

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

The Sheffield College

July 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

**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 the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

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

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

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	2
Responsiveness and range of provision	8
Governance and management	21
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	31
Teaching and the promotion of learning	44
Students' achievements	60
Quality assurance	75
Resources	86
Conclusions and issues	101
Figures	

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 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-95

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 89/96

THE SHEFFIELD COLLEGE
YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE REGION
Inspected May 1995-March 1996

Summary

The Sheffield College is the largest further education college in England. The amalgamation of six separate colleges and the development of a unified structure has been well managed. The college offers an extensive range of general, vocational and adult education courses which provide for the diverse community. Links with a large number of organisations are strong. Senior managers and the governing body have a productive working relationship. Students receive high-quality support and guidance through all stages of their courses. In most curriculum areas the standard of teaching and learning is good. Students' performance in examinations is generally satisfactory and, in some areas of work, results are good. There is a framework for quality assurance and a wide-ranging programme of staff development. Teaching staff are well qualified and experienced. The accommodation in many curriculum areas and all of the learning centres is of a high standard. To build on its strengths the college should specify more clearly how the college's annual targets are to be achieved, take further measures to assure the college's financial health, strengthen management information and communications systems, make the course review process more consistent and rigorous, extend the appraisal and development processes to all staff, and improve the quality of the equipment and accommodation in some curriculum areas.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science and computing	2	Health and social care, hair and beauty	1
Mathematics	2	Art and design	2
Construction	2	Humanities	2
Engineering	3	Languages including English	2
Business management	3	Adult basic education	3
Business administration	2	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
Hospitality, catering, leisure and tourism	1		

INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection of The Sheffield College took place between May 1995 and March 1996. Business management was separately inspected in May and September 1995. In September 1995, enrolment and induction procedures were inspected. Forty-three inspectors spent 177 days inspecting programme areas. They visited 645 classes, examined students' work, held meetings with staff and looked at a variety of documentation relating to the college and its courses. All six main centres and 56 outreach centres were visited. In the two weeks beginning 11 March 1996, 12 inspectors spent a further 65 days examining aspects of cross-college provision. During this period they held meetings with governors, representatives from the Sheffield Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), the Sheffield careers guidance service, headteachers, local employers, parents, other members of the wider community, students, college managers, teachers and support staff.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 The Sheffield College is the largest college within the further education sector in England. It was formed on 1 September 1992 by the amalgamation of six tertiary colleges, controlled by the Sheffield Local Education Authority (LEA): Castle, Loxley, Norton, Parkwood, Parson Cross and Stradbroke. These now serve as the main centres of The Sheffield College. Each centre offers similar core provision. There is also specialist provision, for example in engineering at Loxley, vocational science at Stradbroke and construction at Parkwood. The college makes use of over 100 neighbourhood centres, located around the city, as delivery points for its adult and community courses.

3 The college works closely with twenty 11 to 16 secondary schools and a number of special schools and support units in Sheffield, grouping them in clusters associated with the six centres. Five LEA schools and two grant-maintained schools in Sheffield have sixth forms, and there are further education colleges at Barnsley, Chesterfield, Doncaster, and Rotherham, all within a 15-mile radius of Sheffield.

4 Sheffield and its travel-to-work area has a population of approximately 600,000. The local economy is dominated by small to medium-size businesses. The major employers are the local authority, hospitals, the two universities, the Meadowhall Shopping Centre and specialist manufacturers. In recent years, there has been a significant decline in the numbers employed in the manufacture of steel. In 1994-95, the unemployment rate in the Sheffield travel-to-work area was 10.8 per cent. In some areas of Sheffield, however, unemployment rises to 13.5 per cent. Minority ethnic groups form 5 per cent of the general population and 14 per cent of the college's enrolments.

5 The directorate comprises the principal, the director of curriculum, the director of finance and the director of human resources. Each of the main centres is managed by a centre head who reports to the principal.

The curriculum is managed through four schools: construction, engineering and science; business, leisure and hospitality; design, media and social services; and humanities and core skills. At the time of the inspection, 33,693 students were enrolled at the college. Of these, 6,726 were undertaking full-time courses and 26,967 were part-time students attending in a variety of modes, including day release, block release and evening only.

6 The changes in the local economy have led to a decline in enrolment in engineering and construction, while enrolments in the service sector have increased. The college has maintained its number of enrolments from students in the 16 to 19 age group and the number of adult students has grown considerably. The college is developing an extensive franchise provision within the city and a substantial part of the planned growth in student numbers for 1996-97 rests on this provision. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The college employs 858 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 746 full-time equivalent support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7 The college's mission is to 'stimulate, encourage and respond to any demand for post-16 education and training identified locally, nationally or internationally'. The college aims to be the first-choice provider of further education and training in Sheffield and its surrounding area and to make a significant contribution to the economic and social regeneration of the city.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The college provides a comprehensive range of general and vocational courses for full-time and part-time students and is making a significant contribution to the achievement of the national targets for education and training. It estimates that it offers more than 5,000 different courses across the city. More than 50 new or substantially redesigned courses have been introduced over the last two years.

9 There are productive links with a large number of organisations, including the LEA and schools. These links are helping to increase the range of accredited education and training courses in Sheffield and to improve the coherence of provision for 14 to 19 year olds. For example, the college has arrangements with several schools which enable them to offer parts of General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses at lower levels while the college offers the more advanced levels.

10 The college offers 50 subjects at General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and more than 50 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects. Vocational provision is also extensive. It includes 10 different GNVQ programmes, eight at foundation level, eight at intermediate level and nine at advanced. A number of programme areas, including business, construction, catering and health and care, offer National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at different levels.

11 The college has designed an innovative 'languages ladder' of 14 modern foreign languages, available in 25 centres. The qualifications offered are systematically arranged in levels ranging from a beginners level to beyond GCE A level. Courses for international secretaries and bilingual courses for graduates have been developed in co-operation with Sheffield Hallam University. A Braille skills accreditation programme has been developed in consultation with the Royal National Institute for the Blind. A mathematics scheme based on South Yorkshire Open College Federation accredited units, ranging from foundation level to GCSE equivalence, provides good opportunities for a wide range of students. The popular 'student opportunities' programme offers many sports and cultural activities; some 3,200 students take part at any one time. Through a scheme called 'Sportex 2000' students who possess sporting talent can combine their main course studies with sports activity which includes coaching from professional coaches. If necessary, the main course is extended to allow sufficient time for both study and sport.

12 The college is involved in initiatives designed to improve information technology services to learners. For example, a collaborative bid, with the seven other South Yorkshire colleges, to the competitiveness fund is aimed at developing opportunities for interactive learning, and the college is a member of a consortium of 11 colleges which is co-operating with a software company to develop computer-based facilities for learning centres. Only a small number of the college's students are currently engaged in open or distance learning.

13 Community-based provision, operating from over 100 neighbourhood centres, is co-ordinated effectively and serves the needs of a diverse community well. The college is involved in many projects which help to widen participation in further or adult education. Some of these projects are developed in partnership with the TEC and LEA. For example, there is a city-wide response to the European Year of Lifelong Learning. There is productive liaison with a range of community agencies and many voluntary organisations, resulting in initiatives such as the city-wide community literacy campaigns designed to meet the needs of the minority ethnic communities. The college provides courses for more than 8,000 unemployed people and has special projects, such as 'springboard' and 'fresh start', aimed at people wishing to gain skills which will improve their employment opportunities. There are courses designed specifically for women, for example, in the motor vehicle and construction areas. The college provides substantial adult basic education and non-vocational adult education programmes and has established neighbourhood networks and adult focus groups to facilitate participation.

14 The college has a thriving programme of courses designed to provide access to higher education. It covers 13 different subjects and more than 1,150 students are enrolled. Some courses are aimed specifically at groups which have not usually been involved in further or higher education.

For example, there is a long-established access course for black students, a women's studies course and a Hillsborough Memorial course for students from youth training programmes who have the potential to benefit from higher education.

15 Links with higher education institutions in the city are strong. For example, there is an agreement with the University of Sheffield which helps students to progress to higher education courses at the university, and associate college status has been agreed with Sheffield Hallam University. About 700 students study on the college's full-time and part-time higher education courses, many of which are franchised from Sheffield Hallam University and designed to complement the university's provision. A course leading to a diploma in higher education in playwork for those working with young children is run in collaboration with Leeds Metropolitan University. College staff support visually-impaired and hearing-impaired students at both of the universities in the city.

