Brookes University, are an important aspect of the college's life. Students have access to a wide range of university facilities including the Bodleian Library and other libraries.

5 Students are recruited from all parts of the country and from overseas. In July 1996 there were 659 students at the college, of whom 203 were full time. There were 138 residential students. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2, and 3. The college employs 65 full-time equivalent staff. This number includes 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. Students accepted by the college on full-time, one-year courses who have lived in the United Kingdom for

three years preceding their entry to the college are awarded adult education bursaries covering tuition, examination and validation fees and a maintenance grant. In 1995-96, the value of the maintenance grant was £2,665. Additional bursaries are funded by various organisations, including trades unions and the Ruskin College students' union.

6 The college's mission is expressed as a 'vocation' statement. This statement emphasises the college's distinctive tradition of work with the labour movement and with other organisations in the community. It identifies two commitments for the 1990s:

- 'to provide high-quality long-term and short-term residential education for adults whose educational opportunities have been limited by social or economic circumstances
- to work particularly with those individuals and groups who wish to increase their educational abilities and become more effective in their local, national and international organisations for the betterment of the societies in which they live'.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 The college has a successful record of providing access to education for people with few prior educational achievements. In 1995-96, of the 160 students starting the full-time certificate in higher education programme, 33 per cent had no general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) qualifications and a further 50 per cent had only one or more GCSE. Of the 135 students completing the course, 73 per cent proceeded to higher education. There are many individual success stories of students who have been awarded good degrees in higher education institutions following their time at Ruskin College. The college's commitment to enabling individuals to become more effective in their community is reflected in its work with refugees, a long-standing involvement in local community action, and the presence of older local residents in the college through the Agewell Project. The personal confidence and social and political awareness which is fostered at the college enable students to return to their communities and organisations with new skills and understanding.

8 The college offers programmes at various levels from return-to-learn provision for students without qualifications to postgraduate study. The main full-time programmes are the one-year certificate in higher education (150 students in 1995-96), and the two-year diploma in social work/diploma in higher education (47 students in 1995-96). The certificate and diploma in higher education are validated by the Open University Validation Service. Students studying for the certificate in higher education choose from eight core subjects: sociology, politics, history, community and youth work, labour studies, economics, women's studies, and English. The community and youth work programme is also validated by the National Youth Agency and partly qualifies students as community and youth workers.

9 Students on the certificate in higher education programme can choose from approximately 50 complementary study modules to enrich their studies. These include subjects such as beginners mathematics, collective bargaining techniques, music and society, and understanding computers. The modular design of the certificate programme enables students to mix subjects; for example, students studying English or history can also study the women and popular music module. However, complementary studies modules are unevenly attended and the college is reviewing this element of the programme.

10 Students who successfully complete the certificate in higher education are awarded 120 credit points within the national credit accumulation and transfer scheme for higher education. This should enable them to proceed directly to the second year of a degree course. In practice, only a small proportion of students do so.

11 The main part-time programme is the Ruskin Learning Project which provides courses for people with no qualifications. Originally a response to local unemployment, it includes a return-to-learn programme and eight other humanities-based courses. Accreditation is offered through the Open College Network for most of these courses. At the time of the inspection, there were 135 students on the project, ranging in age from 19 to 80; 15 per cent were from minority ethnic groups. The project is responsive to local community needs and successfully recruits unemployed adults who have few formal qualifications. Some students progress to the certificate in higher education programme.

12 The residential experience at Ruskin College is a distinctive part of its provision. It offers the opportunity for an intensive and challenging learning experience through academic study and communal living. The college is also looking at ways of introducing more flexible short-term residential experiences. Although students have access to Oxford University facilities, recreational opportunities at the college are limited and students consider them unsatisfactory.

13 The college recognises the need to offer more opportunities for students to study at times which suit them and has made some progress towards this objective. Students on the full-time certificate in higher education programme can start at various points in the year. Ruskin Learning Project courses are available on a drop-in basis with a choice of start and finish dates. Links with the Heart of England TEC are strong and have led to some useful developments such as a project to support students studying away from the college. The college has strong international links, several of which have led to overseas consultancies and projects. Some of these are maintained through two research and consultancy units which are based in the college and operate as separate limited companies. The extensive research work and publications of staff support the academic quality and vocational relevance of college programmes.

14 The college has links with a wide range of organisations and individuals who support its mission. In addition to the strong contacts with trades unions there are productive links with higher education, particularly the universities of Oxford, Oxford Brookes, Warwick and Lancaster, and with several further education colleges and adult education organisations. Effective contacts are maintained with Oxfordshire Social Services, the Department of Health, and other partners through, for example, work placements and joint seminars. The college has been involved in local community developments for many years. This has brought benefits to communities in the Oxford area and provides a wide range of placement opportunities for community and youth work students.

15 The college recognises the need to improve marketing which at present is largely based on its network of contacts. It is making efforts to reach a wider audience through the use of national press and television advertising. An advertising plan and a database of existing contacts have been devised. Some use is made of labour market information but there is no mechanism for identifying the needs of a wider range of potential clients. The college does not use information on student satisfaction to inform its marketing strategy.

