

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

The Solihull College

June 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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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*

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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 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 83/96

THE SOLIHULL COLLEGE

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected February 1995-February 1996

Summary

The Solihull College offers an extensive range of courses which students may take through various modes of attendance. Strong leadership is provided by the college managers. Importance is placed upon teamworking by staff. There are good communications throughout the college. Governors and staff are committed to fulfilling the college's mission. The college has good links with schools and employers. There is a growing international dimension to the work of the college. Teaching is well planned and effective. Examination results for vocational programmes and GCSE subjects are generally good. Many students benefit from a carefully-managed programme of work experience. Staff are appreciative of the opportunities provided for their professional development. The college has a strong commitment to its system of quality assurance although there is some inconsistency in the way it operates. The college needs to: improve the range of community education provision; ensure the continued development of effective management information systems and performance indicators; improve examination results in some GCE A level subjects; improve the implementation of the strategic plan at all levels within the college; improve some accommodation and the refectory services; improve the college's charter and raise the students' awareness of it.

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	2
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	2	Health and social care, including hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Engineering	2	Art and design	2
Management, retailing, trade union studies, business studies and business administration	2	Humanities, including modern languages, teacher and trainer education	2
Leisure and tourism	2	Supported learning	2
		Community education	3

INTRODUCTION

1 The Solihull College was inspected between February 1995 and February 1996. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the beginning of the autumn term 1995. Specialist subject areas were inspected during February, October and November 1995 and February 1996. Aspects of cross-college provision were inspected at the end of February 1996. Twenty inspectors spent a total of 107 days in the college. They visited 298 classes involving 3,095 students, and examined students' work. Discussions took place with governors, college staff, students, local employers, representatives from the Central England Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), teachers from local schools, and members of the local community.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 The Solihull College opened in 1954 and occupied a number of temporary sites in Solihull before its first purpose-built accommodation in Blossomfield Road was provided in 1961. A five-storey teaching block and specialist art and engineering accommodation were added in the early 1970s. An extension to the art block was completed in 1994 and a new reception area was opened in 1995.

3 The college has three main sites, and offers courses in 33 outreach centres throughout the borough. The Blossomfield site houses 70 per cent of the college's daytime work and is the main administrative centre. Sharman's Cross, about one mile away, is a former secondary school building which is used for most of the work in health and social care, science, and electronic engineering. It also houses a large hairdressing salon, run in conjunction with a hair care firm. The third site is a former secondary school building in Chelmsley Wood, in the north of the borough.

4 The metropolitan borough of Solihull was created in the local government reorganisation of 1974, and has two distinct parts. The southern part is suburban and has a population of about 135,000. It stretches from the Birmingham boundary on the west to the border of Warwickshire and Worcestershire. Southern Solihull is an area of high employment, especially in the service industries and motor vehicle manufacturing and related industries. The northern part, with a population of 64,000, is primarily an overspill area for Birmingham with a number of very large housing estates. This area has an unemployment rate of 14 per cent. Only 52 per cent of school leavers stay on in education and training.

5 The college had a total enrolment in 1994-95 of 35,088, of whom 3,311 were full-time students. The average age of all students was 28. Nearly 50 per cent of full-time students are resident in Birmingham. Twenty-two per cent of full-time students are drawn from minority ethnic groups which make up 2.9 per cent of the population of Solihull. Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

6 Solihull metropolitan borough has a growing population. There are 12 secondary schools in the borough of which four have sixth forms. Other schools are seeking means of developing sixth forms. There are more than 20 colleges within 15 miles and three other post-16 institutions within five miles. Competition between institutions, particularly to recruit students aged 16 to 19, is intense.

7 The college's mission statement emphasises the institution's role in providing educational opportunity for the whole community. It places particular importance on guidance and support for students, and the identification of clear progression routes. The key objectives identified in the strategic plan are continued growth, the development of the quality of provision, increased responsiveness and efficient use of resources.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 In accord with its mission statement, the college provides an extensive range of courses and programmes. Timetabling arrangements are varied and flexible. Enrolments have been increased at all levels of study, from foundation to higher education. The college offers eight courses at General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) advanced level, seven at GNVQ intermediate level and three at GNVQ foundation level. There are 34 subjects available at General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and 30 subjects for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Progress has been made in developing a unitised curriculum. This allows students to combine programmes of study leading to different qualifications. The college offers a wide range of part-time vocational programmes. There has been strong growth of courses leading to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). There is well-established provision for school leavers and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college manages a large programme of community education. There are learning centres, with facilities for private study, open to the public on all three campuses. Generally, provision made by the specialist curriculum areas offers students clear progression routes and, in most respects, meets the needs of the local community.

9 There are extensive links with employers. Staff liaise with employers to arrange work experience placements for students. Employers sit on the college's curriculum groups. There are partnerships between the college and companies for the provision of work-related education and training. The college franchises some education and training which takes place on employers' premises, with local companies and also some national and international firms. The college provides education and training leading to NVQs in management and information technology for more than 900 employees of a major food and drink chain, over 200 of whom have their studies funded by the TEC. The college also provides the teaching of modern languages to employees on the premises of an international car manufacturer and has won a regional training award for this. Employers support the college and are appreciative of its responsiveness to their

needs. The college has established the Solihull Training Consultancy at Tudor Grange House, a Victorian building on the Blossomfield campus. This consultancy offers a range of training programmes, mainly in management, languages, computing and communications. Employers buy programmes which the college has designed to suit their needs. The college also runs a job matching bureau which aims to link job seekers with employers who want employees with specific skills and qualifications.

10 The college's work in the north of the borough is based at the Chelmsley campus. The college has made vigorous efforts to identify the needs of the community in this part of the borough and develop programmes to meet them. Five 'outreach' workers, all former students of the college, work with individuals and community groups to establish lines of communication with them and identify their needs. The Chelmsley Wood campus offers a wide range of courses for school leavers and adults. There were 3,183 students on the campus in 1994-95. Courses include motor vehicle engineering, electronics, hairdressing and beauty therapy, health and community care, business and office skills, theatre studies and access courses to higher education. Enrolments, mostly of adults, have increased on the Chelmsley Wood campus by about 30 per cent in each of the last two years. The number of part-time students studying business administration has grown from 112 in 1993-94 to over 400 in 1995-96. Many students have started with two-hour sessions in information technology and have progressed from these to GNVQ courses. Unemployed males, however, have not enrolled on courses in significant numbers. The campus has a successful centre for women. Most of the college's provision of youth training and training for work takes place on the campus. It also provides education and training for the Prince's Trust Volunteers.

11 The college provides higher education in association with seven universities. This offers a good range of progression opportunities to the college's own further education students, including courses directly related to six of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. More than 1,850 students are on degree, higher national and advanced professional programmes. Of these students, 26 per cent had progressed from further education programmes at the college.

12 The college manages all the community education and leisure and recreational classes for the Solihull Local Education Authority (LEA) and provides these at centres throughout the borough. Much of the college's community education programme has remained unchanged over many years. Curriculum managers have been given responsibility for developing the community education provision to include courses which lead to accreditation. During the past three years, the college has increased the proportion of community education leading to qualifications from 25 per cent to 68 per cent. Basic education for adults is offered at nine centres. The college provides classes on Saturday mornings and also runs summer schools.

13 Over 60 link courses are run for pupils at 24 local schools, mostly in Solihull and Birmingham. School pupils attend college for a varied programme of link courses, some of which lead to vocational qualifications. Headteachers of the secondary schools involved in the link course programme expressed their confidence in the high quality of provision made by the college. In the summer of 1995, more than 1,000 school pupils attended three days of 'taster' sessions at the college when they sampled some further education courses. The college is represented at major careers events held at local schools and co-operates with them on a number of initiatives. For example, the college led a project on core skills with secondary schools in Solihull. In another initiative, a teacher of textiles from the college served as an 'artist in residence' in a local secondary school, working with the pupils to put on a fashion show.