16 The college liaises effectively with local agencies to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and has established a broad range of provision to meet their needs. Where possible these students join mainstream programmes. It has also developed separate accredited programmes which provide effective preparation for employment. The college recruited only a limited number of students with moderate learning difficulties in 1994-95. Provision for those with mental health difficulties is also underdeveloped.

17 The college works closely with the TEC. It is a major provider of TEC-funded youth and adult training and has responded positively to many initiatives. The TEC has provided funding for a wide range of activities, including the 'TEN' project which seeks to help develop equal opportunities policies and practices in small and medium-size enterprises.

18 Some vocational areas, including hairdressing and catering, have strong links with employers. However, the number of advisory groups is small, and the opportunities for employers to contribute to curriculum development is limited. In the current year, the college has projected earnings of £850,000 from work for industry and commerce and it has attracted £3.24 million of European funding.

19 The college's marketing unit has clearly-defined objectives, which include the formulation of strategies for public relations, marketing and promotional campaigns. The college works with five other South Yorkshire colleges to promote courses jointly. High-quality information leaflets are produced for a wide range of courses, subjects and centres, some in ethnic community languages. Courses are advertised in the local press and publicity materials are widely distributed in the city. Some of the publicity is aimed at specific groups such as unwaged adults. Not enough is done to try to ascertain employers' views of college provision and not enough use is made of the information collected on prospective students' learning needs when planning provision.

20 The college has links with several other countries. There are overseas commercial and consultancy contracts and marketing missions undertaken jointly with the universities in the city. The volume of these activities is, however, modest for the size of the college. Staff and students take part in work experience abroad and in exchange visits. Some 300 overseas students are enrolled, mainly on courses in English as a foreign language. All of the college's full-time students are entitled to take a modern language or European awareness course but take-up is low.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

21 Prior to incorporation, the governors set the principal the task of achieving an integrated further education provision for the city in ways which would:

- cause minimum disruption to the service
- meet the requirements of incorporation
- maintain existing standards
- minimise the extra costs and lead to longer-term economies.

This was to be achieved by centralising the decision-making processes previously undertaken separately in the six colleges, by designing structures and procedures to support these processes and their eventual delegation, and by obtaining college agreement on their implementation. At the time of the inspection, many of the senior and middle managers had just been, or were being, appointed to new roles and a substantial number of staff were taking voluntary early retirement.

22 The corporation has 20 members. Ten are drawn from the business community, one is a TEC nominee, one is a student governor, two are staff governors and others come from the education and service sectors. The principal is also a governor. Two people who had previously served as governors representing community interests and special needs, act as advisers to the corporation. Collectively, members of the board have an appropriate range of knowledge and experience, including financial, estates and personnel experience. The board continues to clarify its procedures. It has a code of practice and a register of interests, it has reviewed its membership and terms of service and it has effective procedures for identifying and appointing new members. It is in the process of agreeing targets for its own performance. The college has recently appointed a full-time clerk to the governors. The clerk also manages an office which serves as a library and resource base for governors.

23 The corporation has an appropriate range of committees. Meetings are frequent; full board meetings are held twice a term and the finance and general purposes committee meets monthly. Board meetings are businesslike and well attended. Relationships between the governors and the directorate are good and there are effective channels of communication.

Governors receive an appropriate range of reports from the principal and other managers. As well as receiving reports on the college's financial performance the governors are kept informed on curriculum matters. A recent report on students' achievements on vocational courses led to a request from the governors for an additional analysis of under-performing areas. Governors contribute to the establishment of key college policies and serve on college committees where their expertise is relevant. The board provides a clear sense of direction and guidance on strategic priorities.

24 The college has made significant progress in establishing a corporate identity. The initial management structure, modelled on that of the previous colleges, provided an appropriate framework for the transitional period. Existing structures for curriculum delivery were maintained while centralised management functions were being established. The new management structure is much less complex. Aspects which remain to be clarified as the structure develops include: the relationships between those working in cross-college development roles and those holding development posts within the schools; some lines of reporting including those of the quality co-ordinators; and the points of responsibility for some functions, such as college information systems or technician support.

25 Strategic and business planning processes are not yet fully established. The strategic plan for 1995-98 sets out aims, objectives and indicators of success and the targets for 1995-96 have been established. However, the plan does not specify sufficiently clearly how these targets are to be met, what the financial implications are, or who is responsible for implementing required developments. A cycle for managing the strategic planning process, so that the schools and other units can contribute in a systematic way, is currently being implemented. Business and development plans at school level are produced in a variety of formats and are of variable quality. The college is developing a common approach to the costing of courses. At the moment, revenue funding for materials is based on historical data.

26 The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 is £20.23 per unit, a reduction from £23.56 in 1993-94. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £17.84 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Figures provided by the college show that a substantial proportion of its deficit for 1994-95 was due to costs associated with college restructuring. There is an urgent need to ensure that initiatives to rectify the college's serious financial position are reinforced by other measures, as appropriate, in order that the college can eliminate its accumulated deficit and achieve its aim of securing longer-term economies.

27 An appropriate range of college committees has been established. The academic board and the health and safety and equal opportunities forums meet termly and the directorate meets weekly. Meetings are

minuted effectively using a standard college format. Standing committees are supplemented by project committees, such as the information technology steering group, which are established to meet specific need and then disbanded. The role of the academic board is being reviewed; it has insufficient influence over the college's academic provision. Timetabled weekly course meetings facilitate course management. Communications within the college are primarily through a system of team briefings, regular news bulletins and letters from the principal. The use and timing of general administrative days have not been made clear to all staff and staff were not given clear notice of the conditions of service of some of the new posts presently being filled. However, the college has, overall, been systematic and consultative in its approach to the management of reorganisation and has been sensitive in its handling of staff issues. Staff are generally positive about their work and the college.

28 Policy statements on equal opportunities and health and safety are clear and have been issued to all staff. A unified set of procedures and practices is being developed. Responsibilities for implementation and monitoring are understood at all levels in the college. The governing body receives appropriate reports. The appointment of two equal opportunities advisers and a health and safety team of four represent a significant staffing resource deployed to ensure compliance with legal requirements and the development of good practice. There has been some specific staff development on equal opportunities issues, and the student handbook and college charter make clear and helpful statements about equality of opportunity.

29 The practical difficulties involved in bringing together the different management information systems of the former tertiary colleges are being tackled systematically. New equipment and software has been purchased, the register system used is being rationalised and roles and procedures are being reviewed. However, confidence in the accuracy of the information generated on staffing and students is not yet fully established. For example, whilst systems are in place to monitor students' retention and success rates, the information available at school and college levels does not agree with the records kept at course and section levels. According to the college's aggregated figures the retention rate from the 1 November 1994 census point to the end of the academic year was 83 per cent for all students and 87 per cent for full-time students.

30 Information on students' destinations is collected for full-time and part-time students on courses involving more than 210 course hours a year. Letters requesting information are sent to the students with their examination results and students not responding are telephoned. The college was unable to obtain the destinations of a significant proportion of students. For example, the destinations of 20 per cent of the 600 full-time GCE A level students aged 16 to 18 were unknown.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

31 The college's strategic plan identifies the need for support 'in which individual needs and the achievement of the learner are paramount'. Each of the six main centres has a student services centre which provides comprehensive information, guidance and support. Attractive and informative brochures and leaflets inform prospective students of the programmes available. Students comment positively on the way the staff welcome them to the college and the ease with which information and support is made available.

32 A team of school liaison co-ordinators has established good links with local schools. A video illustrating the work of the college is distributed to each secondary school in Sheffield and a 'collegifax' diary containing information about the college and its courses is produced for each pupil in year 11. Pupils are able to sample a range of programmes prior to enrolment. For example, approximately 300 pupils from six local schools spent a week in the college working on problems set for them by science staff in a project sponsored by major commercial companies. The pupils gained 'creativity in science and technology' awards through the college.