16 The college is committed through its mission to the principles of equal opportunity. There is a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and disability statement endorsed by the governing executive. Students' views are taken seriously and college staff have attempted to deal sensitively with some complex and difficult issues. There is an appropriate procedure for dealing with students' complaints and students are made aware of this. The equal opportunities policy is not supported by a detailed action plan and its implementation is not monitored systematically.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

17 The college is going through a process of change as it adapts to new challenges. The transition is both cultural and organisational. There is a general concern among staff that these changes should not undermine the college's strong traditions. The college's 'vocation' statement, its roots in the trades union and labour movement and its national reputation have created a strong sense of identity, an impressive loyalty to the college and its traditions, and a commitment to long-standing ways of working.

18 Governance at Ruskin College operates through a council with 69 members which elects a governing executive of approximately 19 members. The council meets twice a year and acts as a forum for discussion of key issues. The governing executive is, in effect, the governing body. Both bodies have staff and student representation. Membership reflects the origins and mission of the college. The trades union and labour movement is particularly strongly represented. Thirty of the present members of the council and seven of the present 19 members of the governing executive have been appointed within the last two years. There is an impressive range of experience and expertise among members.

Additional specialist advice is sought where necessary. The governing executive has recently undertaken an audit of members' skills and begun to assess its effectiveness. Some training has taken place, for example, in preparation for inspection.

19 Responsibility for monitoring finance and resources has been devolved by governors to a finance and resources committee consisting mainly of college staff. Until a year ago, it was chaired by a member of the governing executive. Since then it has been chaired by the general secretary. The committee works efficiently and has the confidence of the governors. However, the committee's composition and reporting arrangements should be reviewed to ensure proper accountability to the governing executive. There is no remuneration committee.

20 Governors and senior managers are aware of the need for clear strategic planning to address the challenges facing the college. The college's strategic plan includes seven strategic aims derived from the college's mission. The plan has been reviewed recently and the outcomes reported to governors. The strategic aims form the basis of the current annual operating statement. However, the operating statement does not include dates by which specific tasks are to be completed or resource implications. The means by which objectives will be achieved are not clearly identified.

21 In the last 18 months, the college has taken appropriate steps to strengthen its management arrangements. Four deans have been appointed: all have cross-college responsibilities and three have specific responsibility for curriculum areas which the college calls boards of study. Until recently, the principal had direct management responsibility for all teaching staff. The principal's role as chief executive is acknowledged but in practice the role is split, with responsibility for the academic management of the college resting with the principal and responsibility for the administrative and financial management allocated to the general secretary. Both report directly to the chair of the governing executive. Neither has an up-to-date job description. The demarcation between reporting arrangements for academic and administrative/financial matters sometimes means that decision-making processes are unclear. The need for clarification of the roles and for revised job descriptions has been recognised by governors.

22 A senior management team has been established comprising the principal, the general secretary and the four deans. The team meets regularly and is developing effective working methods. In common with other operational groups, the team does not have written terms of reference. Its role and functional relationship to other groups are not yet widely understood. Lines of communication and accountability are not always clearly identified. The management of support functions is effective. There is good liaison between teaching and support staff.

23 There is a tradition of participative decision making in the college which is valued by staff and students. There is a tension between the

development of greater management accountability and the traditional emphasis on participative decision making. The need for organisational change is widely recognised and is embraced by some staff. However, the nature of the changes necessary and the processes for bringing them about are not always clear. In terms of both ethos and management Ruskin College is in a state of transition. The governors are aware of the need to review the college's management arrangements. Informed discussions have taken place at meetings of the governing executive and these are due to continue following the inspection.

24 The new boards of study are making progress in developing effective mechanisms for curriculum management. Some of these developments are at an early stage and there are inconsistencies in management within curriculum boards and across the college. More needs to be done to ensure that the best practice operates consistently across the college. There are some weaknesses in the management and co-ordination of cross-college learning programmes.

25 The committee structure is complex. The majority of committees include staff and student representation. All academic staff serve on at least one committee. There is some duplication between committees and operational groups. The roles and responsibilities of all formal committees and working groups are currently under review. Responsibility for the implementation of policies is not always clearly identified. For example, there is a brief statement of intent for health and safety matters but no written procedures for risk assessment. The college has acknowledged the need to develop further its personnel policies and procedures.

26 Until recently, budgets have been allocated largely on a historical basis. Some preliminary work on unit costing has been done and more effective links are being established between the deployment of resources and planned provision. A new cost centre structure has been established which reflects recent changes in the management structure. The deans, who now have some responsibility for financial management, receive reliable financial information. The quantity and reliability of management information has improved significantly during the last year, although the management information system is not yet fully computerised and some managers do not make full use of the information available.

27 Enrolment targets are set and achieved overall, although the one-year certificate programme did not reach its recruitment target this year. Retention rates are monitored and reasons for students leaving are investigated. Retention rates for full-time students are good. Destinations are monitored and used in college publicity.

28 In 1995-96, the FEFC funding allocation was £1,125,742. The FEFC funding allocation for 1996-97 is £1,105,383. FEFC funding accounts for 54 per cent of the college's income, but at present, in common with the other long-term residential colleges, the normal FEFC funding methodology does not apply to the college. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

29 Students are well supported at Ruskin College. Most arrive at the college with few formal qualifications and the support they receive helps many of them to acquire the knowledge, skills and confidence to enter higher education.

