

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**South
Birmingham
College**

March 1995

**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 FEFC's quality assessment committee.

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

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 14/95

SOUTH BIRMINGHAM COLLEGE

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected March – November 1994

Summary

South Birmingham College is a major provider of post-16 education and training. It has good links and partnerships with the local community, schools, the local training and enterprise council and higher education institutions. There is a community network especially for groups who have not usually entered further education. It has a well-researched and sound strategic plan with measurable targets. The student counselling service is effective. The college has clear standards and procedures for handling applications and queries. The quality of teaching is generally good and staff are well qualified and suitably experienced. Examination results in vocational areas are generally good. The college has recently reorganised its management structure to make it more effective. A total quality management approach has been developed which has led to improvements in a number of areas. A systematic programme of course review and development should be carried out. The college should improve cross-college communications and the information provided to parents; strengthen procedures for collecting and monitoring student destinations; update and improve equipment in a number of vocational subjects; and improve access at most college centres for people with restricted mobility.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	3	Social care	2
Information technology	2	Hairdressing	4
Construction	3	Art and design	3
Engineering	2	English and modern languages	2
Business studies	2	Community network	2
Trade union studies	1		

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	2
Responsiveness and range of provision	10
Governance and management	22
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	30
Teaching and the promotion of learning	47
Students' achievements	61
Quality assurance	75
Resources	84
Conclusions and issues	96
Figures	

INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection of South Birmingham College took place from March to November 1994. Specialist subject areas were inspected during March and May 1994. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the beginning of the autumn term and aspects of cross-college provision from 14 to 17 November 1994. Sixteen inspectors took part for a total of 73 inspector days. They visited 166 classes, examined representative samples of students' work, and held discussions with governors, college staff, students, local employers, parents, teachers from local schools and representatives of the community.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 South Birmingham College was established as Hall Green Technical College in 1960 to provide part-time courses in engineering, motor vehicle and construction studies for local apprentices. During the mid 1970s, the college rapidly developed into a regional as well as a local provider of courses. It began to diversify into full-time courses and into new curriculum areas including business and secretarial and General Certificate of Education advanced and ordinary level (GCE A and O level) work.

3 This diversification was accelerated by the need to compensate for the decline in engineering during the recession of the early 1980s, and by increasing demands for education and training from groups who had not in the past participated in further education. These included the adult unemployed, women returners, minority ethnic groups and people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The largest proportion of the college's students now comes from or near to the southern and south eastern inner city areas of Birmingham. These are areas characterised by social deprivation. There is high unemployment (37 per cent in Sparkbrook), a deteriorating housing stock, and over half of school age children are in receipt of free school meals. In the inner city wards, minority ethnic groups make up between 60 and 70 per cent of the population. In April 1993, the college changed its name to South Birmingham College in order to reflect more accurately the area from which it attracts students.

4 The college is one of eight further education colleges in Birmingham serving a population of just over one million people within the city's boundary. The college operates on five major sites, geographically dispersed along the southbound A34.

5 In 1993-94, the college enrolled 9,866 students and of these 2,206 attended full time. The college annual monitoring survey translated these enrolments into 3,234 full-time equivalents. Fifty-two per cent of all enrolments and 72 per cent of full-time enrolments are from minority ethnic groups. Women comprise 47 per cent of enrolments

6 There are not many women and members of ethnic minority groups in some of the college's programme areas, for example, construction,

although in other areas the college has achieved considerable success in redressing the ethnic and gender imbalance. The average age of the students has been increasing and now almost half the students are over 25. Percentage enrolments of students by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3.

7 In 1993-94, the college employed 172 full-time teachers, and 36.5 full-time equivalent part-time teachers. There were 145 full-time equivalent support staff. A profile of staff, expressed as full-time equivalents is shown in figure 4. Courses are taught in 15 curriculum divisions, grouped into four faculties. A small group of middle managers has responsibility for cross-college curriculum and administrative support. The college has a senior management team of nine people who hold faculty or other managerial responsibilities.

8 The college's mission is to provide education and training services of the highest quality. It aims to make its provision as accessible and flexible as possible to ensure that it meets the needs of the socially, economically and culturally diverse community it serves.