14 The individual needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met through full-time and part-time courses and link courses with special schools. Students on these courses receive additional support for their learning through a special support group which includes students, college staff and representatives from the social services. Local employers provide work experience for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The needs of students from special schools are carefully assessed when they come to college. There are few students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on mainstream courses in the college.

15 Twenty access programmes are available for adults. There are clear progression routes from basic education courses for adults, which are provided in nine locations, to further education courses. There are progression routes from other access courses to higher education and particularly to some universities in the Midlands.

16 The college works with two TECs and with the Central England TEC in particular. The principal is a member of the Central England TEC's economic development subgroup and the college's director of training is on its equal opportunities subgroup. The TEC values its long-standing relationship with the college, which is one of its largest contractors. The college is a key partner with the TEC in the development of a 'through life' learning plan being developed for Solihull, and is an active member of an education business partnership. The TEC, the college and the LEA have made a successful bid for a major single regeneration grant. This grant is being used to identify the needs of under-represented groups in northern Solihull and increase the educational and training opportunities for them.

17 The college has a highly professional marketing unit, which is led by a director of marketing and supported by a small team with expertise in design, promotions, publicity and public relations. The principal chairs a business development team, while members of the marketing unit work closely with curriculum managers and cross-college co-ordinators to identify the needs of prospective students and clients. Curriculum managers are able to influence the content and presentation of the college's

publications, which are generally well produced and present a consistent image of the college.

18 A well-established international unit sells the college's courses and services to other countries and recruits students from abroad. The college has links with institutions in other countries of the European Union. Over 60 overseas students enrol on courses each year. The college attracts a significant number of students from Japan to its full-time courses and its short courses in floristry. The college has been recognised as a centre of excellence by the Floristry Training Council. The college is co-operating with an industrial partner to provide training for science teachers in Ghana. In 1995, students from an American community college participated in a course called 'Shakespeare in performance'.

19 The college has a clear and long-established equal opportunities policy and comprehensive code of practice, which includes an explicit commitment to furthering awareness of equal opportunities through the curriculum. The policy is approved by the corporation and has been the subject of review and refinement. An equal opportunities committee has wide representation and is active in addressing serious issues, often through working groups. For example, following recent concerns in some parts of the college about religious intolerance, the committee has prepared a paper for senior managers on the place and responsibilities of religious societies in the college.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 The corporation comprises 10 business members, a TEC nominee, five co-opted members, the principal and a staff member. Currently, there are two vacancies. Members have experience of working in medium and large organisations, finance, accountancy, personnel, local government, school and higher education. Two members are women, but there is no representation from ethnic groups or students. The corporation is strongly committed to the college and its mission. A succinct terms of reference document describes the objectives and responsibilities of the corporation and committees and contains a comprehensive code of conduct. The clerk to the corporation is a senior member of the management team.

21 There are four committees of the corporation. These cover finance and policy, curriculum and quality, audit, and remuneration, respectively. The expertise of members is well matched to the work of these committees. The corporation is involved in defining the reports needed on financial issues and in helping to frame objectives for quality assurance and the monitoring of the college's performance. The corporation is supplied with monthly financial information. A register of members' interests has been introduced and there is an approved procedure for the nomination and appointment of new governors. Minutes and supporting documentation for the committees are of a good standard. Attendance at corporation and committee meetings is usually satisfactory, although the audit committee has been inquorate on recent occasions. Working groups of governors

and staff are set up for specific projects in order to help the college achieve its mission. Two such projects relate to further education in north Solihull and the proposed sports hall. Corporation minutes are available only in the library at the Blossomfield campus. A foundation board has been set up with the approval of the corporation, which brings together a small group of influential figures associated with the community. They meet to consider promotional activities which would be beneficial to the college and the community.

22 Members of the corporation are kept informed about college activities through regular bulletins and briefing papers. Links between corporation members and curriculum areas are being developed. Recently a team of three members investigated and reported on the college's work in engineering. Development days for members of the corporation have included discussions on the 1996-99 strategic plan and on inspections. There is detailed consideration of examination results, including year-on-year, and national and regional comparisons.

23 The mission statement is well understood and supported by the corporation and staff. It has been reviewed and refined after an extensive period of structured consultation at all levels. Development days have enabled staff to be informed of and contribute to the process of strategic planning. The current strategic plan critically reviews and details the objectives achieved in the first strategic plan, defines major corporate objectives and undertakes a realistic needs and risk analysis. However, further work is needed to ensure its detailed implementation at all levels.

24 The college describes its management structure as a 'mixed matrix'. The senior management comprises six posts; the principal, deputy principal and vice-principal, supported by three directors, of finance, training and corporate services. In addition, there are directors for marketing and institutional research, and managers of quality, site management, and the international office. There are 11 curriculum managers. There are posts with responsibility across the college for services to learners, advice and admissions, the co-ordination of GNVQ courses, liaison with schools, higher education and community education. In total, there are 45 staff with management responsibilities.

25 Managers collaborate well and exert clear leadership. The senior management team meets about every two weeks. Minutes are produced which identify agreed actions and those who have responsibility for carrying them out. The lines of communication between senior managers and curriculum managers are well defined and staff at all levels can contribute to decision making in the college. There is a strong emphasis on team building and teamwork among staff. Curriculum managers and co-ordinators are given autonomy to exercise their initiative in day-to-day operations. All staff have defined responsibilities and individual performance targets. The finance and policy committee of the corporation has instigated the setting, review and monitoring of these targets. At the

time of the inspection, reviews of the targets had not yet taken place. The structure of line management for staff is clearly identified. Managers meet weekly.

26 Informative, weekly college newsletters are valued by staff and students. The library produces a weekly newsletter which identifies additions to its stock, new services and developments. The newsletter incorporates a useful press digest from educational journals. The college has a policy and a code of practice on equal opportunities. An equal opportunities officer monitors the effectiveness of the implementation of this policy. The college collects statistical information on the ethnicity and gender of students. This is supplied to curriculum managers in a basic form. There is a policy on support services for students. The college has a comprehensive health and safety policy. This is monitored by the health and safety committee which meets about three times a year. At the time of the inspection, some science staff were unaware of the procedures for the storage of hazardous materials.

27 The academic board meets termly and deals with strategic and other major issues. It is chaired by the principal and its membership is drawn from all levels of the college. It has recently begun to take an overview of quality in the college. Two committees of the academic board deal with equal opportunities and health and safety, respectively. Student councils meet regularly and make recommendations for action which are considered by the management committee.

28 The college has developed a model for allocating funds for resourcing areas of the curriculum. The allocation of funds is clearly related to the amount of revenue generated by enrolments on different programmes. The model is valued by curriculum managers. It makes staff teams aware of the cost of delivering their courses. Curriculum managers and other budget holders must work within the budget allocated to them. The model has the flexibility to determine equitable budgets for a diversity of provision, the costs of full-time and part-time staffing and a variety of resources. Curriculum managers have considerable autonomy and can bid for additional funds for new initiatives. Staff in a minority of curriculum areas have limited understanding of the mechanisms used for financial allocation. Human and physical resources are regularly monitored and monthly reports on the usage of staff and finances are produced for the finance and policy committee, senior management and curriculum managers.

29 The average level of funding per unit of activity for 1994-95 was £16.62. The median for general further education colleges was £17.97 per unit. The funded average level of funding per unit of activity for 1995-96 is £16.54 compared with that of £17.84 for general further education colleges. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The staffing budget is around 72 per cent of the college's expenditure. At the time of the

inspection the college was expecting confirmation of a growth of 15 per cent for the 1994-95 academic year. In 1995-96, the college made a bid for a growth of 49 per cent, but received recurrent funding for growth of 16.5 per cent. An agreement about, and transfer of, assets from the local authority to the college, is nearing completion.