33 Many students come from areas of economic and social deprivation and they or their families are in receipt of state benefits. LEA grants have been reduced over recent years and are now often limited to bus passes. The student services centres provide informed financial advice and assistance to students. For example, students are made aware of the costs involved in study, the financial support available and how state benefits may be affected by their choice of course. The college provides financial support for students from several funds such as the Hillsborough memorial trust fund. Good links have been established with external agencies which are able to provide advice and support to students. A job club provides support for students in the preparation of curriculum vitae, including stationery and wordprocessing facilities.

34 Admissions procedures are well managed. Standards have been specified to assure the quality of the procedures and there are guidelines which help to ensure that staff have a consistent approach to interviewing. Strategies such as the sending of good luck cards prior to examinations help the college to keep in touch with students in the time between their application and enrolment. A small number of programmes offer opportunities for accrediting students' prior achievements but there is no college-wide policy or overall co-ordinator to guide such procedures.

35 Each full-time student has a personal tutor who manages the students' induction and tutorial programme. Students receive an appropriate induction which includes common elements such as visits to the learning and student services centres, and the establishment of individual learning plans, as well as other elements specific to their courses. A good feature of the induction of full-time students is the entitlement to a six-hour introduction to information technology. Students who enrol late receive an abridged induction programme.

36 During induction, tutors assess full-time students' ability in communications and numeracy. Students are referred, if appropriate, to core skills tutors in the learning centres who arrange individual learning support programmes. Students' progress is recorded and information passed to the students' personal tutors for consideration at their termly reviews. The quality of support varies. In some cases, it is insufficiently linked to the students' main programmes or there is too long a delay between assessment and support. Few part-time students have their numeracy and communication needs assessed.

37 Full-time students' progress is monitored, reviewed and recorded as part of the tutorial process. Procedures are well documented and are sufficiently adaptable to meet students' differing needs. In consultation with their tutors, students set their own learning objectives and monitor their progress in achieving these. They meet their tutors individually at least once a term in order to review their progress and modify their learning plans. Students say that the process improves their motivation and performance. Topics such as time management and study skills, health and social education, job search and interview skills are covered at appropriate times during group tutorials. Regular tutor briefing sheets, up-to-date tutor guides and staff-development activity help to ensure that tutorials are effective. The tutorial system is being extended to those part-time students who study for more than 210 hours. Students' attendance at classes is monitored rigorously. Teachers notify personal tutors of students who have failed to attend on three consecutive occasions. Students are aware of the need to provide reasons for their absence. The student services managers conduct a termly review of attendance levels.

38 Seventy-five per cent of the tutorials inspected were judged to have more strengths than weaknesses. Attendance was good, averaging 80 per cent. Effective use was made of learning materials produced by the college. Students were encouraged to reflect on their progress and set realistic targets for future work. They contributed well to discussions. In some cases, issues dealt with in individual tutorials would have been better dealt with in group sessions. A few tutorials were conducted in inappropriate accommodation, such as a catering kitchen.

39 The college successfully promotes the use of national records of achievement; 65 per cent of full-time students left college with a completed record in July 1995. It is college policy that all students develop records of achievement and they are used, where available, during the admissions and tutorial processes. Each centre has a validation board for records of achievement, comprising representatives from local employers, schools, students, the community and the careers service. The boards are effective in promoting and monitoring the recording processes. A liaison group, comprising representatives from each of the boards and a college governor, presents an annual report to the academic board.

40 The support services for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are co-ordinated by additional support co-ordinators who are

members of the student support teams. A thorough assessment of students' support needs is undertaken, although a small number of students report delays in the provision of the support. An educational psychologist provides specialist assessments and support for students and staff. Learning support assistants provide help in classes. Specialist teaching support is available for students who have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. The support provided for students who have hearing and/or visual impairments is of particularly high quality.

41 Students receive comprehensive information and guidance on careers. A detailed agreement with the Sheffield careers guidance service covers priorities, key delivery aims, criteria for success, roles and responsibilities. Careers officers work closely with tutors and with staff within the student services team; they also provide training for tutors. This work is supplemented by education guidance workers who are part of the student services team.

42 A confidential counselling service is provided at each of the six main centres. Its main purpose is 'to help students to overcome barriers to their learning'. At least one member of the counselling staff at each centre is qualified to the standards specified by the Association of Student Counsellors or the British Association of Counsellors. Two staff from minority ethnic groups are currently training to become counsellors. There is an appointments procedure and an emergency rota ensures that a counsellor can be contacted at all times. The service is well managed and appreciated by students.

43 The 'Under 5s Service' is managed effectively and provides free childcare facilities for students at 29 units or creches both at the college's main centres and in community settings. Parents reported that the service is invaluable. They speak highly of the welcome they receive, the professionalism of the staff and the benefits for the children. Staff make considerable efforts to meet the childcare needs of each student and to ensure that the students' studies are not hindered by worries about their children.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

44 Overall, the quality of teaching was good. Strengths outweighed weaknesses in 64 per cent of the sessions inspected. Weaknesses outweighed strengths in only 6 per cent. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		25	61	36	5	0	127
GCSE		8	20	8	2	0	38
GNVQ		16	25	26	7	1	75
NVQ		25	35	16	1	0	77
Other vocational		32	66	41	6	0	145
Basic education		6	19	29	7	0	61
Access to higher education		6	13	1	2	0	22
Access to further education		4	11	8	1	0	24
Other		13	26	33	4	0	76
Total		135	276	198	35	1	645

45 Teaching was generally well planned and teachers made good use of appropriate learning materials and visual aids. Programmes of study were coherent and well organised, schemes of work indicated good coverage of syllabuses, and lesson plans provided an effective structure for activities. The better schemes provided information on how each topic was to be taught and the equipment to be used. The content of lessons was of an appropriate standard and assignments were set regularly. In the best practice, students were given assessment calendars which identified deadlines for the submission and return of marked work. Students' progress was usually monitored systematically. Relationships between staff and students were good and students were complimentary about the teaching they received.

46 Students showed good awareness of the core skills of communication, numeracy and information technology, and could produce examples of their use in their vocational work. In some areas, for example in engineering and art and design, core skills were developed as a central part of the vocational work and assessed through well-planned assignments. In some areas, for example in English, students made good use of information technology and multi-media techniques were used effectively to enhance the presentation of work. There was insufficient use of information technology in hair and beauty, catering, and mathematics courses. In science, the development of information technology skills was insufficiently related to the vocational context. In business studies, there was inadequate attention to the development of numeracy skills; some students were unable to deal with simple numerical problems.

47 Teachers of science and computing used a variety of methods to make their lectures lively and interesting. Questioning of students was effective in generating group discussion and in helping students to understand some difficult concepts. Practical work in science provoked useful discussion. For example, students in a GCSE chemistry class, having undertaken simple pH testing on a range of commercial products, were encouraged to think about the applications of this type of testing and to discuss their ideas. In computing classes students often worked in small groups and then presented the outcomes of their work orally to the whole class. Students responded well to these activities. The interactive style of teaching was particularly well suited to adults, who were encouraged to contribute from their own experiences. In computer programming work, good use was made of formal and systematic methods of software design. Students' work was marked and returned promptly. Teachers reviewed the work carefully in order to make helpful suggestions for improvement. In some of the weaker lessons, teachers failed to take adequate account of the differing abilities of students.

48 Mathematics teachers often organised work imaginatively. They made good use of investigative techniques. For example, in practical work sessions simple apparatus was used to draw out underlying mathematical principles and work with graphical calculators helped to improve students' understanding of equations. The teaching was well managed and students worked hard. In a minority of sessions, students spent too much time copying notes.

49 In construction, teachers demonstrated techniques carefully and had high expectations of students. The students were provided with well-designed learning materials and detailed drawings and were able to work at a pace which suited them individually. They responded well, applying themselves and producing work of a high standard. In a furniture diploma class the students produced intricate work with a high degree of accuracy.

50 Engineering students were provided with detailed learning materials. Many of the theory lessons were conducted too slowly and failed to motivate students. In contrast, workshop activity on craft courses was well organised. Students worked briskly, were eager and attentive and produced good work. There was insufficient practical work to support engineering science and electrical theory. Some assignments, such as those on GNVQ courses, were accompanied by detailed briefs which indicated how the assignments were to be marked and how they were linked to the course's overall assessment. While students on some courses received constructive feedback on their progress, others received inadequate information.