30 Arrangements for recruitment and admissions are flexible and effective. Entry criteria are clear and include a requirement for evidence of involvement in voluntary or public service or trades union work. Most students start in September but it is possible to start in January. Staff are available to provide help with applications. All applicants are interviewed. Those living at some distance from the college are offered interviews by telephone. Telephone interviews are carried out carefully and time is allowed for preparation. Most students found the interviews fair, encouraging and informative. Students offered a place at the college receive comprehensive information and are sent a preparatory pack to enable them to do some initial studying before they start their course. Part-time students applying for Ruskin Learning Project courses are not all interviewed but arrangements are made for them to receive guidance at the college.

31 Enrolment is well organised. Former students are around to welcome new students. They provide reassurance to new residential students, many of whom have travelled from a considerable distance to an environment which is different from anything they have previously experienced. There is a week-long induction which provides a thorough introduction to the teaching programme and to the college. Particular emphasis is given to introducing students to the residential aspect of the college. During the week, students complete a personal learning plan and undertake an initial assessment to see if they need additional support in English or numeracy. General course induction and related study skills sessions continue throughout the first half term, during which time students are able to change course.

32 Tutorial support is provided through personal advisers and course tutors. Each student is allocated a personal adviser who is one of the teaching staff. Advisers are responsible for monitoring the progress of their students and providing general support. They have time each week for formal consultation with their students and also have considerable informal contact with them. Course tutors see students, normally in pairs, for one hour each week as part of the teaching support on main course modules. They give students detailed feedback on their work and provide a termly report for the adviser. Reports are discussed with the students and records are kept of the discussions. There is some overlap between the functions of adviser and tutor, especially as they are often the same person. Some staff perform the advisory role less effectively than the academic tutorial role. Twice a year, each student has a personal interview with the principal or a dean.

33 The residential experience encourages students to support each other informally and through groups formed for particular purposes, for example, meeting together to revise. Some residential students have their children living with them. There are a few family units and a small number of low-cost nursery places. Non-resident students, particularly those with children of school age, find it difficult to integrate fully with other students. Residential issues are dealt with through a community and facilities subcommittee on which students are represented. Students relate well to the domestic wardens and other support staff. Each site has a resident tutor. They perform a valuable role supporting residential students and ensuring the community functions effectively.

34 In some aspects of college life, there is too much dependence on informal communication and goodwill rather than use of the regulatory systems which are in place. Although there are set procedures for monitoring and following up absence, some tutors are over-tolerant of poor standards of attendance and punctuality. Guidelines for residential living need to be more explicit to ensure that the majority of students are not disadvantaged by the behaviour of a thoughtless few. When formal disciplinary measures have been invoked the procedures have been properly applied. However, some students feel that the college does not act firmly enough to deal with cases of anti-social behaviour.

35 The college provides a good range of learning support. Students identified during induction as having additional support needs are invited to undertake a more detailed diagnostic test. Effective support for students with dyslexia and those speaking English as a second language is provided by specialist teachers in individual and group sessions. There are also general study skills and numeracy sessions each week. Not all students choose to take up the opportunity of extra learning support, and attendance at group sessions is sometimes low. However, students who do attend feel that the support contributes significantly to their academic development. Liaison between the people providing different strands of learning support needs to be improved.

36 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are welcomed and the college is attempting to respond appropriately to their needs. Students are asked to notify the college of their requirements when they apply, and appropriate support is arranged in advance of their arrival. However, most rooms on both sites are inaccessible to people with restricted mobility.

37 Arrangements for providing students with guidance on higher education and careers are appropriate. Students receive effective help when applying to higher education institutions. Students choosing to enter employment are referred initially to the local adult careers service; in the third term more systematic careers guidance is paid for by the college after an assessment of needs.

38 A qualified counsellor provides confidential personal counselling on each site. This service is much appreciated by students and staff. It is well publicised and carefully monitored. Students also have access to medical advice from a local doctor and a nurse who runs a weekly clinic at each site. The college has a hardship fund which helps students with financial difficulties. It is a measure of their commitment to the students that many staff contribute to the hardship fund from their own salaries.

39 Students are represented in many areas of college life. There is an active students' union which benefits from the experience many students have of trades union and voluntary service activities. Students may attend the termly academic board meetings, and are represented on many committees. Their views are respected and the college attempts to address the concerns they raise.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

40 Of the teaching sessions inspected, 61 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. Nine per cent had weaknesses which outweighed strengths. The grades awarded to the sessions inspected are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades

	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Total
All programmes	8	19	13	4	0	44

41 Teaching on most courses consists of lectures, seminars and tutorials. At its best, this works very well. The tutorial teaching system is particularly effective. Each week students meet in pairs with course tutors. These sessions reinforce other teaching and are used to discuss students' progress. All tutors keep a record of tutorial discussions on a common form. Teachers have good, supportive relationships with students, treating them with respect both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers demonstrate a sound and often outstanding knowledge of their subjects. The quality of course documentation varies; some is good but a minority is poor. Although many students are articulate and ready to ask questions, the needs of less able or less confident students are sometimes overlooked. Some sessions would benefit from greater variety in the teaching methods used such as more use of work in pairs or larger groups. Some teachers make little use of teaching aids such as whiteboards, overhead projectors or flipcharts to reinforce learning. The college is characterised by an informal ethos and this sometimes interferes with learning. For example, some students arrive late for classes or leave early, and students and teachers sometimes go in and out of classrooms during teaching sessions.