30 A new student record system was introduced in September 1995. The system produces returns for the FEFC and is providing valuable basic information to curriculum managers and other senior staff. Responsibility for the maintenance of the data rests with the curriculum teams. This database is the definitive source of information on student numbers and is used as base data for the resourcing model. Curriculum managers can produce a variety of information about students including enrolments, their postcodes, transfers, withdrawals and the number of hours students study on each programme. There is a growing recognition of the potential of this information.

31 As part of the cycle of strategic planning, curriculum area teams are required to set targets for the retention rates of students on courses and monitor these, together with the destinations of students and the qualifications they achieve. In practice, however, there is little monitoring of retention rates on many courses. Each curriculum area produces reports on the destinations of students.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

32 There are clear policies and procedures for the recruitment, guidance and support of students. These cover students' applications, initial interviews, tutorials and careers guidance. The college's admissions and reception services aim to be welcoming and friendly towards prospective students. The process of admitting a student to the college, from initial enquiry to enrolment, can be completed in a day. The college does not, however, monitor the length of time applicants have to wait before they are interviewed.

33 Prospective students receive clear information about the college's provision in well-designed and attractive prospectuses. Applications are handled by the central admissions unit which arranges an initial interview for each prospective full-time student with staff from the appropriate curriculum area. Use is made of the applicant's record of achievement during the interview. Staff provide applicants with information and guidance to help them to choose the right course. Applicants for the basic education courses for adults are interviewed. During the interview, their expectations and needs are explored, the most convenient centre for them is identified and they are helped to ascertain how their study will fit in with other commitments they may have. They are also given an initial assessment of their capabilities in order that they may work out an action plan which states their learning objectives and a timetable for achieving them. Part-time students are offered specialist guidance where necessary.

They are given an initial assessment which provides their initial action plan and subsequent timetable. Most full-time enrolment takes place from June onwards and there are facilities for postal enrolment. Students can enrol at any time and almost 50 per cent do so outside the peak period in September. During the peak period additional staff and physical resources are deployed to maintain a suitable level of service.

34 All full-time students are provided with an induction programme. Clear guidelines are identified centrally for inclusion in all programmes. Full-time students are offered an assessment to determine whether they need additional support during their studies. In 1995, a total of 1,073 students were assessed including all those on GNVQ courses and 32 per cent of the GCSE students. Staff in the core skills centre set up interviews and arrange for those who need additional support to receive it. During the induction, all full-time students are allocated a personal tutor and the student completes a 'learning agreement' which sets out objectives and a commitment from the student to fulfil them. Students are provided with a handbook, a college diary and a guide on how to learn. Information on the additional cost of courses, including the cost of text books, was not adequately conveyed to all students during the induction process. Induction for part-time students and late applicants varies in its content and effectiveness. The college reviews its enrolment and induction processes each year and produces an action plan for their improvement.

35 The college has well-established procedures for the accreditation of prior learning through which the skills and knowledge that students already have before they begin their course are tested and recognised. In conjunction with the TEC, the college has piloted a number of projects for the accreditation of prior learning across a range of vocational areas. In 1994-95, 718 students had their prior learning accredited. Several local employers use the college's system for accrediting prior learning as a means of identifying the training needs of their employees.

36 There is good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including those with mobility, visual and hearing impairments. Twenty-two students with dyslexia are receiving support. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are generally well integrated with the life of the college. A disabilities action group provides clear guidance and advice to staff and students and is organising a disabilities awareness day for the whole college.

37 Monitoring students' attendance is the responsibility of class teachers. It is up to them to provide the curriculum administration team with information on students' withdrawals from courses, transfers between courses and absenteeism. The monitoring of attendance is inadequate in some areas. Course programmes are designed to be sufficiently flexible to permit students to transfer from one course to another, when necessary. At the time of the inspection, 813 students had changed their courses; of these, 60 per cent were part-time students.

38 A programme of tutorials has been developed for full-time students which includes weekly group tutorials. A scheme is being piloted whereby tutors help students to develop independent learning skills. There is a programme of staff development for tutors.

39 Students have access to a wide range of careers advice, guidance and resources. The college has its own careers service and also has good links with the Central Careers Service which is run by the LEA and the TEC. Each curriculum area makes an agreement with the Central Careers Service for the amount of service to be provided to students. The college maintains a database of job vacancies and the skills required by employers.

40 The college has extensive welfare and counselling services. Financial support is available to students from a variety of sources, including an access fund, a TEC-funded scholarship and the college's welfare fund. Counselling services are available from qualified staff on all three sites. There is a total of 73 creche places at the Blossomfield and Chelmsley campuses, supplemented by additional places and childminding services funded through the TEC and the European Social Fund.

41 The work of the five student liaison officers is dynamic and sensibly innovative. Each has responsibility for a particular service to students and for a college site. Their activities are closely linked to the students' union charter. A network of 10 students' councils, run by students, are well attended by students and staff. At their council meetings, students have frequently commented on the poor quality of provision in all the refectories. The students' union is well resourced and the students' union executive, in conjunction with a student liaison officer, provides a wide range of activities including weekly sports and recreational events and regional sporting fixtures. Visits are made to other countries.

42 The college has a good range of links with parents of students under the age of 19. Parents are encouraged to attend interviews, parents' evenings and college events. Many live outside the borough, however, and find it difficult to participate in such activities.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

43 Of the 298 lessons inspected, 70 per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. A further 24 per cent had a balance of strengths and weaknesses. In only 6 per cent were weaknesses predominant. Consistently-good practice was found on the teacher and trainer education programme. The average attendance in the lessons inspected was 76 per cent. The range was from 47 per cent to 100 per cent. The average number of students in the lessons inspected was 10.

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		9	18	12	3	0	42
GCSE		2	17	3	2	0	24
GVNQ		7	16	11	3	0	37
NVQ		12	14	8	3	0	37
Other vocational		13	27	20	4	0	64
Access to further and higher education		1	8	3	0	0	12
Basic education		7	8	2	1	0	18
Higher education		3	5	0	0	0	8
Non-schedule 2 provision		5	2	7	1	0	15
Other		13	20	6	1	1	41
Total		72	135	72	18	1	298

44 Most of the teaching was effective. Teachers had a good command of their subjects and most planned their lessons in accordance with schemes of work clearly related to examination syllabuses and the specifications of accredited courses. Relations between teachers and students were almost always positive and mutually supportive. There were, however, no schemes of work for some community education classes. In a small number of classes, the attendance and punctuality of some students were poor.

45 The college places importance on the development of learning, particularly in business administration and engineering, which the students carry out on their own at their own pace, often using information technology. When they are ready, the students present their work for assessment. Throughout the college, students' assignments were set at an appropriate level and were carefully and fairly assessed and recorded. Teachers provided constructive criticism to students on their performance. There were, however, a few examples of uncorrected errors, over-generous marking and the infrequent collection and assessment of work. In community education, teaching was not always linked to the requirements of the examination syllabus or accreditation requirements; marking was not always undertaken systematically.

46 The teaching of information technology is effective and students are encouraged to draw on their experience of information technology at work or during work placements. Students make good use of the Internet in their studies. The use of information technology in modern languages is constrained by a lack of relevant software. The teaching of numeracy is variable in quality and does not always take into account work which the

students have already carried out. The teaching of communications on vocational courses and in the workshops is of high quality and is integrated with vocational work. The college's arrangements for providing help in numeracy, communications or information technology are not always successfully implemented for students on GCE A level and GCSE programmes. In business administration, the teaching and learning do not develop the students' skills of numeracy and communication sufficiently. Students were unaware that they could receive assistance in the numeracy workshop. The college has recently developed a policy on core skills.