9 The strategic aims of the college include working towards the national targets for a qualified workforce; promoting overseas links; improving cost effectiveness through greater internal efficiency; and the generation of external income.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

10 The strategic plan is firmly committed to growth and the college succeeded in achieving a 21 per cent growth in enrolments between September 1993 and September 1994. Staff are aware of national issues including the requirements of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and the national targets for education and training, although at the time of the inspection, teachers' detailed knowledge of the latter was variable. Heads of divisions have been set relevant enrolment targets which they convey to their staff through meetings throughout the year.

11 The college has developed education and training programmes appropriate to the needs of its students. A community council, established to advise the college on its response to the needs of the local community, has helped the college to develop an extensive outreach provision for the community, which students value. Other initiatives include a recent conference in conjunction with Birmingham City Council and local organisations on the economic regeneration of the local community. The college has been involved in partnership bidding for the single regeneration budget.

12 The college actively participates in the South Birmingham Business Education Partnership and provides it with free office accommodation. The partnership has been a significant factor in developing school links over the past few years. Originally starting with nine secondary schools,

these links now extend to 42 primary schools. There are effective links with schools at key stage four and at post-16 in the range of curriculum areas offered by the college. Links with special schools are also strong, and the college is committed to ensuring that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make appropriate progress. The college belongs to the South Birmingham local learning partnership which has recently undertaken a comprehensive mapping exercise of the provision of post-16 education and training. Conferences have been held for business and community groups to help to determine the priorities for training and education and to identify, for example, adult training opportunities in local schools.

13 The college has expanded its franchised higher education provision, including arrangements with the University of Central England through its accredited college status. There are courses run jointly with the university; for example, management courses leading to the award of a degree in business administration.

14 The college has successful links with the Birmingham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) in a variety of curriculum areas including construction, business administration, management, motor vehicle engineering and horticulture. The TEC has commended the college's commitment to promoting access for women and minority ethnic groups. The TEC's and the local authorities' labour market analysis has been used in developing the college's strategic plan.

15 Some employer links have proved successful especially in work placement arrangements for students on care courses. Others, such as construction, are in need of improvement. A college charter for employers has recently been published. This places an emphasis on meeting the education and training needs of local employers, but it has not yet been circulated to employers. The college has identified weaknesses in its formal links with local employers and several initiatives have been developed to overcome these. The creation of a new post of assistant principal for business development has led to a draft plan for the establishment of an industrial liaison team. It is hoped that this liaison will assist in identifying industrial and commercial trends in service sector industries like tourism and leisure. Collaboration with the city council and community groups has identified training opportunities in the textile industry. Other initiatives include care work in the community and training for interpreters in community languages for work at airports. The college is seeking ways of developing more full-cost recovery training courses for local industry.

16 Links with parents are variable in quality. Community representatives and parents of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have a high regard for the quality of the college's provision and pastoral support. Other parents are less satisfied with the level of information and support which is provided.

17 The college offers a wide range of pre-vocational, vocational, general education and training courses which are matched to local needs. They range from basic education to higher education and are available in different attendance patterns to meet students' requirements. Many of the courses lead to the award of a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). In recent years there has been a considerable change from a curriculum dominated by construction and engineering to one that is broadly based and includes social care, languages, business, management, information technology, science, and creative studies. There are a range of GCE A level and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects. General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) at intermediate and advanced level are offered in business, care and construction. The college's continuing reputation in construction is shown by its designation as the national centre for conservation in terracotta brick and tile work.

18 The college Euro unit has established productive links with a number of other European organisations and regularly receives visits from overseas groups of college principals, lecturers, and students from a wide range of vocational areas. The unit has supported visits by students and staff to a number of countries and, with the aid of European funding, work experience has been provided in Holland for students in the motor vehicle division. Members of staff have visited their counterparts in Portugal, Romania and Slovenia to discuss matters of common interest, including building restoration and conservation. The college has undertaken a 'Euroform' project on the conservation of historic buildings with partners in France and Portugal, which has led to the development of a specialist course in the construction craft area, as well as work on behalf of national agencies. The college is a regional centre for trade union studies. It was the first college in Birmingham to provide weekend college facilities, subsequently funded by the TEC. It is delivering courses on company premises and has run 'taster' courses in construction and social care. A special project concerning a school for autistic children has involved the college in providing a training scheme for care assistants at the school. A recent TEC-funded initiative is the bridge programme to help post-16 students, who have few examination achievements and low skills, to make realistic career choices.