42 In English, women's studies and history, most sessions are well structured and have a clear focus which teachers make clear to students. Teachers use questioning and summarising techniques skilfully to challenge students and extend their learning. Students are given

opportunities to develop skills in information technology, written and oral communication and research. History and women's studies are integrated with other elements of the humanities programme. Teachers recognise that there is a range of ability among students and ensure that they all meet rigorous assessment requirements. However, the management of group work is not always effective. The English studies curriculum is narrow in its content and few links are made to the broader humanities programme. Too little attention is given to the social and cultural context of literature, modern texts, black and feminist writers, drama and modern linguistic theory.

43 In sociology and politics, students' work is carefully marked and promptly returned with constructive comments. In some sessions, the wide range of life experience among the students is used to illustrate points and reinforce learning. Teachers use a variety of teaching methods and succeed in making the subject come to life. In a few less effective sessions, teachers fail to summarise discussions and there is insufficient checking of students' understanding. Few students take comprehensive notes; some take none.

44 In community and youth work most of the teaching is good. It takes account of the wide range of students' experiences and makes productive links between theory and practice. Some staff have been involved in local community development over many years and draw on this experience in their teaching. Students spend their second term on fieldwork placements. Their planning and organisation is generally sound. During placements, students work to broad objectives set at pre-placement planning meetings but they do not systematically refine these objectives once they have started. Guidance for students on how they record their work on placements needs to be more specific.

45 In labour studies and economics, teachers demonstrate an awareness of the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds of their students who are encouraged to share their experiences. Students are set challenging tasks and receive effective guidance through the tutorial system to enable them to complete them. The emphasis on self-directed learning is welcomed by students. Teachers often use high-quality handouts but a few are poorly presented or out of date. Some students do not get full benefit from lectures. For example, they often miss key points or detailed explanations offered by the lecturer as they concentrate on copying down headings from an overhead projector or blackboard. There is often a marked difference in students' knowledge of the subject, their commitment to it and the life experiences they bring to discussion. For example, in a lesson on industrial relations, students who were able to relate their personal knowledge of the process of union mergers dominated the discussion. There is some poor lesson planning and, in some instances, teachers ran out of time before they had completed the intended activities.

46 The complementary studies programme for students on the certificate in higher education has sound aims but the curriculum is in need of review and the standards required on the different modules are inconsistent. Courses on the Ruskin Learning Project provide a rich, responsive and relevant curriculum. In both of these programmes, teaching is generally effective but the procedures for recording students' progress are ineffective. Most sessions benefit from sound planning and clear objectives. Teachers are supportive and encouraging, and manage group discussions effectively. Regular checks are made on students' learning and understanding.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

47 Despite the relative informality of the certificate in higher education programme, the demands on students are considerable. Most have not studied full time for many years and have not written essays since leaving school. In the residential setting, most students quickly gain confidence and make progress in their subject and in their ability to study independently. Students approach their studies with a high degree of commitment and enthusiasm. The standard of debate is high. Many students bring with them wide experience of social, community and political action. They apply the knowledge gained at Ruskin College to their own life experience. This creates a rich learning environment in which, at its best, academic study comes to life and students are inspired to learn. Those with the intellectual capacity to take full advantage of this make rapid progress. A few struggle and are in danger of getting left behind. Others find that personal difficulties make progress difficult. The tutorial system gives effective support to individuals and overcomes some of these difficulties.

48 Completion and achievement rates on the full-time certificate in higher education are high. The following table shows the pattern of achievement, retention and progression to higher education for each subject in 1995-96.

**Completion rates, pass rates, and progression rates by subjects
1995-96**

Subject	Percentage of students who complete course	Percentage of completing students who pass (percentage starting who pass)	Percentage of students passing progressing to higher education (to employment)
Social studies	91	88 (80)	87
Labour studies	97	75 (72)	71 (19)
Community and youth work	100	92 (92)	64 (18)
History	92	86 (79)	79 (11)
Women's studies	94	88 (82)	86
English	88	100 (88)	73 (20)

49 In history, women's studies and English, most students achieve high standards in their written work, and are articulate in class but there are a few who are unable fully to meet the high standards of the course. The best students' work shows a high level of analysis and logical structure. Students' debating and communication skills, even at an early stage of the course, are good. There are some weaknesses and inconsistencies in the way some students use references in their written work.

50 In community and youth work, students produce some well-researched and carefully-prepared portfolios. They are able to demonstrate and talk about the significant progress they have made while on the course. Fieldwork placements enable them to relate theory to practice. However, some weaker students are struggling with basic concepts.

51 In social studies, some students demonstrate an impressive ability to use theoretical concepts to interpret social and political events. Some good-quality, well-researched written work is produced. The essays produced for weekly tutorial sessions show a high degree of commitment to study. A small number of students are having difficulties with basic theory and key concepts.

52 In labour studies, students demonstrate clear progress in subject knowledge and study skills. They use their life and work experiences to illustrate the points they make in essays. The ability to do this increases their motivation and allows them to engage in informed debate with their tutors when receiving feedback on their work.

53 Students' achievements for those who complete complementary studies courses and the Ruskin Learning Project programme are high. Students say that they value the courses and derive benefit from them. They work well in groups and support each other. However, there are low

attendance and retention rates on both programmes although attendance figures for complementary studies are affected by the numbers of students who attend a few sessions as 'tasters'. Few Ruskin Learning Project students have their achievements recognised through external accreditation.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

54 The college has increased the rigour and scope of its quality assurance procedures over the last few years. Some procedures have been introduced recently and have not yet become fully established; others are well established but have not yet been brought together effectively within a college-wide framework. There is a quality assurance statement in the strategic plan and the college's charter. The dean with cross-college responsibilities has overall responsibility for quality assurance; the other deans have a responsibility for quality assurance within their boards of study. The college's annual report includes a summary of students' achievements and other aspects of performance. The board of governors has approved the quality assurance statement, discussed the college's self-assessment report and considered the performance indicators which are being introduced in the college.