47 Every full-time student has an entitlement to work experience. Carefully-managed work experience forms an integral part of many vocational courses. In 1994-95, a total of 1,276 students, studying in nine curriculum areas, undertook work placements. Most work experience is co-ordinated centrally, although curriculum areas retain responsibility for evaluating the achievements of students on placements. Some curriculum areas have produced valuable guidance materials for students and employers. The college has established three simulated firms which enable students to take part in realistic business activities with other students in the United Kingdom and Europe.

48 Teaching in computing is well organised. Teachers presented suitable technical material at an appropriate level. They provided students with activities which ensured their full attention and participation. Information was imparted to the students in innovative ways which included the imaginative use of spreadsheets in the teaching of accounting skills. In a few lessons, students were insufficiently challenged. In others, learning was impeded because of the poor quality or absence of software. Students receive good support in mathematics workshops, though a small number of less well-motivated students did not have clear learning targets. In the more successful lessons, the teaching of theory was balanced by well-chosen practical work. In some cases, however, there was excessive note taking. GCE A level mathematics students were not all given regular homework. In science lessons, teachers used a wide range of appropriate teaching materials and drew on their own experiences to illustrate key points for the students. Teachers were sensitive to the range of students' needs, and catered for them effectively in a relaxed but disciplined learning environment.

49 In engineering, most learning takes place in workshops where students can carry out assignments. This assignment work is complemented by seminars. Students use both commercially-produced materials and those produced in the college. Students valued the opportunities for working on their own on assignments but some would benefit from more advice on how to study by themselves. The teaching in some of the lessons for the whole class was too slow and failed to sustain the students' interest. Engineering lessons on franchised programmes taught on employers' premises were of a good standard.

50 Much of the teaching in business administration takes place in workshops where students undertake a range of well-planned assignments. Booklets produced by the college are of particular help to the students. These guide them, step by step, through their learning programmes. The students are not allowed, however, to take the booklets home. The students' work is regularly assessed. Teachers help students to draw up a profile of their achievements in meeting the objectives set in action plans. NVQ assignments are fairly and consistently marked. In a few instances, teachers have failed to maintain records of their students' progress.

51 In business, management, retailing and trade union studies, the majority of teaching is well organised and effective, although some lessons lacked plans. Students took part in a wide variety of activities, including exhibitions, role-playing exercises, presentations and work experience. In management and trade union studies, there were examples of well-structured presentations by the teacher followed by discussion closely related to students' vocational experiences. Students on a trade union health and safety course used a checklist which they had devised to carry out a practical inspection. On GNVQ programmes, the assessment of core skills is well integrated with that for vocational units. In some classes teachers did not check students' understanding sufficiently and set tasks that failed to challenge them. Some handouts and assignments were poorly presented or out of date. Classes were sometimes poorly attended.

52 The teaching in leisure and tourism is good. The GNVQ foundation and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) certificate courses in leisure and tourism are well organised and cater for a wide range of students. On all GNVQ courses except advanced leisure and tourism, core skills were carefully integrated with vocational work, as were common skills in the BTEC courses. There is no clear system for the recording of core skills on the GNVQ advanced course. On both GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses in leisure and tourism, there is some imbalance between the amount of work students undertake on their own and the teaching of underpinning knowledge and understanding to the whole class.

53 The teaching in health and social care is of a high standard and makes use of an appropriate variety of learning activities. Students' skills, knowledge and understanding are tested and challenged. Work is set and marked at an appropriate level, although some comments from the teachers are very brief and some errors go uncorrected. Students are provided with a useful calendar which sets out the sequence of learning activities on their course. This does not include deadlines by which they have to return work. Teaching and learning in hairdressing and beauty is well organised and managed. Realistic work environments enable students to develop practices and attain standards which match those of industry.

54 The teaching in art and design and media is of high quality. Teachers use a wide range of teaching and learning methods. Assessment is

thorough and teachers provide their students with feedback on their progress. On GNVQ courses, core skills are effectively taught and the students' proficiency in them is carefully monitored. In art and design, coursework is increasingly carried out through activities requiring computer-aided design. In a GNVQ advanced art and design class, students worked individually on drawings to meet objectives agreed in tutorials; there was an excellent working atmosphere and the drawings produced were of a high standard. Features of some less successful lessons included the teachers' failure to challenge students sufficiently and check their understanding.

55 The teaching in humanities is well planned. Group work is used effectively in teacher and trainer education, where students are also encouraged to reflect on and share their experiences of teaching and learning. In English, a wide range of written assignments and learning materials is used. Teachers' use of questions in the study of set texts for GCE A level was perceptive and challenging. In general humanities, which included history, law, psychology and sociology, students benefit from well-produced learning aids. Teachers often explored and explained complex ideas and issues with skill and imagination. Students were given the opportunity to practise final assessment and examination techniques. In a few lessons, teachers did not ensure that activities involved the participation of all students in the class; some teachers accepted incomplete answers to questions. In modern languages, most lessons were conducted in the language being taught and teachers encouraged students to use it through well-sustained oral work. In some lessons, audio and video cassettes were regularly used but some follow-up activities were insufficiently imaginative and failed to capitalise sufficiently on the content of these audio-visual aids.

56 The teaching of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is generally good. Where appropriate, students are provided with elements or modules of vocational work. Lessons were well prepared, especially when teachers and support assistants planned them together. Students were clear about what to do and why, and they found the work challenging. Teachers regularly checked to see that the students understood what they were learning and gave them feedback about their progress. Work with individual students was always good. In some vocational lessons, however, teachers had not been adequately briefed about the students' learning difficulties and failed to adapt their teaching styles to cater for these. On the full-time course, the students' learning was sometimes fragmented because teachers failed to establish links between different lessons. In the small number of less successful lessons, the teachers' language was condescending and they failed to match their teaching style to the students' individual needs and aptitude.

57 In community education, much of the teaching is of good quality. Many teachers provide their students with useful learning materials, including well-produced handouts. In many lessons, the teaching was

lively and encouraged the full participation of students. In some less successful lessons, teachers failed to ensure that activities involved all the students in the class. There was significant absenteeism from some classes. In adult basic education and access courses to further and higher education teachers use a good range of teaching and learning approaches. Teaching takes account of the differing abilities of students. In some classes, teachers dominated the proceedings and failed to draw sufficiently on the students' own experience. In business administration and office studies, some imaginative handouts are tailored to the individual needs of students. Records of students' progress are, however, inconsistently maintained. Most lessons in art and design were well prepared and there was regular and effective use of presentations and demonstrations. Some teachers, however, had difficulty in catering for groups containing students with different experiences and abilities. In humanities classes, there was much lively discussion and debate which engaged the students' full participation. Some modern languages were taught consistently in the language being studied and teachers used an appropriate variety of activities and resources. In some of the less successful lessons in community education, teachers were not sufficiently sensitive to the needs of adult students and gave them tasks which were too difficult for them.

58 Teachers emphasise the importance of health and safety in all areas of practical work. In science lessons, students wear suitable clothing in the laboratories and observe high standards of safety. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, students are professionally dressed for their work in the salons and observe health and safety practices to industrial standards.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

59 In many areas of the college's work, students show enthusiasm for their studies. In engineering and media studies, in particular, students learn how to work on their own successfully. The morale of students on access courses is enhanced because they make significant progress in a short time and celebrate their achievements at awards ceremonies. Similarly, some students on community education classes have made outstanding progress in a short time. In health and social care, students are especially enthusiastic about their courses which have exceeded their expectations. Students learn to work together. For example, there is effective teamwork by students on leisure programmes which helps to develop their professional expertise. On the GNVQ intermediate course in leisure and tourism, however, there is an overemphasis on teamwork and students have insufficient opportunities to work individually.