51 Business administration teachers made good use of contemporary issues. For example, reference to local events and matters raised in the national media enabled medical secretaries to develop a better

understanding of key issues. Learning materials were of high quality and designed to meet the widely differing needs of students. Teachers encouraged a high level of self-discipline from students and made regular checks on their progress. At the end of many sessions, students were encouraged to update their own records of progress. Work was set and marked on a regular basis, but teachers often failed to add sufficient or sufficiently constructive comments. In a minority of sessions, teachers provided inadequate opportunity for students to devise their own solutions to the problems set. In the design of some courses, typewriting skills were overemphasised at the expense of wordprocessing.

52 On business management courses, teachers used relevant commercial and professional examples to illustrate general principles. In the better sessions, students contributed well, drawing from knowledge and experience which they had gained in the workplace. For example, during a class on the legal aspects of underwriting, the teacher drew effectively on students' own experiences of risk identification and control. In some sessions, however, teachers assumed too much; for instance, that students knew the correct layout for business letters. On a number of occasions, teachers failed, where appropriate, to refer to topical issues, such as developments in the European Union. In several classes, the teaching lacked variety and students were bored and unresponsive. Poor class management sometimes reduced the effectiveness of group work; in several cases the time allocated by the teacher was insufficient for students to complete the tasks they had been given.

53 Catering, leisure and tourism courses were well designed and provided a good balance of practical and theoretical subjects, work placements and educational visits. Leisure and recreation students undertook a 12-week paid work placement at a Butlin's holiday camp and Butlin's staff were involved in the planning and assessment. Students were well prepared for their work placement periods and these contributed significantly to their learning. Assignment work involved students in a wide range of activity and students received regular and constructive feedback on their progress. Good use of realistic working environments such as the coffee shop, patisserie and restaurant encouraged students to achieve high standards.

54 Lessons in hairdressing and beauty therapy, and health and social care were well structured. Teaching was of a high standard. Students' knowledge of design, and of the scientific theory underpinning their work, was well developed by the use of specialist teachers. The realistic working environment in the salons provided a professional atmosphere. Teachers sustained students' interest through a variety of activities, including group work. In one lesson, a group of part-time beauty therapy students discussed the choice of natural products to use as face masks. By careful questioning, the teacher ensured that they considered the practical applications of each product. In other sessions, teachers made good use

of their professional experience to illustrate and explain aspects of social care. In some sessions, the results of group discussion were inadequately summarised. Students undertaking work experience were regularly visited by the teachers. In some cases, useful handbooks helped students prepare for their work placement. Students were encouraged to relate their own experiences to their studies.

55 Art and design students worked on well-conceived and interesting assignments which were designed to improve skills they had previously acquired and to develop new ones. One assignment on the design and making of a 'peep show' in a box involved the use of perspective and three-dimensional design and various fabrication skills. Generally teachers used appropriate teaching methods and the pace of the work was well judged. However, some sessions included too much note taking and observational drawing work was sometimes insufficiently developed. Planning for dance and theatre studies took careful account of the physical capabilities and progress of each performer.

56 In English and communication, varied teaching methods helped to stimulate students' interest and learning. In one session, the class was divided into two groups, each analysing a poem using a framework previously provided by the teacher. The resulting debate was detailed and lively and it led to a real understanding of the two poems. Other successful sessions incorporated topical television interviews and photographs selected to illustrate the historical background of the period of literature the students were studying. In a minority of lessons, insufficient consideration was given to the wide range of abilities and experiences of the students in the class, so that the more able students either dominated sessions or became bored. Teaching in modern foreign languages was of a consistently high quality. Whenever possible, classes were conducted in the language being studied. Lively interaction between students and the teacher resulted in high standards of oral work. Teachers used a variety of resources, including satellite television and magazine articles. One group of students used magazine articles to make a comparative study of European health services. Working in smaller groups, they prepared material which they then presented in summary form to the whole class. Teachers provided thorough comments on written work, often in the language being studied.

57 Teachers of other humanities subjects also used a variety of interesting and relevant resources and techniques. In one psychology class, the link between anxiety and emotion was clearly demonstrated by the students, working in pairs, measuring pulse rates while undertaking a time-controlled task. In many sessions, however, all students were expected to work at a speed which suited the majority, and this meant that some students were not progressing as quickly as they should. Specially-designed marking sheets covering aspects of assignment work such as planning, structure, content and style enabled teachers to provide students

with consistent feedback on their performance. In order to strengthen students' confidence, former students now at university were encouraged to return and talk to students who were studying on access to higher education courses. In many GCE A level subjects, teachers organised whole-college conferences, using outside speakers, to broaden students' learning.

58 The learning materials used on adult basic education courses were of good quality. In particular, mathematics materials were well designed and well organised. Basic English workshop sessions were managed effectively. There was effective use of bilingual tuition in classes in English for speakers of other languages. However, much of the teaching lacked variety. There was little small group work, and learning programmes had not been developed to meet the individual needs of students. In some cases, students were not working to their full potential. Information technology was seldom used. In some lessons, students lacked the opportunity and encouragement to develop their language skills. There was an inconsistent approach to marking and assessment. Teachers gave helpful oral feedback to students but written comments were frequently too general to be of use in helping students to improve the quality of their work.

59 Relationships between staff and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were positive. Individual tutoring of students with hearing or visual impairments was of particularly high quality. Some students with learning difficulties benefited from the opportunity to undertake vocational training in realistic work environments and specialist vocational workshops. Teachers had high expectations of these students and planned sessions which were challenging and interesting. For example, in a horticulture group, a video camera was used to record students' performance of a practical task. Each student had a personal copy of the video which was updated throughout the course. Students were encouraged to use the video to assess their own performance and to show it to members of their family to demonstrate their progress. The videos were used as evidence within the students' records of achievements. The quality of much of the teaching of students with severe or complex learning needs was poor. They were insufficiently challenged and often required to undertake inappropriate activities, the purposes of which were unclear. In many sessions, the emphasis was on the completion of tasks rather than on the learning they were designed to achieve.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

60 The majority of students were attentive, diligent and appeared to enjoy their studies. Many were confident and showed a good grasp of their subjects. Students' motivation was at its highest in practical work which was carried out competently and, in many cases, with a high level of skill. In general, students were able to contribute effectively to group

work. Much of their written work was well presented and showed appropriate levels of understanding. Note-taking skills were generally satisfactory; in business management they were well developed, in science much less so. In a small minority of lessons, students displayed immature and noisy behaviour. This was often associated with lengthy teaching sessions in which the pace of work was conducted too slowly.

61 Eighty per cent of the 563 students, aged 16 to 18, in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment's performance tables for 1995 achieved their qualification. This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the sector on this performance measure. Vocational course results have improved since 1994 when students achieved a 56 per cent pass rate. The 944 students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1994-95 scored, on average, 4.2 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This again places the college amongst the middle third of colleges on this performance measure, based on the Department's tables for 1995.

62 In science and computing, pass rates at GCE A levels were similar to sector averages for general further education colleges. In biology and mathematics the results were better than sector averages by 5 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively. The percentage of those achieving grades A to C in GCSE mathematics was close to the average for general further education colleges, but in science they were below average and confirmed a downward trend. Results in vocational courses were good. For example, in advanced national courses in dental technology all the students who completed the course passed and in the GNVQ in information technology pass rates were 29 per cent above the sector average. A high proportion of students completing access to higher education courses in science and computing progressed to higher education. Results in examinations were not uniform across all college centres; they were significantly poorer, for example, in some subjects at the Parson Cross centre. Retention rates were high on vocational science courses. For GCSE and GCE A level courses, retention rates were satisfactory in mathematics but poor in science.

63 Practical and assignment work in construction was generally of a high standard and some of it was excellent. Students have been successful in gaining national awards for excellence in a number of vocational disciplines. Pass rates in external examinations were generally satisfactory, although not all results for 1995 had been collated at the time of the inspection.