19 A new information centre which deals with personal, postal and telephone queries was opened in September 1994. It is well designed and located close to the college entrance. Early indications show that it is attracting a significant number of enquiries. The centre is undertaking a detailed analysis of these as part of its market research and this is now being extended to other centres of the college where there are smaller information areas. Information about courses is also available in community outreach centres.

20 A marketing group meets regularly to review activities. This group consists of a representative from each of the curriculum divisions, the

marketing director and the assistant principal for business development. A series of pre-enrolment and continuing course advertising is undertaken at various times throughout the year, and innovative ideas are being considered, such as advertising in local cinemas. The marketing plan acknowledges that markets are changing rapidly and that better information is needed to manage growth effectively. A full marketing audit is to be undertaken to determine the demands of the community. The marketing budget is £100,000 and a review of opportunities for sponsorship has been carried out for items such as college newspapers and courses brochures.

21 The college has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and code of practice which covers gender, race and support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The reorganisation of the academic board has led to a delay in re-establishing the equal opportunities subcommittee but a control group chaired by a vice-principal meets monthly. The college should review its equal opportunities procedures in order to ensure that they are consistent with policies, especially in staff appointments. The community outreach programme is helping the college meet its equal opportunity commitments, and to achieve its aim of recruiting students from groups who do not normally enter further education. The programme offers a range of subjects at 17 different community centres. Most courses are at introductory level but there are some opportunities for students to progress to higher levels, for example, in computing. The programmes are responsive to the expressed needs of the local community and are taught using English and community languages. The programme expanded considerably last year and has been successful in recruiting adult students from minority ethnic groups, of whom 75 per cent are women.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

22 The corporation has 20 members, including the principal. There are four women, and three members from minority ethnic groups. Ten governors represent business, industry and the professions and there is a nominee of the Birmingham TEC. Representatives from staff, students and community groups are also members. Two corporation meetings are held each term and they are well attended. Meetings have comprehensive and well-presented reports and minutes. A range of subcommittees exist, for planning and resources, employment, senior staff remuneration, academic board, management systems review, and estates. Governors are committed and highly supportive of the college. They have a good working relationship with the senior management and each division in the college has a link governor. Governors see their role as strategic and look to college management to achieve the implementation of the strategic plan and the operational success of the institution. During the last 18 months the governors have concentrated their efforts on finance, personnel, estates, and audit. The college has drawn on the individual expertise of governors to provide skills in personnel and financial management.

23 The college has a well-developed and well-researched five-year strategic plan. The plan is comprehensive and has clear, measurable goals for the short and medium term. The key objective of the plan is to increase recruitment from the community. The college commissioned a consultant to survey the needs of local employers in order to inform the strategic thinking of the college. The annual planning process involved contributions from each area of the college. A draft strategic plan was produced and circulated to all staff for consideration. This extensive involvement ensures that the plan is well supported by staff. Governors considered and agreed the final version of the strategic plan, and it will be reviewed and amended at the end of the academic year.

24 A new management structure was introduced in September 1994. The college senior management team consists of the principal, two vice-principals, with responsibility for resources and development, respectively, and two assistant principals with cross-college responsibilities for staff and student services and business developments. The director of corporate services who acts as clerk to the corporation, and four heads of faculty, one of whom is an acting head, are also members of the team. The 15 divisions of the college responsible for teaching the programme areas are organised into four faculties. As the new management structure has only just been implemented it was not possible to judge its effectiveness at the time of inspection. Responsibilities for implementing and monitoring policies relating to equal opportunities, health and safety, student support and environmental issues are clearly allocated.

25 The 15 divisions are managed effectively. Roles and responsibilities have been clearly allocated for different aspects of the divisions' work and, in many areas, teamwork includes part-time teachers. There are a number of directors who manage major cross-college support activities and lead teams of staff drawn from various parts of the college. The college recognises that it should strengthen cross-college communication and co-ordination. A staff newsletter is produced monthly.