60 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have the opportunity to gain accreditation for their achievement. Imaginative use is made of alternative methods of recording achievements, for example through the use of photographs in cookery. A professional approach is taken to the recording of students' work in art and design through the labelling of work and photographs of exhibitors. Students maintain profiles

of achievement, which are regularly reviewed. In some cases, students do not understand what is being accredited and few students progress to full-time vocational courses at the college.

61 The community education programme covers a wide range of subjects and vocational areas. Some students on pre-foundation courses make outstanding progress in a short time. Examination results were generally good in business administration. Students are able to achieve a high level of technical and practical skills in art and design and can work well on their own. There is effective group work by students on GCE A level and GCSE programmes. There were 100 per cent pass rates in the examinations taken by students on signing, mathematics and radio courses. Few students obtained high grades in GCE A level or GCSE. In some classes, for example, in modern languages, students undertook tasks which were too difficult for them. A significant proportion of community education classes do not lead to accreditation. The college plans to develop accreditation for community education courses through the open college accreditation network.

62 The students' achievements in external examinations have improved. About 7,000 awards are obtained each year. The majority of these are for achievements on vocational programmes. Many are in areas which do not appear in national performance tables. Eighty-seven per cent of the 252 students taking vocational courses, included in the Department for Education and Employment's performance tables for 1995, were successful. On this performance measure, the college is placed in the top third of colleges in the further education sector. In 1995, the pass rates on GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses were 59 per cent and 73 per cent, respectively. These results are above the national average. The pass rates on most vocational courses in science are over 70 per cent. There was a 90 per cent pass rate in NVQs in floristry. Results in leisure and tourism were mostly good. In care, there was a 92 per cent pass rate in the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education courses, in 1995. Results were good on the BTEC first diploma in design, most BTEC fashion and photography courses and also in foundation courses in numeracy and literacy. In business studies, students obtained good results on some management studies courses and BTEC national certificate and diploma courses, but results in the Institute of Bankers' examinations are weak. Some examination results are also poor on the foundation and intermediate GNVQ courses in health care. Achievements and retention rates were mostly high on hairdressing and beauty therapy courses. Many students on art and design and media courses obtained good results. Students on the GNVQ intermediate art and design course obtained poorer results. On courses in English for speakers of other languages, many students return to their home country before completing their course.

63 In GCE A level and GCSE examinations, the students' performance is generally more modest. The 242 students aged 16 to 18 entered for the GCE AS/A level examination in 1994-95 scored, on average, 3.2 points per

entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector, based on the data in the 1995 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. The score was a slight improvement over the previous year. The overall pass rate for GCE A level examinations in 1995 was 74 per cent. The proportion of students achieving three GCE A level passes increased from 43 per cent in 1993 to 50 per cent in 1995. There were also increases in those obtaining one or more GCE A levels. The examinations results of adult students on community education GCE and GCSE programmes were generally poor.

64 Examination results in GCE A levels vary between, and within, individual subjects. Results have been at or below the national average in many subjects, including accounting, business studies and physical sciences, although the latter improved significantly in 1995. In most other subjects, examination results have been variable, with some, including most humanities subjects, often below the national average for the sector. Achievements are generally better in the one-year courses, including those in art and design and combined English language and literature.

65 The results of GCSE examinations are also variable, although overall, 52 per cent of the students sitting examinations achieve A to C grade results which is higher than the national average for the sector. The proportion of students obtaining four or five A to C grades has remained low, at below 30 per cent. Results in the psychology of child development are consistently good and those in mathematics and English language usually equal or exceed the national averages.

66 The college joined the Advanced Level Information System scheme two years ago. This scheme helps the college to calculate the added value, in terms of attainment, which students gain as a result of studying at the college. The value-added component is calculated, using a formula, by comparing the students' achievements, in terms of grades and qualifications, with those they had when they started their course. Value-added calculations indicate that the college recruits students with modest scores in GCSE, with subjects in which students make significant gains slightly outnumbering those in which they significantly underachieve. At present, the college is unclear how it will use this analysis of the value-added factor to improve the future performance of students.

67 The retention rates of students on courses are variable, and in some instances, low. In 1995, the average retention rate on two-year courses was 68 per cent and it was 78 per cent on one-year courses. Retention rates on hairdressing and beauty therapy courses were generally high. The retention rate on two-year full-time GCE A level programmes was 56 per cent; the retention rate on one-year GCE A level programmes was significantly higher, particularly in subjects with high enrolments such as human biology, art and design, business studies and English. The retention rate for full-time GCSE students was 58 per cent. The retention rates on many community education programmes were low.

68 The college obtains comprehensive information on the destinations of 93 per cent of its full-time students. The proportion progressing to higher education has increased steadily to 29 per cent, while 27 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, proceed to further education and employment. There is substantial progression of students to higher levels of study within the college. In 1995, about 26 per cent of students continuing to higher education did so on courses within the college. Very limited information is available on the destinations of part-time students.

69 Individual students perform well in national competitions. Recent successes include students who, respectively, won the beauty therapist of the year award, the Institute of Management award and became the 'best achiever' in a competition sponsored by a leading travel agency and travel magazine. The college has been successful in enabling some students with very limited initial educational achievements to progress from pre-foundation courses to higher education.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

70 The college's policy on quality assurance is understood and strongly supported by the staff. The college's system of quality assurance incorporates features of other well-known systems of quality assurance used in industry and commerce. These systems have been adopted because they suit particular parts of the college's operations. For example, International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9001 has been achieved by the training consultancy. The principles of total quality management have been adopted and are understood by staff. Staff talk with enthusiasm about the importance of reviewing what they do, of understanding how students learn, and of improving the processes of learning. They are committed to working in teams. They feel involved in the making of decisions about the college and their own areas of work. The college gained the Investors in People award in 1995.

71 The college has begun to set targets and standards. A manual of quality assurance procedures has been circulated within the college. This covers administration, personnel, finance and site services. The manual specifies a number of standards for each of these areas. There is further work to be done on this manual to ensure it covers all the procedures required for effective quality assurance and that they are presented in a consistent format. Monitoring of the effectiveness of the procedures and the appropriateness of the standards has not yet been undertaken.

72 The college is committed, through its policy on quality assurance, to the collection and use of performance indicators. It is the responsibility of the academic board to monitor examination results. At the time of the inspection, the board had not scrutinised the examination results for 1994-95. Targets for examination results have been discussed, but have not yet been set. An overall target for the retention of students has recently been set. Reports on retention rates were not submitted to the academic board in 1995.

73 The college began audits of curriculum areas in 1992. These have been thorough and they have highlighted strengths and identified areas where improvement is needed. The audits have entailed observation and assessment of teaching and learning. Recommendations and action plans are drawn up after each audit. By the start of the inspection, six audits had been completed. The college decided to postpone future audits until the inspection was over.

74 Course reviews are designed to be central to the monitoring of quality in the college. However, there is a lack of consistency in the way these operate. Some course reviews are completed in great detail. Others have a minimal amount of detail. The reviews do not compare examination results with national averages and other measures or identify their trends. Curriculum areas are required to produce summary evaluations but not all do. The views of students are collected during many of the reviews. In 1995, a survey sought the views of 4,000 students on their first impressions of the college. Other surveys have been conducted in specific areas such as business studies. The college is developing processes for validating its own courses. Internal verification is a significant element of quality assurance in the college.

75 All staff greatly value the opportunities provided for their professional and personal development. Middle managers speak enthusiastically about the programme of management training which regularly takes place on Friday mornings. Support staff have opportunities to gain qualifications offered in the college. The staff-development policy sets out precisely the entitlement of different groups of staff to professional development. Staff are able to discuss their own staff-development needs during their appraisal interview, within their course and curriculum teams and at various meetings. Part-time staff are able to participate in staff-development activities and many do so. The staff-development programme focuses on the nature of learning and has helped staff to improve their understanding of how students may be helped to learn more effectively.