64 In engineering, achievements in class were limited by the slow pace of work in some sessions. Levels of achievement in practical work were generally good and in some cases, for example in vehicle paint work, where students worked with patience and pride, there was a high standard of achievement. According to figures supplied by the college, retention

rates were generally good: 87 per cent of students on engineering courses registered in November 1994 completed the year. On some individual courses, however, retention was poor; only 59 per cent of students on the two-year national diploma completed their course in 1995. Pass rates for students who completed their courses varied. Students achieved pass rates of over 80 per cent on some craft courses, in motor vehicle work and in higher national certificate courses. However, there were poor results on first and national diploma and certificate courses.

65 Students' work in business administration showed a good level of skill, knowledge and understanding. Students were thorough and disciplined in compiling their portfolios, which were often of a high standard in terms of content and presentation. Pass rates in the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) single subjects such as typewriting and wordprocessing at stage 1 were about 80 per cent and at stage 3 about 60 per cent. Good pass rates were achieved in the RSA higher diploma in business administrative procedures and in the international secretaries courses where all students who completed the course passed. Achievements on courses leading to NVQs were poor. In many cases, this was a result of students concentrating on the single subject RSA awards, which they took alongside the NVQ course, because of their perceived value in the jobs market. Retention rates in 1995 were above 80 per cent and a significant improvement on 1994.

66 Business management students generally displayed appropriate levels of understanding. However, many GNVQ business studies students had a poor understanding of business vocabulary and some could not perform simple mathematical routines. They often displayed poor levels of motivation and were often late for lessons. Pass rates for students who complete their courses were generally in line with national averages for BTEC national diploma and certificate programmes. The pass rate for GCE A level business studies was high at 90 per cent, and a substantial proportion of students achieved the higher grades of A to C. For those completing GNVQ intermediate courses, pass rates were good. Retention rates on some courses were low and a significant number of students left two-year courses early.

67 Hotel and catering students displayed high levels of skill and professional practice, particularly in the production and service of food. Some improved their performance considerably over the duration of their courses. Pass rates of over 80 per cent were recorded for students completing a range of courses, including practical cookery and courses in bakery and innkeeping. Students on leisure and tourism courses worked well, both individually and in teams, and achieved high standards. In particular, students on the Sportex 2000 sport coaching scheme displayed good practical ability. Pass rates for those who complete both full-time and part-time courses were generally high, and several courses achieved 100 per cent pass rates. Retention rates on a small number of courses were low. Eight-five per cent of students progressed to higher

education or employment from advanced level courses in leisure and tourism.

68 In several health and caring courses, all students who completed their course were successful in external examinations. Hairdressing and beauty therapy students demonstrated a high degree of practical skill and worked to exacting standards in the college's salons. Some achieved success in national competitions.

69 Standards of work in art and design were generally high. Several students, for example some on the British display society courses, gained medal successes. Students on over 60 per cent of the courses achieved pass rates of over 80 per cent and in 30 per cent of the courses all were successful. On a small number of courses, including GNVQ foundation courses, pass rates were poor and in GCSE drama a substantial proportion of the students failed to gain an A to C grade. Retention rates were good on many courses; half those inspected achieved rates above 80 per cent. Sixteen per cent had retention rates below 60 per cent.

70 Students of English, foreign languages and communications worked co-operatively in groups and in pairs. On GCE A level courses, they were developing good oral skills and were perceptive and articulate in their comments. College data show that in 1995 the pass rate in English at GCE A level was generally in line with the average for general further education colleges and at GCSE, slightly below. However, some of the college's retention and examination data were unreliable. Achievement levels were high on the South Yorkshire Open College Federation courses. Retention rates, attendance and punctuality on some English courses were poor. Students of modern foreign languages and English as a foreign language achieved high standards in coursework, performance in class and in examinations. They demonstrated good language skills. Some outstanding examples of GCE A level coursework were seen which showed originality and creativity. For example, one assignment included a written and photographic record of a visit abroad and recorded interviews in French. The content, language and presentation were all of a high order. Examination pass rates at GCSE and GCE A level were significantly above national averages. GCE A level French results were particularly high: in 1995, all candidates achieved a pass grade and 95 per cent achieved an A to C grade.

71 In other humanities subjects many students were able to write fluently and produce well-constructed essays. In psychology, students demonstrated an effective grasp of research methodology. Good examination results were achieved in GCE A level history, government and politics and GCSE geography, psychology and sociology. However, results for individual college centres varied and were below the sector average in some subjects in some centres. Generally, GCE A level results have improved over recent years. In 1995, some individual students achieved excellent results. For example, two GCE A level sociology students

were placed in the top five nationally for their respective examination board results. A high proportion of the students who completed the access to higher education course in humanities subjects progressed to higher education.

72 Most students on adult basic education courses were well motivated, worked hard, and showed steady progress. All students have the opportunity to gain certification, mostly through the South Yorkshire Open College Federation. Although increasing numbers of students are gaining these qualifications, the overall proportion of students achieving them remains low. Attendance was low in the classes observed, and there were low retention rates on many courses.

73 Many students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were making sound progress in their studies. Students spoke positively about the value of the courses and were able to work competently and confidently. Some had progressed from transition programmes, designed specially for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to NVQ programmes where they achieved qualifications which enabled them to progress to employment. One student had progressed to an NVQ level 2 course in hairdressing in less than two years. Another had achieved three level 2 NVQ units and had undertaken a successful work experience placement. In some cases, courses were not accredited. The achievements of some students with severe learning difficulties were limited by the inappropriate tasks which were set for them. The data produced by the college on progression from courses in adult basic education, and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, proved to be inadequate.

74 Of the full-time students who gained level 2 awards in 1994-95, the destinations of 26 per cent were unknown to the college. Of those whose destinations were known, 62 per cent progressed to further education and 16 per cent to employment. The destinations of 14 per cent of those who completed level 3 programmes were unknown. Of those whose destinations were known, 60 per cent progressed to higher education, 18 per cent to further education, and 12 per cent to employment. Adult students studying for level 3 qualifications were very successful in achieving entry to higher education.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

75 The college has produced a charter in leaflet form addressed to students, employers and the local community. It contains a summary of the complaints procedure and a list of telephone numbers where further information can be obtained. It is lucidly written and clearly presented. Not all of the charter statements are easily measurable. The commitment to return marked work to students within three weeks does not represent a demanding target. Currently, there is no annual report on the progress in achieving charter standards and no survey of employers to ascertain the extent to which charter commitments are being delivered in relation, for example, to work experience or progress reports on employees.

76 Key college documents give appropriate attention to quality and its assurance. The mission of the college makes a commitment to securing continuous improvement in the quality of provision. The strategic plan makes reference to high-quality education and training within a total quality management framework and the staff handbook contains a detailed section on quality assurance issues. A framework for quality assurance has been established which includes a set of 12 performance indicators; an annual course review mechanism; a student survey conducted on an annual basis; and a quality assurance manual which contains sets of standardised procedures for different college operations. The college has set itself standards for each indicator. For example, the target for students' achievement is that 90 per cent of those who complete their course achieve their primary learning goal and the target for retention is that 80 per cent of those enrolled in November are present in the third term. A college quality assurance manager, two administrators and six newly-appointed co-ordinators attached to schools, franchising and college services comprise the major personnel responsible for quality assurance issues.

77 The college quality assurance manual is divided into eight chapters which reflect the main elements of the strategic plan. It is regularly updated by the quality assurance administrators, who are responsible for providing guidance on new developments. Copies of the manual are available in all the learning centres and are also retained by heads of school and centre. The manual is also publicised in the staff handbook. Although the manual contains procedures for operating the range of cross-college services, only a small number of service standards have been formulated. The extension of these standards is seen as a priority for the quality assurance manager responsible for this aspect of operation.

78 The college recognises that its quality assurance system is still at a developmental stage. Quality audit procedures have yet to be agreed and the reporting responsibilities of the quality assurance co-ordinators and administrators have still to be widely understood. There is also a strategic intention to re-establish a standards forum to monitor the range of college services and reporting to the academic board. A value-added project, covering both academic and vocational courses, has been established to measure students' achievements against their GCSE results on entry. Staff development is helping to raise awareness about the project but it is not yet used in all course reviews.