55 The academic committee oversees all academic matters in the college. Reporting to this committee, directly or indirectly, are eight other committees and groups with some responsibility for assuring quality. Together, these committees and groups comprise a complex and elaborate structure with some overlapping functions. Responsibility for checking progress on action recommended by the various bodies is not specified in the terms of reference for these committees and groups.

56 There is a strong emphasis on the involvement of students in the quality assurance process. The college monitors students' views about their courses and other aspects of their experience at the college using questionnaires. The main questionnaire is distributed to all full-time students towards the end of their course. In 1996, only 53 per cent of students responded but those who did so indicated a high degree of satisfaction. The principal and deans have meetings with full-time students about their progress. Full-time students also have an opportunity to express their views during timetabled structured discussions with tutors at the end of each module of the course. On some courses, the outcomes of the discussions are summarised in short reports which tutors find useful. The results of surveys on other aspects of college life are reported to the community and facilities committee which has staff and student representatives, as well as to the quality assurance working party.

57 Course evaluation reports have been prepared for most courses for the last three years and for longer in the case of some courses, such as the diploma in social work. Some reports constitute only a summary of students' comments derived from the structured discussions and evaluation forms. Tutors do not have a consistent approach to course

evaluation. This year, a new procedure is being introduced which requires an evaluation by course tutors comprising an analysis of students' comments, students' achievements, course developments and intended action resulting from the evaluation process. Boards of studies, newly introduced for most courses in 1996, are expected to receive the course evaluation reports and to recommend appropriate action to improve the quality of provision. However, the evaluations will not include judgements about performance as standards have not been agreed. There is no agreement amongst tutors of the criteria for success that could be applied to their courses. The boards have not yet become sufficiently self-critical. At the time of inspection, there was limited awareness among tutors of the new reporting procedure.

58 This year, the college is introducing performance indicators which follow the guidance in *Measuring Achievement 1994-95*, and arrangements are in place to monitor performance. There is little awareness among staff, other than senior managers, of the existence of these performance indicators. Targets, with the exception of student enrolments, have not yet been agreed at board of study or course level. The college charter states, as an aim 'making all members of the college more accountable for the services offered' but does not specify standards of service. Elsewhere, for example in the learning and support handbook, some targets for staff performance are described. The charter draws attention to the formal complaints procedure.

59 The certificate in higher education programme has been validated by the Open University since 1993. The programme is subject to a quinquennial re-accreditation process and an annual review. The annual review, resulting in a report to the academic committee, requires a range of internal quality controls, including scrutiny by external examiners, course evaluations and consideration of students' comments. External examiners produce reports each year with recommendations for action by the boards of studies. The programme benefits from the guidance of external academic advisers who attend meetings of the academic standards subcommittee. Part-time courses, some of which are validated by the Open College Network, have less systematic and less rigorous arrangements for quality assurance than the full-time courses.

60 The college has a staff-development policy and one of the aims in the strategic plan is 'to invest in Ruskin College staff through staff development'. A staff-development advisory subcommittee considers staff-development needs, but there is no overall plan. Academic staff participate in a range of activities, including personal research, consultancy, sabbaticals and attendance at conferences and courses. New contracts of employment have been introduced which include 500 hours each year for research and development. The evaluation of these activities is not fully effective. Tutors' personal objectives for development are not matched sufficiently to the college's strategic objectives. Support staff value their opportunities for training and development and engage in many relevant activities. The college is flexible

in arranging the duties of staff to allow attendance at courses. A scheme of appraisal for academic staff has been agreed and the deans have been appraised. The intention is for tutors to be appraised before the end of this year. The principal and general secretary have been appraised by the chair of the governing executive. Support staff have not yet been appraised.

61 A quality assurance working group has met regularly during the last two years. This group has a membership of teachers and support staff representing most activities in the college and has guided the self-assessment process leading to the self-assessment report. The report was discussed at a staff conference. The self-assessment report is a comprehensive document which describes perceived strengths and weaknesses under most of the headings in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The style of the document is descriptive and there is no cross-referencing to evidence or indication of intended action to address the weaknesses which are identified. Many of the judgements in the report accord with those of the inspectors.

RESOURCES

Staffing

62 There is strong commitment to residential adult education among all staff. Fifteen of the 16 full-time teachers are graduates, and 10 have postgraduate qualifications. The great majority have produced research publications. Only 30 per cent have a teaching qualification and the college does not give explicit emphasis to the development of teaching skills. The college employs the equivalent of a further two-and-a-half full-time staff on part-time or hourly-paid contracts. Part-time staff are also well qualified. Some are professionally engaged in work related to their teaching and students benefit from their experience. Where specialist teaching is needed for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, this is provided by part-time staff with relevant professional qualifications. The college employs a part-time counsellor. Library staff are suitably qualified and experienced for their present roles.

63 A new system for allocating the time of teaching staff has recently been introduced. This divides activity into 500 hours teaching contact, 500 hours teaching support, and 500 hours research and development. This provides a basis for measuring workload. Overall, staffing levels are appropriate and most teachers are effectively deployed.