76 All full-time staff, and full-time and part-time support staff, are appraised. Approximately 80 per cent of staff have had appraisal training and, of these, half have had appraisal interviews. During their appraisal interview, staff discuss their individual objectives and professional development needs with their line manager and produce an action plan to meet these. There are sound arrangements for the induction of new staff which include a mentoring system for teachers.

77 The college's self-assessment document has been carefully prepared. Many managers were involved in its production. The document provides helpful information on the college's recent initiatives to improve its provision. It gives a useful summary of the progress the college has made. The document is not, however, particularly forward looking and does not sufficiently identify those areas of provision which still need to be improved. The document gives little indication of the college's assessment of its own

strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, comparisons could not be made between findings in the self-assessment document and those of the inspection.

78 The college's charter has not made a significant impact on students. The students' diary informs them about the charter and where it may be obtained. The charter is, however, not well known to students. Part-time students, in particular, do not regard charters as important. The original charter gave few indications of specific entitlements for students. An improved version has been prepared and consultation is about to take place on its revised format and content. The new version lists the kind of information, guidance and support, and resources available in the college. There has been no evaluation of the college's performance in meeting its commitments in the charter. There are no quantifiable standards of performance in the revised version.

RESOURCES

Staffing

79 The college has a full-time equivalent of 344 teachers and 245 support staff. There are 198 full-time and 614 part-time teachers. Teaching staff are mainly well qualified for the courses on which they teach. Most hold a first degree or an equivalent qualification and a number have postgraduate degrees. Over 80 per cent of all full-time and associate lecturers hold a teaching qualification. This figure is in part due to a college policy to ensure that all new teaching staff hold a teaching qualification or undertake training for one. Some staff teaching students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and English for speakers of other languages, do not have appropriate professional qualifications. In adult basic education few teachers are able to teach the full range of literacy, numeracy and language skills.

80 The college's commitment to staff as its key resource is reflected in policies which promote the responsiveness and adaptability of staff. Generally, the use of staff is carefully planned and effectively monitored. At the time of the specialist inspections, in a small number of cases, teachers are deployed to classes for which they do not possess the necessary skills or experience.

81 Many teaching staff have relevant industrial, commercial and vocational experience, although there is a need for some to update this. Currently, 120 teachers hold vocational assessor qualifications and a further 181 are working towards them. Nevertheless, there is a shortage of NVQ assessors in health and social care, and a need for trained assessors in leisure and tourism.

82 Part-time teachers make an important contribution to the work of course teams and some are well-established practitioners in their field. The college has an active part-time teachers' forum and has provided helpful documentation for part-time teachers. Teachers in the college's

outreach centres are, increasingly, receiving help from the college's support services and taking part in the staff-development programme. In some subject areas, much of the teaching is carried out by part-time staff and, as a result, a disproportionate burden of course administration falls to the full-time staff. Of the 350 part-time staff who teach on the community education programme, 86 per cent possess a teaching qualification.

83 Learning is supported by well-qualified and committed administrative and technical staff. Technical staff provide effective support in many areas of the curriculum. Important and skilful contributions are made by volunteer teachers in adult basic education, support assistants providing additional support for learning and foreign language assistants. The distribution of technical support staff has led to delays in the servicing and repair of equipment in business administration and information technology. The college is currently reviewing its provision of administrative support. A new system of administrative offices for each curriculum area was established in September 1995.

84 There are widely disseminated policies and procedures for the management of personnel. The college has clear procedures for recruitment and all applications are carefully monitored. There is a good balance between experienced and more recently appointed staff. Women are well represented at senior and middle management level. Despite efforts to encourage more applicants from minority ethnic groups, the proportion of staff from such groups is low and does not reflect the ethnic mix of the student population.

Equipment/learning resources

85 Much of the provision of specialist equipment in curriculum areas is of good quality. Computer-aided engineering design, electronics, aerospace engineering, motor vehicle repair and maintenance and refrigeration are well equipped. Science has good basic laboratory equipment and advanced data logging provision, but insufficient high-technology equipment. Equipment for hairdressing meets current industrial standards; students have the shared use of a well-equipped commercial salon on one site and excellent reception facilities on two sites. A computer-aided art and design suite provides advanced facilities for staff and students but has insufficient capacity to meet the demands made upon it. Media studies at Blossomfield has excellent recording and editing facilities for video and sound. The communications/core skills workshops on all three sites are well equipped and resourced. In catering, the production kitchen was refurbished in 1991. There is a well-resourced language centre with good facilities for open and flexible learning. Most teaching rooms have appropriate teaching aids, including whiteboards and overhead projectors. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have access to a range of specialist equipment, including information technology, as well as some good materials made by the

college. Franchising is mostly delivered on the premises of major companies and training organisations, where high-quality facilities are available.

86 The college is well equipped with computers, of which over 80 per cent are of a high specification. There is a college-wide specification for hardware and software, and an information technology group determines the strategy for future acquisitions. The college has a rolling programme for the replacement of hardware, allowing a three-year life for computers. The ratio of full-time equivalent students to machines for the college as a whole is 9.6:1. In a few cases, the poor standard of some equipment is inhibiting the students' development of information technology skills. There are also insufficient computers which students may use at times convenient to them in the learning centres. Some of the information technology facilities used for outreach delivery of community education in secondary school locations are unsatisfactory. Students have access to compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database titles through a network on the Blossomfield campus and two machines in each of the smaller sites. There is increasing use of the Internet and this facility is being made more widely available at Blossomfield. The availability of computers in staff rooms is limited.

87 Library and learning centres are located on each of the three main sites. These are effectively overseen by a single manager. A range of learning resources is held, including books, periodicals, videos, slide sets, and CD-ROM titles. Recent efforts to improve the bookstock in business studies and administration, modern languages, English and adult basic education are in line with needs identified during specialist inspections. The total number of books held, at nearly 27,000, represents a ratio of 6.6 per full-time equivalent student. Card-operated photocopiers are available for students' use on all sites. The 193 private study places in the library are insufficient to meet demand. The library budget has increased to £19 per full-time equivalent student. At least 48 per cent of the library budget is delegated to curriculum areas. The opening hours of the library at the main sites are adequate during the week in term time but there is no weekend opening. The libraries are open during vacation, some by prior arrangement.

Accommodation

88 The college has an accommodation strategy as part of its strategic plan, and this is at an early stage of implementation. It is proposed to replace the demountables at the Blossomfield site and enlarge one of the main blocks there. There is a committed accommodation and site management team. Members of this team regard themselves as suppliers of a service to the college. They use internal performance indicators for their activities. A site services group meets regularly. There are policies on such issues as the reporting of faults and emergency procedures outside working hours.

89 The condition of many of the buildings ranges from acceptable to good. The college has made major improvements to much of its accommodation through careful planning and good management. A 10-year maintenance programme has been informed by internal reviews and the advice of external consultants. The programme aims to minimise the costs of routine maintenance. There is a rolling programme of room refurbishment to a standard specification. There has been major expenditure, particularly at Chelmsley Wood, on schemes such as re-roofing, re-wiring and fire alarm systems. The college is generally clean and tidy.