79 The annual course review mechanism involves course teams responding to a series of prompt sheets which cover four principal areas: evaluation, recruitment, teaching and learning, and equal opportunities. The resulting action plan, written in the form of recommendations, is sent to appropriate line managers. Some course reviews, for example those in hair and beauty, catering, and adult education, are thorough and productive and managers have responded constructively to the recommended actions. There are, however, instances of course reviews not being fully completed and of many action plans which focus on requests

for resources rather than reviews of achievements against standards. Some course teams commented that they received little feedback on the recommendations in their action plan. There is no space provided in the prompt sheets for a statistical summary to illustrate progress in key areas of performance which would allow benchmarks to be established and encourage a more consistent approach to the setting of targets.

80 Currently, the course review calendar requires the action plans for one academic year to be completed in April of the following year. This is too late for the recommendations to have a significant impact on the current academic year. The college recognises the need to align the course review cycle with the business planning cycle. It is intended that, in future, action plans, based on a review of the outcomes of the previous academic year, will be completed by October.

81 Students' responses to the college's survey of their perceptions of provision are analysed by curriculum area and aggregated for the whole college. Although the percentage of students responding in 1995 was 45 per cent less than in 1994, responses were, in the main, positive. Eighty-seven per cent of students rated teaching as very good or good, and 79 per cent rated course organisation similarly. Paradoxically, only 44 per cent of students said that they would 'definitely' recommend the college to a friend.

82 The college's position statement on quality assurance states an intention to move to a self-assessment model. For the purpose of the inspection, position statements were prepared for all of the major curriculum areas, written against the headings of the FEFC's inspection framework. Although the papers focused almost exclusively on the strengths of provision, they contained a detailed commentary on all major aspects of organisation and delivery and acted as informative briefing documents for the inspection. Position papers were also prepared for the cross-college aspects of provision and included a self-assessment report, written in accordance with Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. This report identified broad areas of strength and weakness and these were generally in line with the findings of the inspection.

83 There is a wide-ranging programme of staff development, and opportunities are open to all staff. The programme is closely linked to the college's priorities for staff development which are circulated widely within the college. Staff-development needs are identified in a variety of ways including course review, appraisal of permanent teachers, reports from external verifiers and analysis by line managers of the needs of individuals. The results inform the staff-development programme which is advertised to staff through booklets issued twice a year and through weekly college bulletins. About 1.6 per cent of the staffing budget is allocated to staff development. Efficient use is made of the funding available. Much of the programme is delivered in the college, often by college staff, and the volume of training taking place has increased considerably over the last year. Part-time staff are paid for a proportion of the time they spend in staff

development. Training to meet the assessment needs for NVQ and GNVQ courses is well managed and effective. Staff are helped to develop their portfolios and a high proportion of teachers have gained assessor and/or internal verifier awards.

84 The college's training and development manager and co-ordinators play an important role in ensuring that staff-development activity is effective. They liaise closely with college managers, encouraging teams to make use of staff-development opportunities and ensuring that the work is relevant. Staff-development sessions are evaluated through questionnaires completed by participants. In some cases, longer-term assessment of their effectiveness in improving the quality of provision is undertaken. In several areas of work there were evident links between the quality of provision and recent staff development. For example, the consistently high quality of foreign language teaching owes much to the staff development for all foreign language teachers which has included peer observation of teaching and whole-day sessions led by the divisional manager. Staff development has helped to achieve the consistently high quality of the tutorial process. It has also led, for example, to the use of graphical calculators in mathematics. Staff speak positively about staff development and the support they receive from co-ordinators.

85 New staff receive a structured induction programme and there is careful monitoring to ensure that all staff benefit. A staff manual has been issued to all staff, explaining clearly the college's policies and procedures on a range of issues. Permanent teachers receive an appraisal. The focus of appraisal is on self-review and staff have a choice in the selection of trained appraisers who may not necessarily be their line managers. Whilst there are thorough guidelines on the procedures to be used, many are optional and the process does not include a rigorous review of performance. The appraisal system was introduced in 1992 and is planned to operate over a two-year cycle. To date, only about 75 per cent of teachers have been appraised. The appraisal process does not include non-teaching staff or temporary teachers.

RESOURCES

Staffing

86 The college employs the full-time equivalent of 1,605 staff, of whom 53 per cent are teachers. Seventeen per cent of the teaching is carried out by part-time teachers. In leisure and tourism the high proportion of part-time teachers places additional pressure on full-time staff. Only 11 out of 48 senior managers are women and there are no women on the college directorate. Six per cent of college staff are from minority ethnic groups. Ninety-eight per cent of full-time teachers have signed new contracts.

87 In general, teaching staff are well qualified and experienced. Ninety-four per cent of full-time teachers are qualified to first degree level or its

equivalent and 96 per cent have a teaching qualification. Some staff also have additional specialist qualifications, for example in the assessment of students with specific learning difficulties. Many part-time teachers have appropriate professional qualifications and are experienced in their relevant fields. For example, teachers with extensive health service experience assist on the medical secretaries course and practical sports sessions are delivered by professional coaches and players.

88 There are some gaps in teaching skills and qualifications. Progress towards assessor qualifications in some areas has been slow and completion rates for part-time staff in particular are slow. Some teachers, for example some teaching students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, lack the necessary range of teaching skills and some have insufficient information technology skills. In a significant number of instances, teachers possess little recent experience of industry.

89 Non-teaching staff are well integrated within the college. In a number of curriculum areas, for example, support staff attend curriculum area team meetings and contribute to the curriculum planning process. Support staff are well qualified and experienced. One hundred and thirty-three support staff are qualified first aiders. Learning centre libraries are well staffed by qualified librarians and library assistants. Effective technician support is provided in most workshops, and support staff who have appropriate vocational expertise help students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Senior managers in a number of support functions have substantial and recent vocational experience, for example, in administration and finance. There are weaknesses in some areas. For example, specialist technician support for computing, science and electronics is inadequate.

Equipment/learning resources

90 The college has spent £2 million since incorporation providing, at each of the six centres, a well-resourced and attractively-furnished learning centre, of which the library is an integral part. These centres have been fully operational since January 1995. The accommodation is well designed and includes group work areas, private study areas and seminar rooms. Each library and learning centre has a good stock of books, periodicals, compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database titles and audio and video cassettes, reflecting the curricular needs of the different centres. In surveys, students report positively on the value of the learning centres. They are heavily used. However, opening hours are restricted; the centres are closed at weekends and there is limited access during the evenings. Expenditure on books and related items in 1994-95 was £18.25 for each full-time equivalent student. Textbooks are issued free of charge to students in some subjects.

91 The learning centres contain up-to-date information technology facilities to which students have open access. The demand for computers

in some of the learning centres is such that, at peak times, students have to wait until a machine becomes available. Some aspects of learning centre operation are at an early stage of development. For example, they lack the automation to enable them to function as a fully integrated system; some rely on card indexes; and no centre has access to the catalogues of other centres. They differ in the extent to which they monitor students' use of the facilities.

92 There is currently one computer for every 10 full-time equivalent students, though the ratio of up-to-date machines for students' use is 1:12. There are plans to improve this ratio to 1:8 within two years. In the current financial year £600,000 has been allocated for the purchase of computers. Local networks exist on all the main sites and the college has plans to link all computers used by students to a college-wide network. Students benefit from up-to-date information technology equipment in several curriculum areas such as business studies, computer-aided design, art and design and catering. In other areas, the equipment is dated and does not reflect current practice; for example, in business administration. There are insufficient computers for laboratory use in science and, in some subjects, including mathematics and adult basic education, students have insufficient access to information technology. Training in the use of information technology for local firms takes place in the well-equipped 'millennium office' which has a suite of 15 up-to-date computers and demonstration facilities.

93 Classrooms in most curriculum areas are fully equipped with overhead projectors and screens. Most also have blinds or curtains, whiteboards and adequate storage facilities. Audio-visual equipment is readily available on the main sites through a booking system. Good use is made of satellite television in modern languages classrooms. Access to information technology and specialist and audio-visual equipment is poor in some of the neighbourhood centres.

94 There is a wide range of high-quality equipment to support students with visual and/or hearing impairments. Some of the computer equipment on loan to students is out of date. In classroom-based sessions for students with learning difficulties the lack of more varied resources leads to an over-reliance on paper-based learning materials.