64 There is a good level of clerical, administrative and technical support. Computing and audio-visual services are each effectively supported by a lead tutor and a technician. The residential services and catering staff are sufficient in number and are suitably qualified and experienced. Staff work hard to ensure that the quality of the environment for the students is maintained. Some of the senior managers have qualifications and experience in finance and personnel. The college buys in specialist expertise, such as estates management.

Equipment/learning resources

65 General teaching rooms are adequately equipped with overhead projectors, screens, whiteboards, video cassette recorders and monitors. A camcorder is available on request. Students can use this equipment for projects and other work. The equipment is adequately maintained, and some monitoring of its use has been undertaken. There is some variability in the quality of handouts and overhead transparencies used for teaching. Some are printed and of high quality while others are handwritten and difficult to read. There are sufficient photocopying facilities on each site and monitoring of use takes place at each cost centre to give some control of overall costs.

66 Students speak favourably about the support they receive from library staff. There is an extensive bookstock, and sufficient texts in most subjects to meet demand. The loans section is open on weekdays during normal working hours; the reference section is open all the time. The library has relatively few computer facilities. It has accumulated a number of important documents on twentieth-century social and political history. There are agreements for Ruskin College students to use the Bodleian library and various other Oxford University libraries. Access to library provision is currently very unequal between the two sites. On the Headington site, there is a reading room but no library provision. Arrangements are made to loan books to students based at Headington for longer periods and for their timetables to allow regular visits to the Walton Street site. The library staff maintain extensive links with boards of study to ensure that purchases match curriculum needs.

67 Computing equipment for teaching and for students' use during private study is adequate in terms of numbers, types of machines and accessibility. At each site, students have access to computers at all times, and the staff provide extensive support. There are reliable printers and a good range of computer software. At Walton Street, there is a room housing eight networked computers and other facilities, including video conferencing, electronic mail and access to the Internet. Fourteen laptops are available for loan to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and specialist equipment is also hired as required. There are effective arrangements for the maintenance of computer equipment. There is a computer policy group which advises on computing equipment. This is beginning to work towards a more comprehensive and co-ordinated view of computing needs and provision across the college.

68 The college identifies academic services and learning support as a cost centre, managed by a dean. This provides a mechanism for developing a co-ordinated strategy towards the provision of library, computing, audio-visual and specialist learning support services. Arrangements are developing to monitor the use of these resources, to undertake reviews of resource needs and to set priorities within the available budget.

Accommodation

69 The college is based on two sites, several miles apart. Each site contains teaching and residential accommodation. The Headington site, Ruskin Hall, is set in an attractive wooded site of eight acres. The Walton Street site, the main administrative base, contains the college library and allows easy access to the facilities of Oxford University. The separation of the college on two sites poses some difficulties for a residential community but offers students contrasting experiences.

70 The Walton Street site contains offices, classrooms, staff rooms, library and catering and residential facilities. The accommodation is generally well looked after, particularly the staff rooms, which are used for meetings and tutorials. Teaching rooms are well decorated and clean. Teaching group sizes are not always matched to room sizes; at peak times there is some overcrowding. The Headington site includes a high-quality conference centre. Most teaching accommodation is of good quality. The Tawney Hall and the Cole Library are less satisfactory. There are student common rooms at both sites which are well used.

71 The residential facilities, catering and housekeeping services are well managed and make an important contribution to the quality of college life. The residential accommodation on both sites is nowhere less than adequate. Some family accommodation is available on each site. Laundry facilities and kitchens are provided for students' use. A minority of kitchens are too small for the large number of students who use them.

72 Access for students with restricted mobility, particularly to the Walton Street site where there are no ramps or lifts, is a major problem. Some residential and teaching accommodation at Headington has been adapted to allow access by wheelchair users. Few of the other rooms on either site are accessible to wheelchair users. The college has a strategy for securing improvements when funding allows.

73 The accommodation strategy was produced by external consultants in 1994 and is due to be updated. Planning permission is currently being sought for further building on the Headington site. There is a maintenance programme and repairs are carried out promptly when faults are reported.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

74 The main strengths of the college are:

- an impressive record of providing access to education for people with few prior educational achievements
- effective governors who have a clear understanding of their role
- the clear benefits students gain from tutorial teaching and from studying in a residential setting
- good retention and achievement rates
- the high level of formal and informal support for students by teaching and non-teaching staff

-
- strong links with the trades union and labour movement and the local community.
- 75 In order to improve the quality of its provision, the college should:
- clarify the roles and responsibilities of the principal and general secretary
 - review decision-making processes in the college and clarify the roles of committees and operational groups
 - review the composition and reporting arrangements for the finance and resources committee
 - identify more clearly the processes by which strategic objectives will be achieved
 - encourage the further development of teaching skills
 - further develop the quality assurance arrangements
 - improve access for people with restricted mobility
 - improve marketing.