90 The match of the accommodation to courses is variable. Generally, the accommodation at Sharman's Cross and Chelmsley Wood is less adaptable than the Blossomfield campus. There are wide variations in the size, layout and furnishing of rooms. Some rooms are of high quality and these include the recently-refurbished business studies accommodation, the language centre, hairdressing salons and the ground floor of Tudor Grange House. Many classrooms are perfectly satisfactory, with the notable exception of the 40 demountable huts on the Blossomfield campus which are wholly inappropriate for the teaching and learning activities for which they are used. Other unsuitable areas include classrooms in the stable block at Tudor Grange. In some areas, such as media studies, there is a shortage of storage space. The quality and quantity of display materials throughout the college are variable. The classrooms used for health and social care courses, and the adjoining corridors, exemplify good practice in the attractive use of relevant display materials. Furniture is generally adequate but the fixed chairs in the computing and information technology rooms are unsuitable. They can restrict efficient working and can cause physical strain to those using the information technology equipment.

91 Access for students with restricted mobility has been improved by the provision of new lifts and appropriate toilets; most areas of the college are now accessible to them. The provision of staff rooms is adequate. Car parks are extensive on all sites, security lighting has been provided, and campus grounds are patrolled by contracted security staff. There is a lack of clear signing to college campuses and internal signs could be improved on all three sites. Sports facilities are limited, but there is some access to local authority facilities near Blossomfield and Chelmsley Wood. The college arranges for students to use vocational facilities outside the college, when appropriate. For example, students on the aerospace national diploma course use facilities at Coventry Airport.

92 There are regular reviews of the use of space. Several of the reviews have informed accommodation changes and room timetabling strategies. For example, more classroom space was obtained by reducing the number of sites for business studies and releasing underused engineering workshops for use by art and design classes. A timetable for the use of rooms is monitored and controlled with the aid of a computer management

system. The college recognises that further efficiency gains of space can be made and is giving consideration to a model for the optimum use of accommodation.

93 The college uses 33 outreach sites for its community education programmes, including school premises and community centres. This accommodation is generally of a suitable standard, with some exceptions. The accommodation in the franchised centres inspected was, with one exception, excellent.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

94 The particular strengths of the college are:

- an extensive range of courses and programmes, offered through varied modes of delivery
- extensive and varied links with schools and employers
- responsiveness to the needs of students in north Solihull
- the growing international dimension of the college's work
- the corporation's strong commitment to the college and its mission
- strong management and leadership, with an emphasis on collaboration and teamworking between staff
- effective internal communication at all levels
- a model for resourcing courses which has raised staff awareness of the cost of their delivery
- generally well-planned and effective teaching
- established and carefully-managed work experience for students
- good overall examination results on vocational courses and GCSE and some GCE A level programmes
- the robust quality assurance policy, which is widely supported within the college
- a commitment to staff development and its implementation.

95 If the college is to continue to strengthen its provision and raise standards it should:

- further improve the range of community education provision
- improve the implementation of the strategic plan at all levels
- continue to develop the use of the management information systems and performance indicators
- resolve problems with refectory services
- improve the attendance and retention rates of students on some courses
- improve GCE A level results in some subjects

-
- ensure greater consistency in quality assurance, particularly quality reviews
 - implement improvements to the students' charter and raise awareness of it amongst students
 - improve some accommodation.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

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

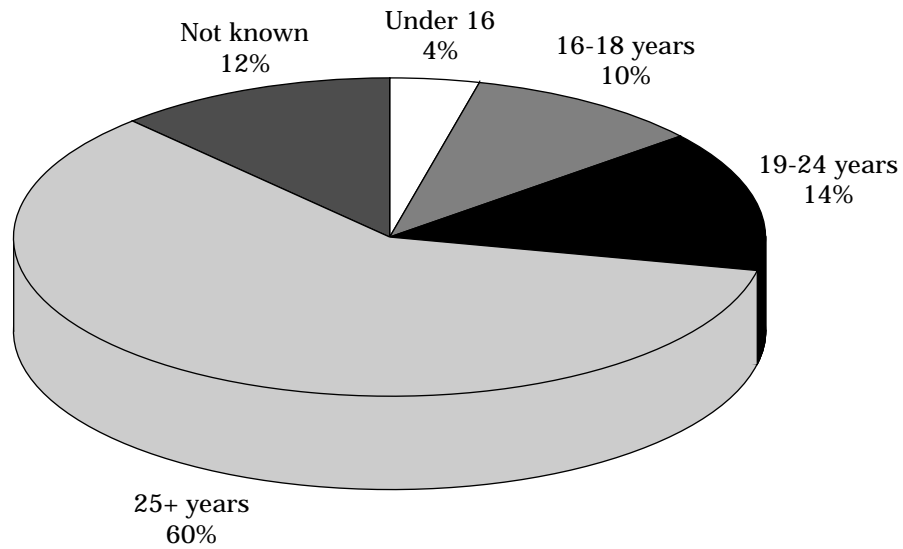
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 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

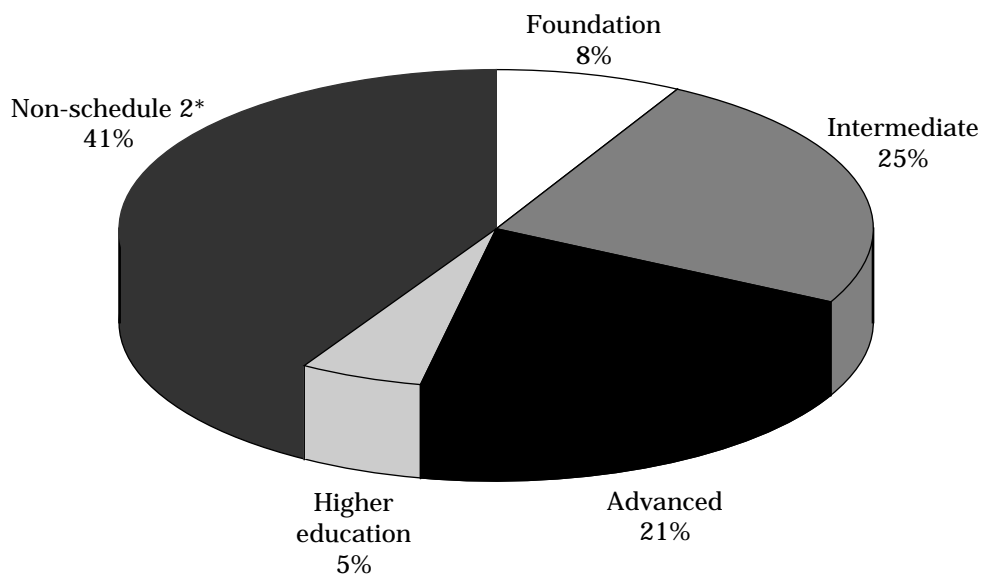
The Solihull College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 35,088

Figure 2

The Solihull College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)