26 The academic board of the college has recently been reconstituted and is establishing subcommittees with responsibility for monitoring equal opportunities and the implementation of the college charter within the curriculum. The college is aware from earlier specialist inspections of the need to develop a systematic process of curriculum review and development. The old academic board lacked a clear focus and was seen as ineffective.

27 The recurrent funding allocation for 1994-95 yields an average unit of funding of £17.28 based on 409,387 units. The median average unit of funding for general further education colleges is £18.17. Summaries of the college's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The finances within the college are controlled centrally. Monthly summaries of budget allocations are given to divisions

and other sections within the college. Staff pay budgets are held centrally by the vice-principal (resources). Budgets for supplies and services, and 50 per cent of the staff development budget are devolved to heads of division. The basis for allocation is historical but is influenced by student numbers within a programme area. Budgetary control methods are in operation, and managers receive monthly summaries of expenditure. The present reports are not easy to read and understand without considerable knowledge of and familiarity with the college's numerical coding system. Overall the college keeps a tight control on finances with the aim of ensuring a surplus. It is in the early stages of implementing unit costing.

28 The college has a management information system which provides information in a variety of areas, including admissions, enrolments, examinations, finance and personnel. It also produces various types of information on students including age, gender, ethnicity, and lists by course tutor. The management information system should be made more readily available to senior managers and others within the college. A networked telephone and data communication system has recently been installed on the main campus and it is to be linked shortly to other centres of the college. This should help to meet some of the problems of disseminating management information.

29 Attendance registers are monitored daily and information entered into the management information system. This enables the production of periodic reports on student attendance so that, where appropriate, action can be taken over undue absence. All curriculum divisions have enrolment targets. The college has recently developed a series of performance indicators which include improved retention rates, student achievement, and productivity. The targets are well known to senior staff but less so amongst other staff. The college should improve its procedures for collecting and monitoring student destinations on completion of courses.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

30 The management of students' services has recently been reorganised, and cross-college support now has a higher priority. A new director of students' services takes up post in January 1995 with responsibility for counselling, careers, admissions and nurseries. He will work with academic divisions to co-ordinate policy on tutorials and induction. Three full-time careers officers have been appointed, counselling services have been expanded and the information and careers centres have been brought together at Hall Green. A new learning development centre, adjacent to the library, with drop-in access for students, and tutorial support for study skills, has just been opened. In the past, guidance and support for students has owed much to the informal links between divisions and student services. These links have varied in quality.

31 Prospective students receive information through a general college brochure, a range of curriculum area prospectuses and an occasional

college newspaper which advertises courses and news about the college. There is some use of community languages in this literature, and the college advertises in local newspapers. Many students obtain information by word of mouth. The college has strong links with the community and aims to attract new students and widen the market for education and training. Both community representatives and students stress the college's positive image. The diversification of the curriculum has widened opportunity and this is beginning to be appreciated. Some local head teachers commented on an increase in the number of pupils in their final year of compulsory schooling applying to South Birmingham College rather than to other colleges.

32 The college has clear procedures for handling applications and queries and adheres to a maximum of 10 days in responding to initial inquiries, as laid down in its charter. All full-time students receive an interview and an opportunity to visit the college. Application and reference forms are clearly designed and there is some use of community languages in the former. There is a strategic drive to increase participation in education and training by members of the local community, particularly by those from minority ethnic groups. There is clear guidance to interviewers on the need to avoid conscious or unconscious bias in dealing with applicants. Inspectors found that, particularly in trade union studies, modern languages, and engineering, the pre-admission guidance worked well and helped students to make well-informed choices. Students commented positively upon the quality of course information, the helpfulness of interviews and the college's responsive nature.

33 The college introduced continuous enrolment in the 1993-94 academic year and now about 1,000 enrolments take place before late August. There is a weekly open-day, and teaching staff are available on a rota throughout the summer period to deal with queries from prospective students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, whose needs are identified at application, are referred to heads of division to ensure that their particular needs can be met. All full-time students complete a personal learning agreement. Voluntary diagnostic Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit screening in literacy and numeracy for full-time students was introduced in 1994. At the time of the inspection only six of the 15 divisions had returned the results of these tests. Consequently, the college was not in a position to evaluate the overall need. Most part-time students were not covered by this screening.