FIGURES

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

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

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

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

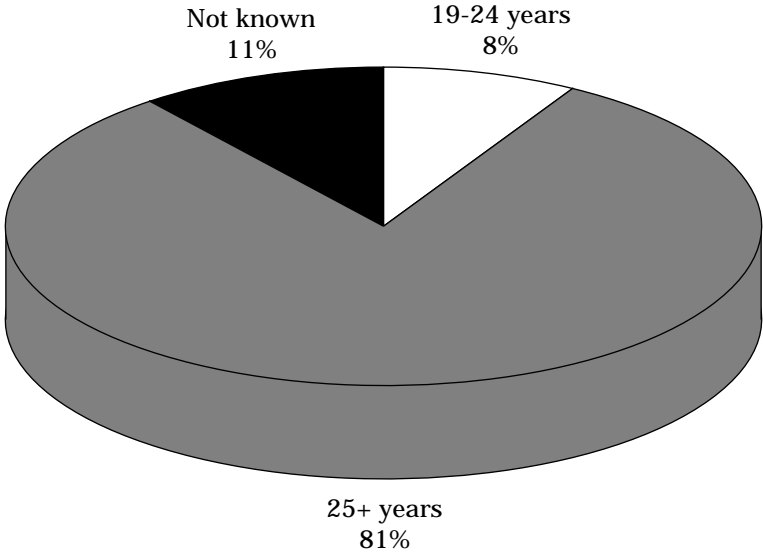
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

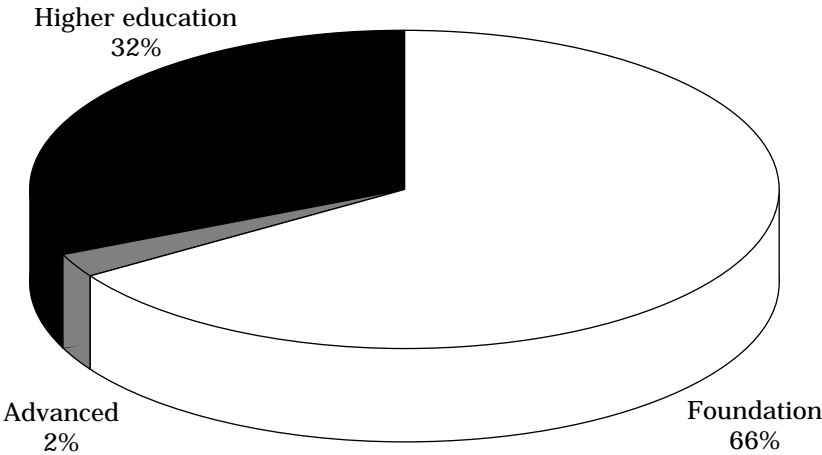
Ruskin College: percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 659

Figure 2

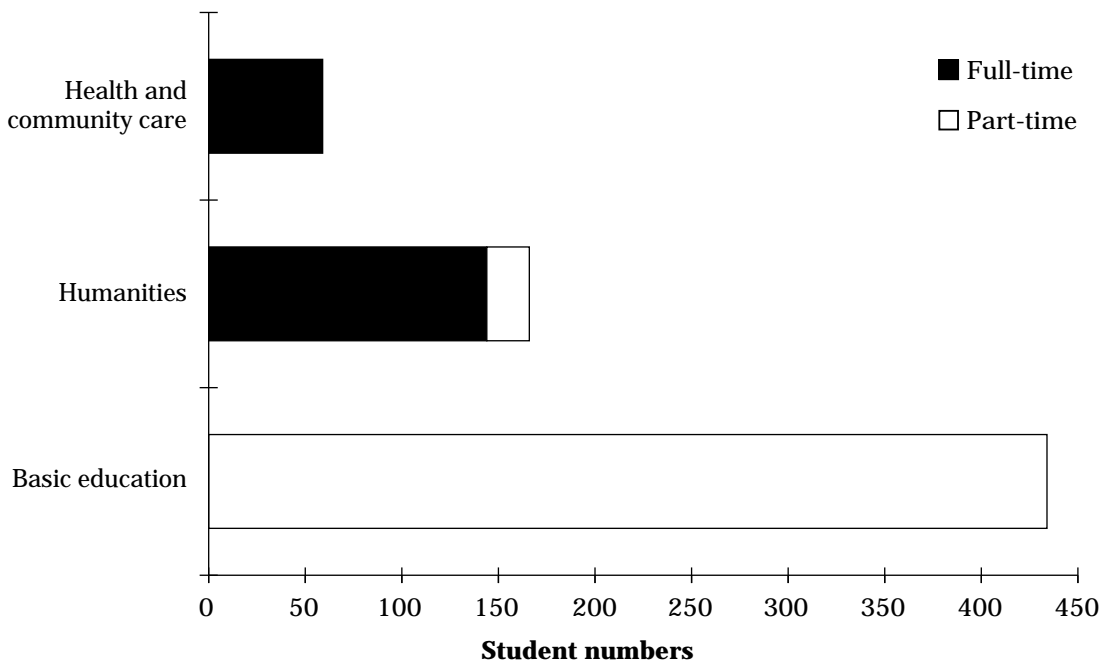
Ruskin College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 659