95 In vocational areas, specialist equipment is generally fit for its purpose and in sufficient supply. In some cases, such as hairdressing and beauty therapy, equipment has recently been upgraded to a high standard. In many other areas, such as art, design, media and performing arts, students use specialist equipment of industrial standard. Leisure and tourism courses have a comprehensive range of specialist equipment, including simulated computer-booking systems and a wide range of travel-related resources. A learning centre next to the construction workshop is well equipped with learning packs and video recordings. Teaching areas for other subjects, including humanities, are also well equipped and learning materials are well presented and plentiful.

96 In business, mathematics and science the standard of equipment and materials varies considerably across the college. Some students on business-related courses have the use of modern office technology, whereas others are over-reliant on typewriters and have insufficient access to up-to-date wordprocessing or desktop publishing facilities. Engineering and motor vehicle workshops have a wide range of equipment of appropriate standard. However, some of it is not easily accessible to students and electronic test equipment is ageing and poorly maintained. There is an adequate range of equipment for catering and for languages, but some is outdated. There is only a limited access to satellite television.

Accommodation

97 The college estate comprises 17 freehold sites, 104,000 square metres of accommodation and 96 acres of land. The six main centres are supported by 115 neighbourhood centres. The majority of the main centre buildings are about 35 years old. The buildings are generally of poor quality. There is poor insulation and heating systems are difficult to control. In some cases, these defects have led to the disruption of classes. For example, heating failure and detection of asbestos recently caused the emergency closure of one of the buildings near the Stradbroke centre. Repair and maintenance costs are high. Many of the neighbourhood centres are rented from the local authority and the majority are in a poor state of repair. The absence of licensing agreements restricts the college from making improvements. However, their use is seen by the college as important for the provision of educational opportunities in local communities.

98 Some of the accommodation is significantly underused. Frequently, there is a poor match between the size of classes and the size of rooms. The large refectory areas are underused for much of the day. The college's strategy is to rationalise the main accommodation, adapt existing buildings and provide new facilities in the south east of the city where there is a significant growth in population. The college is working to improve access for the disabled. For example, lifts, chair lifts and toilets for wheelchair users have been installed on all main sites. Access to upper floors remains a problem in many instances. Courses are moved, where practicable, to other buildings when particular problems of access are encountered by students.

99 There is a considerable variation in the quality of teaching accommodation across sites and refurbishment is being undertaken to try to achieve common standards. Although the majority of classrooms are comfortable and well furnished, many require decoration and fail to provide an appropriate learning environment. Some of the many mobile classrooms are poorly heated and decorated. Teaching rooms and communal areas are generally kept clean, tidy and free from graffiti. Alarm systems and secure windows have been installed on all major sites to protect valuable equipment. There is good access to playing fields, sports and fitness centres. External areas are poorly cleaned and there are litter

problems, particularly at perimeter fencing. There is poor signposting within buildings and to the individual sites.

100 In most curriculum areas specialist accommodation is at least satisfactory. Displays of learning materials are used effectively to enhance the teaching in specialist base rooms. Realistic working environments are often of good quality. For example, the hairdressing and beauty therapy salons, the training restaurants, art studios and electronic newsroom are of professional standard. The workshops for construction are spacious and well laid out. Specialist rooms for business administration generally provide a welcoming learning environment. Some of the languages teaching takes place in general purpose classrooms which lack specialist resources. Accommodation for some practical work, for example in engineering science, is unsuitable. Indoor and outdoor sports facilities and the surrounding countryside and tourist attractions provide a range of suitable learning environments for students on leisure and tourism programmes. Much of the accommodation which is provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is comfortable and fit for the purpose to which it is put.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

101 The college is working steadily towards the attainment of its mission. Its strengths include:

- the extensive range and breadth of curriculum provision
- strong and productive links with many organisations
- the experience and commitment of board members
- effective amalgamation of the six separate colleges and the development of a unified structure
- comprehensive systems of support and guidance for students
- generally high standards of teaching and learning
- the framework for quality assurance
- a wide ranging programme of staff development
- well-qualified staff
- the quality of the equipment in several curriculum areas
- the high standard of some teaching accommodation, particularly the learning centres.

102 If the college is to build on its strengths it should:

- specify more clearly how the college will meet its targets
- strengthen management information and communications systems
- assure the college's financial health
- ensure there is greater consistency and rigour in the course review process

-
- strengthen appraisal systems and extend them to all staff
 - improve the quality of the equipment in some curriculum areas
 - implement the accommodation strategy.

FIGURES

-
- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)

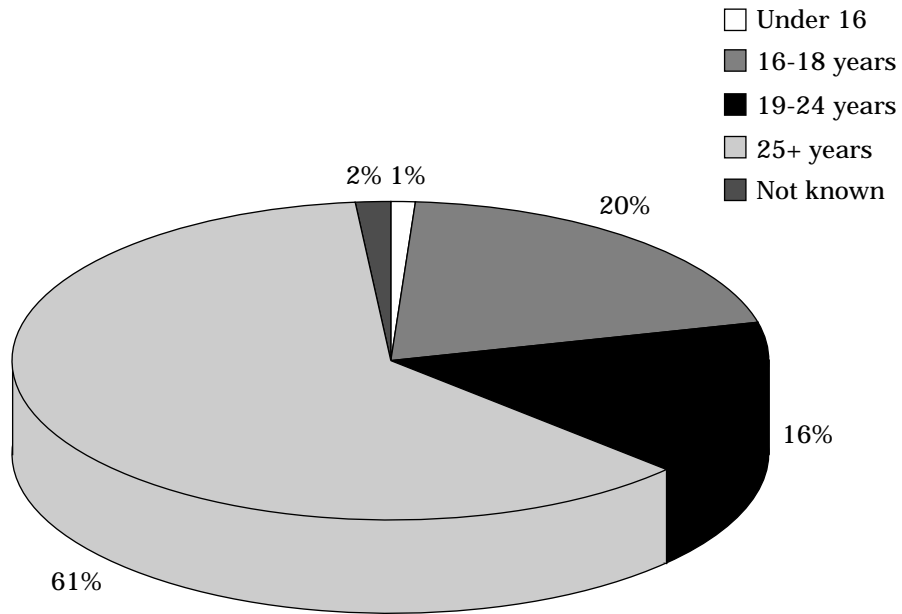
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

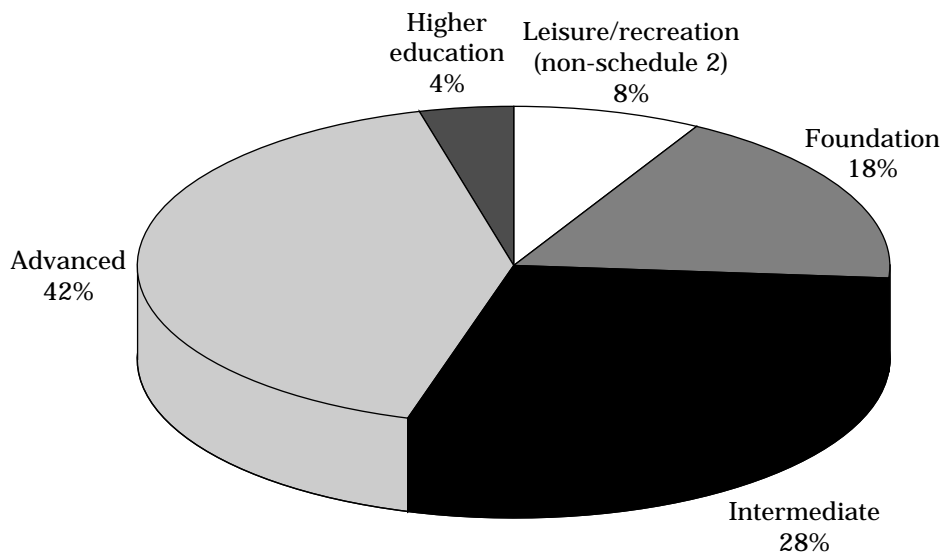
The Sheffield College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 33,693