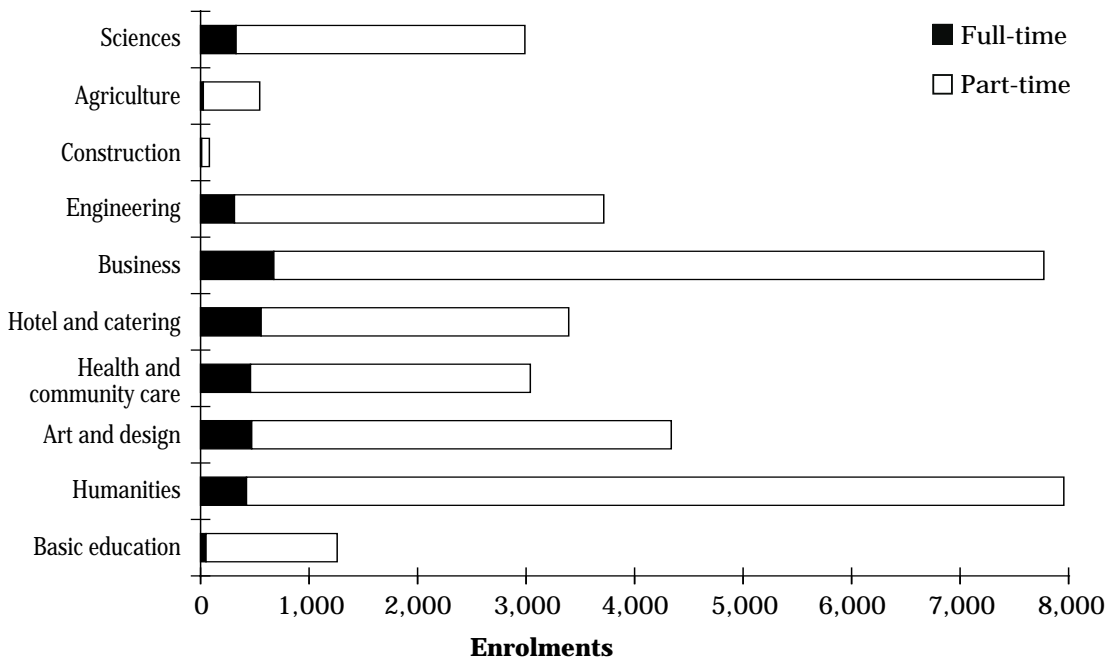


Enrolments: 35,088

* includes leisure/recreation, link courses and full-cost work.

Figure 3

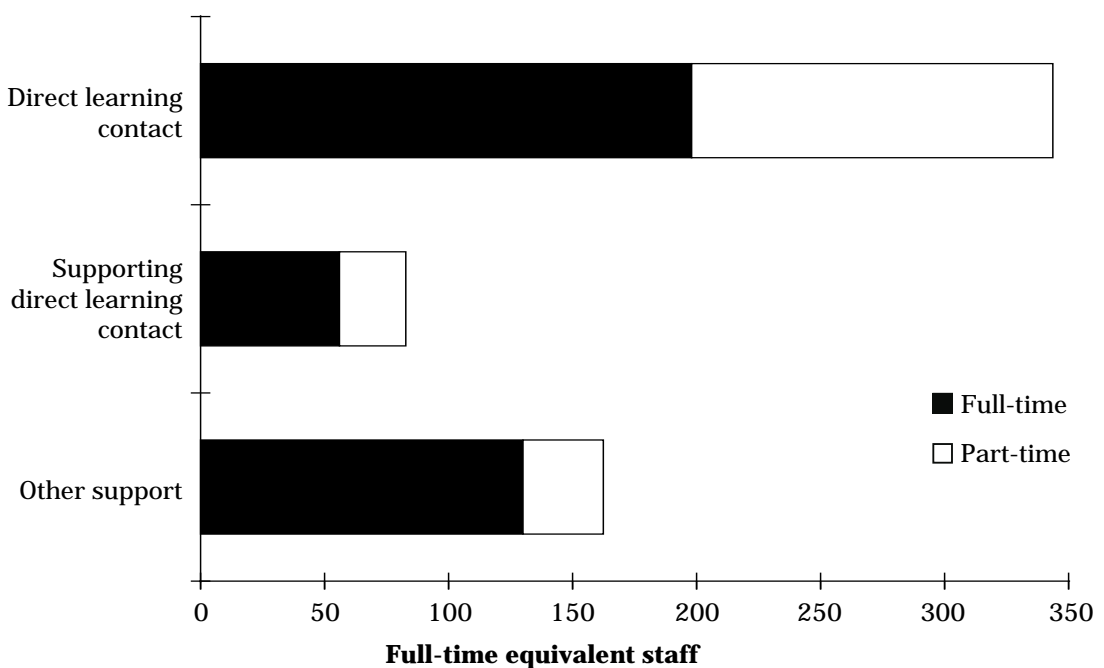
The Solihull College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 35,088

Figure 4

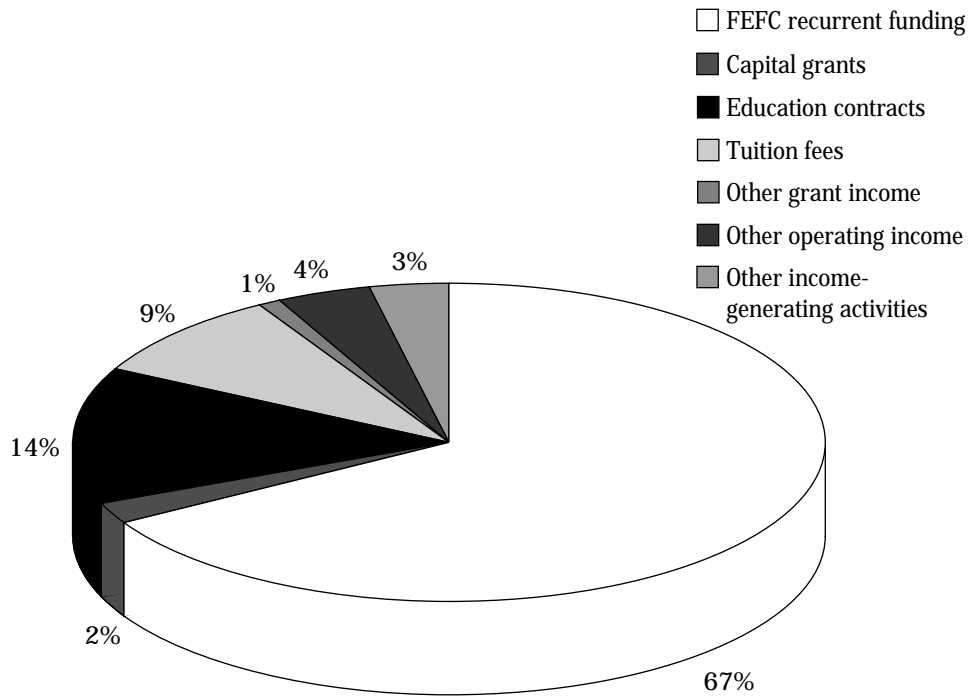
The Solihull College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 589

Figure 5

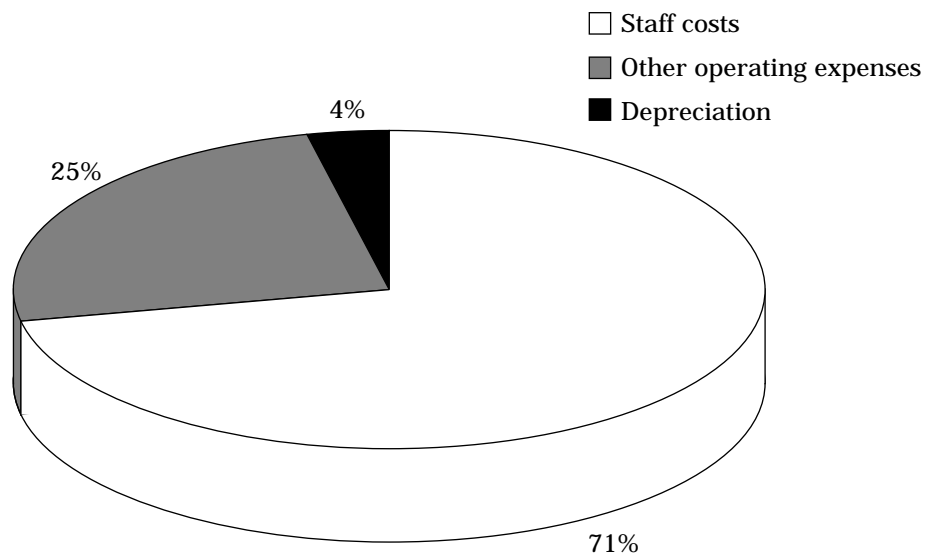
The Solihull College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £15,953,000

Figure 6

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



Expenditure: £16,043,000

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