Figure 3

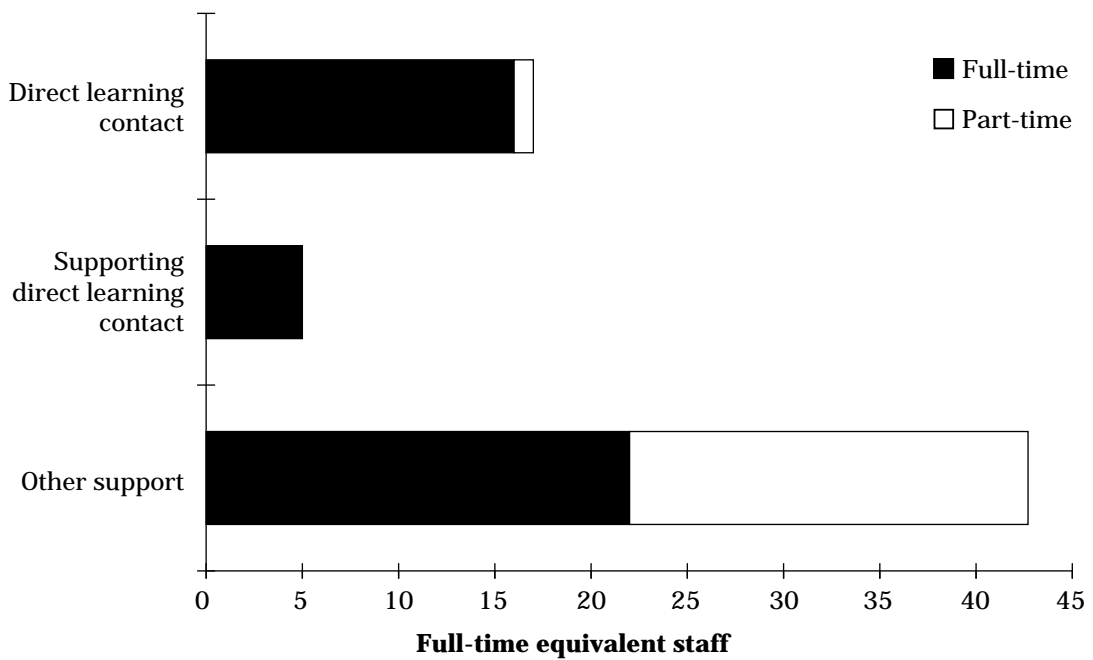
Ruskin College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 659

Figure 4

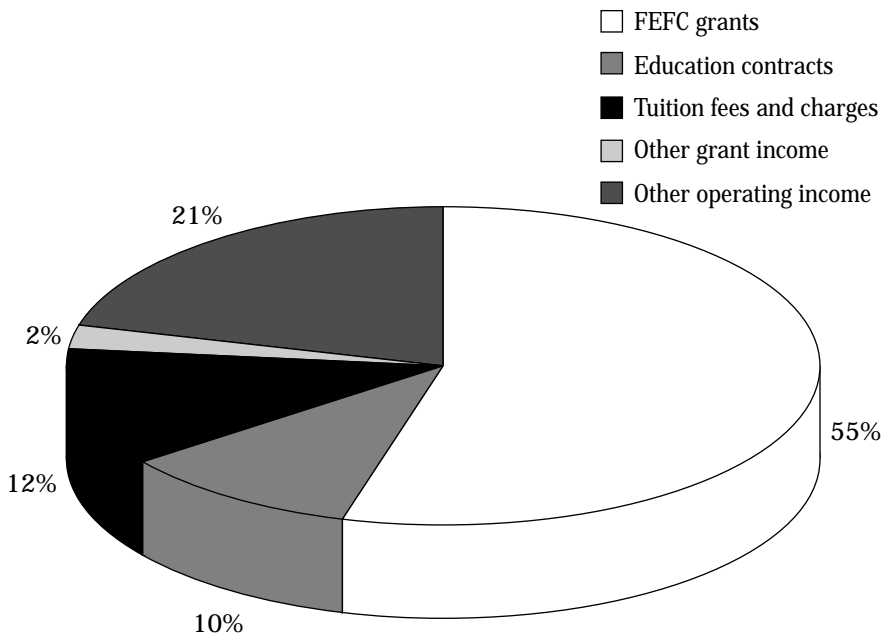
Ruskin College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 65

Figure 5

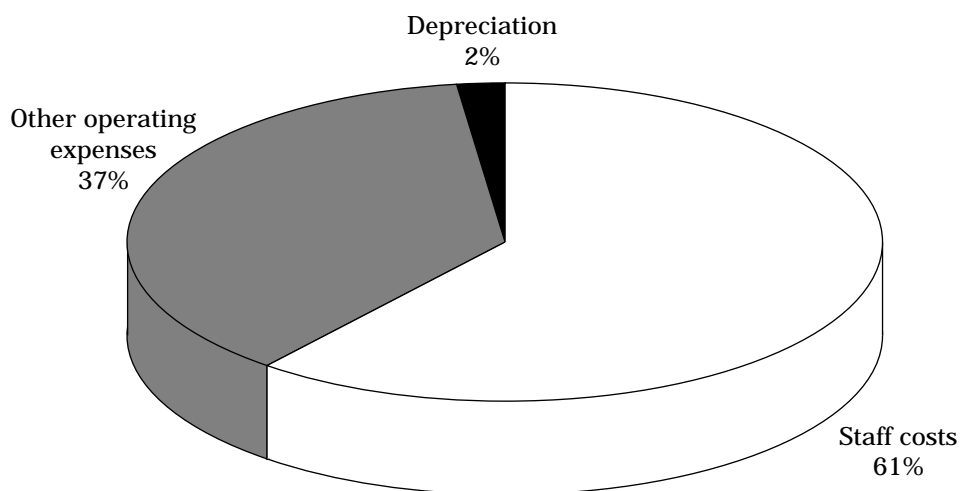
Ruskin College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £2,616,000

Figure 6

Ruskin College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £2,586,000

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
June 1997