34 Women with dependent children are helped by the good-quality nurseries at Hall Green and the Digbeth Centre. The Digbeth Centre is funded in association with the Midland Bank. The college has recently opened a 50-place nursery at the Hall Green centre, doubling the places available. The nurseries provide a total of 55 places on a morning, afternoon and whole-day basis at very low cost to students. A small number of staff, who pay higher charges, have placed children in the nurseries.

There is a six-month waiting list, particularly for the under-three year olds, and some prospective students, for example, women wishing to enrol on construction courses, have been deterred by the lack of nursery places. The senior management is aware of the shortage. The college has made a successful bid to the European Social Fund for support for child care with a particular emphasis upon vocational areas. It is a good feature that the nurseries are used for work experience and for NVQ coursework.

35 The college is in the early stages of developing a universal policy for the accreditation of prior learning. The quality manual has clear statements about accreditation of prior learning entitlement and each division is to have an adviser with suitable Training and Development Lead Body training. The accreditation of prior learning is not used uniformly across the college but good practice was found in business administration where the identification of areas for exemption was well advanced and in art and design, where clear responsibilities for its identification had been assigned. Some students reported that the failure to evaluate their existing information technology skills had led to needless repetition of work in this area.

36 All students received a common induction entitlement for the first time in September 1994 and this is operating fairly well, though with some variations in practice. The quality of induction materials varied between divisions. Particularly good examples were found in engineering, care, and business studies and in construction where staff have developed an induction handbook. Students reported that induction had given them a clear understanding of the nature and demands of their courses, including assessment. For example, some care students had previously been unaware that they would have to study a modern foreign language. Students who had changed their subject choice early in the autumn term had been assisted in making these transfers. A well-produced students' handbook gives succinct information on equal opportunities, health and safety, and student services. There is clear guidance on how to seek advice, information on the conduct expected of students, and complaints procedures. Most students had received the handbook although some thought that it could be written in plainer English. A shortened version, containing key handbook and charter information, was available in outreach centres.

37 All full-time students have a personal tutor and receive a tutorial of two hours per week. Part-time students are also entitled to tutorials. Tutorials enable each student to complete an action plan, and to have an individual meeting at least once a term. They also give assistance with records of achievement, examination techniques, study skills and a range of personal issues such a first aid and health awareness. Students reported that they met tutors regularly and generally found tutorials helpful. In practice, the interpretation of tutorial policy has varied markedly between divisions. For example, some but not all, offer extended tutorials to part-time students. Tutorials were particularly effective in engineering and

trade union studies. In business administration, personal tutorials were held in classrooms, weakening the opportunity for one-to-one tutorials. The recently-appointed heads of faculty see consistency of practice in tutorials as a major priority. The development of a tutors' handbook should help them to achieve this.

38 The college's counselling service is headed by a full-time counsellor, supported by a team of staff of mixed gender and ethnicity. It is well attuned to students' needs. All members of the team have received training in counselling and most undertake some teaching. The use of the service is thoroughly documented and there is a clear statement of categories of enquiry. The number of clients who have used the service has doubled in the last three years. Other centres have counselling provision, usually with counsellors visiting once or twice a week. The effectiveness of this service is governed to some extent by the relationship with tutors. It was reported that in practice these were variable and much depended upon the approach of individual divisions. There are effective links with external agencies such as social services and the centre for the unemployed. The main challenge is how to meet the rapidly-rising demand effectively and to improve the quality of support at centres other than Hall Green. Students in these centres were less aware of the availability of the counselling service although some useful initiatives have been taken to remedy this; for example the establishing of a counselling room at the Digbeth Centre. In contrast, awareness of counselling support in outreach centres was high.

39 The college assists in providing accommodation for students. It produces a brief and useful guidance leaflet and keeps a register of approved accommodation. Accommodation was provided for 82 students last year and there are already early indications of increased demand in 1994-95. Sensitive issues, for example, assistance in finding accommodation for students who have left home following domestic disputes, are well handled.

40 The counselling service also carries responsibility for the allocation of the government's access fund and the substantial college access fund of £130,000 for this year. An access panel, representing college management, administrators and students meets to judge applications. College access monies are not paid directly to students but are costed either as fee waivers or as transfers to divisions; for example, for the provision of equipment for students. Examination fees are paid for students who are on unemployment benefit.