Figure 2

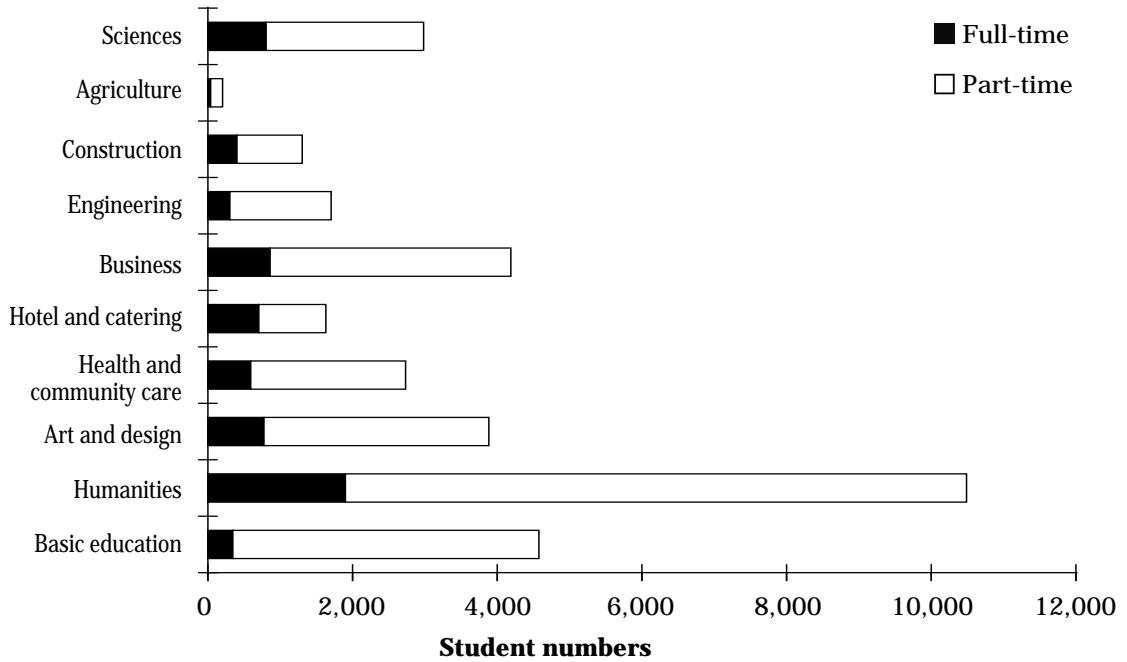
The Sheffield College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 33,693

Figure 3

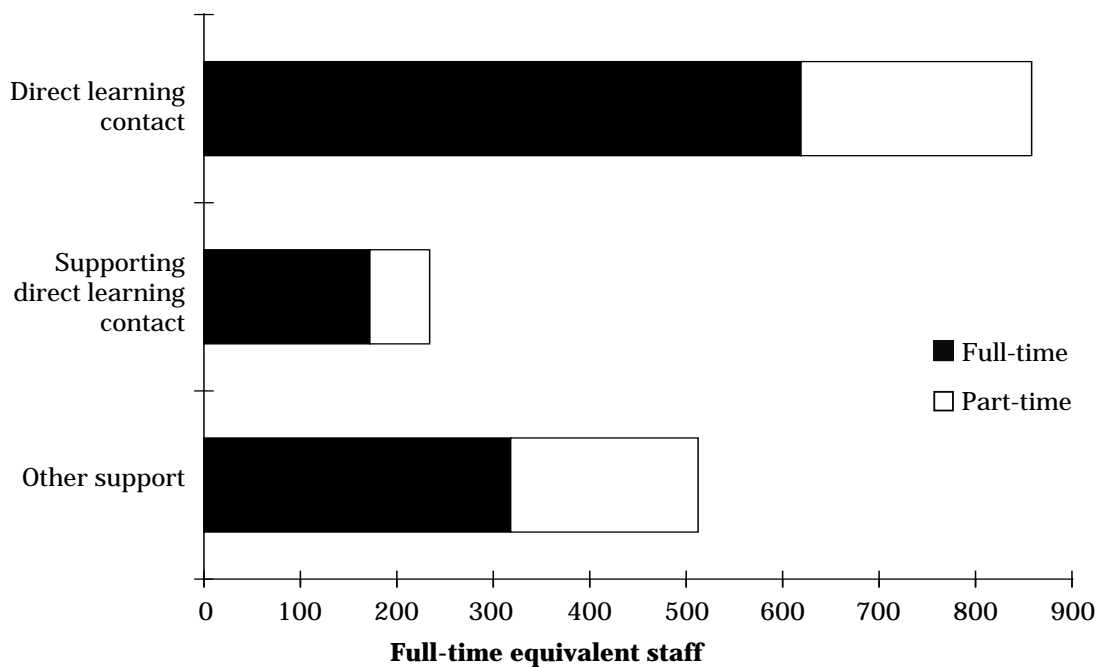
The Sheffield College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 33,693

Figure 4

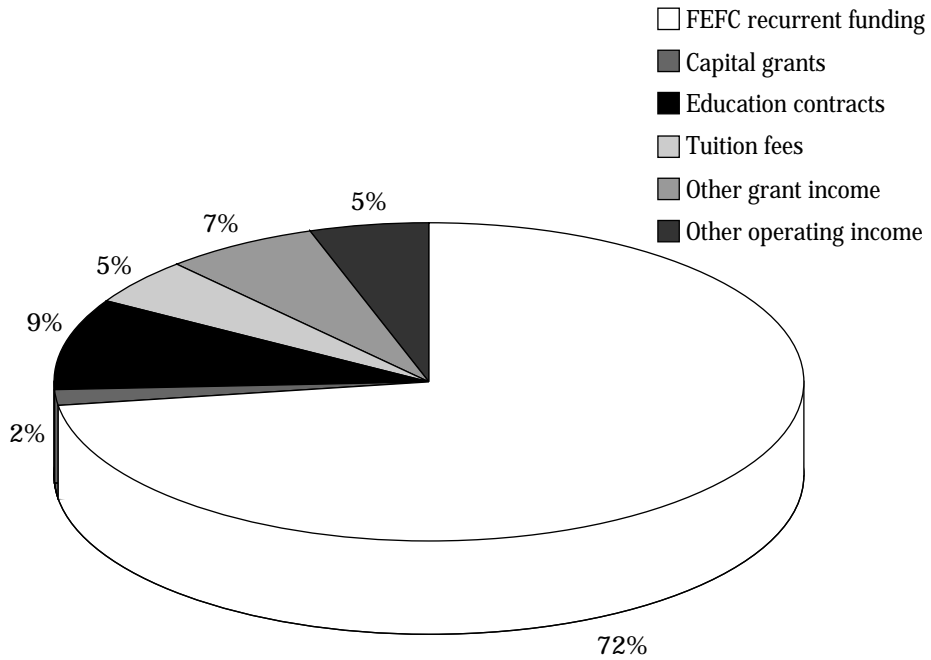
The Sheffield College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 1,605

Figure 5

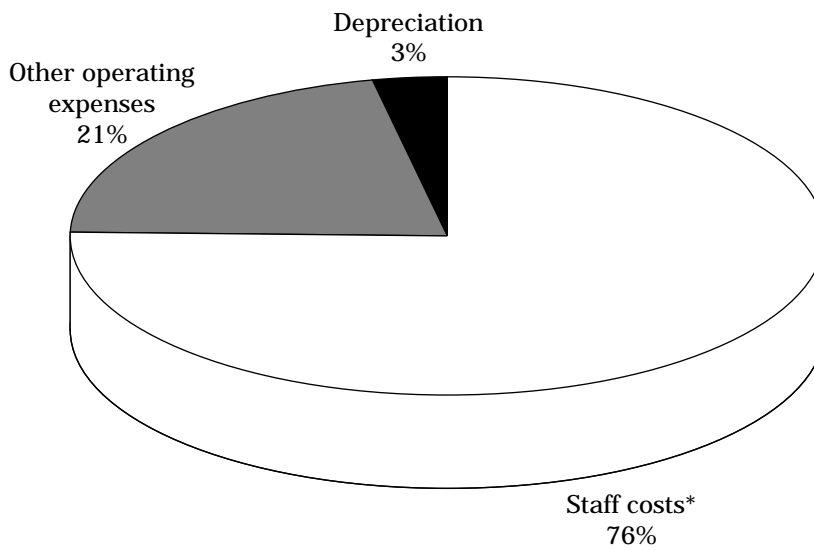
The Sheffield College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £42,226,000

Figure 6

The Sheffield College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £49,707,000

**includes 11 per cent provision for early retirement.*

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
July 1996