41 The new learning development centre offers support for general study skills, numeracy and information technology. The centre has only been open since September and its management, organisation and liaison are still developing. Determined efforts to record the numbers of students seeking support are made but this information is not complete. Staff are available on a rota basis to give individual assistance to students. There are no simplified manuals to help students to use computers and there is

no viewer to allow access to video-help programmes. Information technology staff provided some teaching support up to half-term but this has now been withdrawn. Staff at the centre believe this kind of support is still needed. There is a rich resource of numeracy support packages for students from foundation level upwards. Close collaboration with vocational areas has led to imaginative developments in numeracy and information technology support, for example, on GNVQ and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses. There are mathematics dictionaries in community languages. There is a mathematics centre which has computers and numeracy support packages available to students. Improved shelving here would assist storage. A useful survey of study skills needs has been carried out for some courses and reported to tutors. This should assist in promoting dialogue between the centre and course managers, and enable support from the centre to match more closely students' needs. It would also help to advance students skills if the relationship between the centre, the mathematics centre and teaching staff were kept under continuing review.

42 The careers service has developed rapidly within the recent appointment of a head of service plus two assistants. It is integrated with the information centre at Hall Green where there is a careers library and software packages for careers guidance. Careers advisers also visit other college sites on a regular basis. Some relevant materials are housed at Digbeth. The new careers policy sets out clear procedures of support for students from before they enter until they leave the college. For example, all students have access to careers advice within five days of enrolment. Questionnaires completed by personal tutors, following a tutors' awareness raising session, indicated the need for more up-to-date information about local labour markets. Careers staff have also given group talks in some curriculum areas, covering such issues as higher education grants. Job vacancies are advertised at the Hall Green centre. There are good links with the Birmingham Careers Service. Students are also able to obtain careers support from local council initiatives at some outreach centres. The careers service has already begun to evaluate its use by gender, ethnicity and curriculum area. This reveals wide differences between parts of the college, the reasons for which should be pursued. Since February 1994, 650 students have received vocational guidance.

43 The college has a well-developed records of achievement policy, managed by a co-ordinator. There is clear information on the entitlement, allocation and availability of record of achievement documents and there is staff development for tutors to help students in completing them. Procedures are accredited annually through the TEC-supported partnership arrangements with schools. Records of achievements are carried forward from schools or, if necessary, begun anew at college. Many mature students, who bring few formal qualifications with them, complete records of achievement and this assists them when they seek entry to higher education or employment. A small sample of records of

achievements was inspected and found to be of a good standard. The achievement of records of achievements and action plans varied between divisions. They were good in business, art and design, and hairdressing. The quality of records of achievement is to be reviewed college wide in order to promote best practice. A higher education compact certificate is also available.

44 There are clear procedures to deal with students' absences, linked to disciplinary codes where consistently poor attendance is defined as unsatisfactory conduct. Where there are three consecutive absences, letters are sent to students and personal tutors and reasons for students' absence are sought.

45 The quality assurance manual gives clear guidelines upon work placement. Detailed arrangements are handled by individual divisions. In the best practice, for example, on care courses, employers are advised of the standards expected and students are made aware of expected conduct in the workplace. Report forms on students' placement are completed. Previous attempts to co-ordinate work placements on a college-wide basis were unsuccessful due to the diversity of practice between vocational areas. There is a college-wide database of employers used on placements and a college working group has recently been established to review current practice.

46 The college has a students' union, and a sabbatical president with administrative support. A youth worker who works closely with the students' union is employed by the college to assist in the promotion of sporting and leisure activities. There is a sports hall but the low ceiling limits the range of sporting activities that can be played there. There are various activities such as a multi-gym and aerobics, as well as football, basketball, cricket and table tennis. Fund-raising events are also held to support local and national charities.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

47 Of the 166 sessions inspected, 58 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. Fourteen per cent of sessions were judged to have more weaknesses than strengths. The following table summarises the grades given to the sessions inspected:

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCSE A/AS level		1	7	1	4	0	13
GCSE		1	5	3	2	0	11
GNVQ		0	3	3	0	0	6
NVQ		1	22	14	11	2	50
Other		10	47	25	4	0	86
Total		13	84	46	21	2	166

48 Most students follow coherent programmes, with clear aims and objectives, which meet their needs. Teaching sessions are usually well planned and effectively managed. Good use is made of a variety of teaching methods and resources. The strengths of teaching and learning clearly outweighed weaknesses in business studies, brickwork, building services and construction technology, community outreach provision, computing, engineering, English, and social care. The excellent teaching and learning in trade union studies was of particular note. In all other areas of the curriculum, with the exception of hairdressing, there was a balance of strengths and weaknesses. The best work was characterised by the commitment, enthusiasm and enjoyment of teachers and students. Clearly-defined tasks provided good opportunities for students to contribute actively to the session, to work together and sometimes to take the lead. In less successful sessions, lack of up-to-date accommodation, equipment or resources sometimes limited the range of learning opportunities available. Other features of poorer sessions included the slow pace of the teaching, the lack of challenge, over-reliance on inputs from the teacher, and, in a few cases, late arrival by students and low attendance. Limited provision of opportunities for developing information technology skills was noted in business, construction technology, English, hairdressing and science. Particularly effective use of information technology was seen in the preparation of some assignments in social care.

49 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were successfully introduced into mainstream courses in computing. In a session taught by the hairdressing department for a supported learning group of seven students, a variety of teaching aids were used to teach colour coding. The students participated in an exercise which clearly developed core skills and manual dexterity.

50 Initial assessment to identify basic levels of literacy and numeracy skills took place in a number of curriculum areas, including business and engineering. Good practice was seen in the use of learning support materials in business, construction finishes and mechanical trades, carpentry and joinery, computing and English for speakers of other languages. There was evidence that some students, for example, in engineering courses, were reluctant to make use of the learning support available. Students' progress was monitored effectively and appropriately in art, craft and photography, business management and administration, computing, construction finishes, mechanical trades and technology, engineering and social care. The assessment and recording of students' progress in brickwork, carpentry and joinery would benefit from better organisation and greater objectivity. The quality of feedback to students on their achievement and progress was variable; in science, for example, feedback was limited; whereas, in engineering and languages it was often constructive and useful.

51 Lecturers in art, craft and photography were successful in establishing a rapport with their students and in teaching the curriculum to students with different levels of prior attainment and competence. Poor resources in art contributed to the students being insufficiently challenged, specifically because of the lack of opportunity to engage in three-dimensional construction and in certain crafts. The emphasis in both subject areas was on technical competence, and there were few opportunities for students to engage in critical appraisal of their achievement in the wider context of art or photographic practice. All of the students observed were attentive to, and engaged in, their work.

52 Students in business, management and administration studies responded readily to the challenge of the tasks set. They adjusted to the demands of working in different contexts, selecting appropriate methods and effectively organising the resources they required. Work was generally sustained with a sense of commitment and enjoyment. Where appropriate, students helped one another. However, at the time of the specialist inspection, GNVQ sessions were hindered by a lack of learning materials and the model office for NVQ business administration was poor. In trade union studies, tutors were able to bring illustrations from their own experience to enlighten their teaching. Teaching techniques were varied, lively and interesting and handouts, usually from Trade Union Congress materials, were helpful to the learning process. Students responded positively and often took the lead in discussions. Throughout the programmes, students have access to effective tutorial support, personal counselling and guidance.

53 Tutors on community outreach courses had warm and effective working relationships with students, providing them with individual attention and encouragement. In a lesson on computing, for example, the tutor guided students working effectively in small groups as they used wordprocessing and computer graphics, and a range of information gathering, collation, presentation and editing skills, to compile a booklet of guidance for future students. Courses had coherent programmes suited to the needs of adults. Tutors were knowledgeable in their subject and used a range of teaching approaches. Nearly all of the work was suitably paced and challenging. In some cases, however, poor accommodation, equipment and teaching materials limited the effectiveness of teaching. Particular attention was paid to English language development for the high proportion of students whose first language was not English, and many staff taught effectively using both English and community languages. Some tutors gave informal feedback on students' assignments in the early stages of introductory courses in order to build students' confidence. The majority of tutors were aware of students' achievements but some did not keep written records of students' progress.

54 Construction management and technology sessions were generally well planned and presented. Most students were involved in questioning

and discussion. However, there was a lack of experimental work in some modules and information technology was poorly integrated into the curriculum. In construction craft finishes and in mechanical trades, standards were generally high. Students experienced a variety of teaching and learning methods. They were motivated, attentive and enjoyed working to clearly-defined written and practical tasks. Industrial projects were of a good standard. The pace of work and level of challenge in some classes was inappropriate, and there was an over emphasis on teacher direction. In a few lessons, there was poor preparation and time management. In brickwork, the use of a teaching pack ensured that all groups covered the basic theory and job-knowledge elements of the courses leading to NVQs. The quality of this learning material should enable students to maintain progress towards their primary learning objective. However, staff should keep this method of teaching under review to avoid an over-rigid approach to teaching and learning. The division of carpentry and joinery is evolving and workshop space is being relocated. The current provision is not sufficiently demanding for students. The continuing development of standard teaching packs and student learning support material should improve the learning experience within this division. The safety footwear policy was not followed by staff or students and safety notices were not evident.

55 In engineering and motor vehicle studies the high-quality teaching in classroom and workshop environments, from which students undoubtedly benefited, was offset by the lack of opportunity for full-time students to undertake work experience on employers' premises. High standards were reached in the assignments submitted and in their assessment by staff. Learning support for weaker students was not fully effective.

56 In science, several aspects of good practice were evident in the classes. Individual sessions were well prepared and had a logical structure. Relationships in classes were good and students responded positively to questions. Practical activities were included in all classes. There were, however, significant variations. In biology there was good use of learning materials devised in the college. In physics, the pace, variety and challenge of the work were generally good. In chemistry, students were sometimes insufficiently challenged. For example, in a session on electrolysis, although the content and structure of the session were appropriate, the expectations of what students could achieve were low, the pace of the work was undemanding, and students worked unnecessarily in pairs. In many classes, students received limited feedback on their progress.

57 Students in most computing sessions were well motivated, particularly when they were involved in practical activity. The programmes followed were coherent, and there were regular assessments of an appropriate standard. The better whole-group sessions involved good interaction between students and the member of staff, with frequent use of questions to which the students responded well. Several examples were seen of

effective use of learning support materials. A minority of sessions contained less well-motivated students whose responses were more limited. Just over one-quarter of the sessions were disrupted by the late arrival of students.

58 In social care, good-quality teaching and learning was assured by a close match of objectives to effective classroom methods which included excellent use of discussion and small group work. There was a good blend of theory and practice. The commitment and enthusiasm of staff overcame the detrimental impact of accommodation and mediocre or poor resources. In hairdressing, there was a wide range of provision which showed serious weaknesses: students were not challenged and not working at speed; there was a limited range of teaching and learning strategies; class sizes were generally low due to absence; and students themselves requested more demonstration and less practice work on each other and on hairdressing blocks. Most second-year practical classes lacked industrial realism. Following the appointment of new management to this area, a further inspection took place during the week of the team inspection. Several improvements were found, including the development of flexible, modular learning programmes and packages, effective induction and the establishment of timetabled tutorials, formal procedures for work placements and internal verification. However, serious weaknesses remained in the teaching in the classroom, the key issue being the failure to ensure that professional standards, practices and disciplines are integral to the learning process.

59 Sessions inspected in GCSE English language and literature, and GCE A level literature were well prepared and presented. Teachers had clear objectives and shared them with students. There were sufficient set texts and handouts to support the chosen teaching approach, whether this was to the whole class, individuals or small groups. Lessons were well structured and there was a high level of student involvement. The atmosphere in the classes was purposeful, and there was good interaction between teachers and students. The quality of teaching was reflected in students' written work, which was thorough and well presented. However, all work was handwritten and there was no evidence of an integrated programme to develop wordprocessing skills. The quality of the written work in the adult access programme was good. However, this curriculum area has a poor retention record and some of the teaching groups are small.

60 In modern foreign languages and English for speakers of other languages the quality of teaching and learning was generally sound. Relationships between staff and students were good. Individual lessons were carefully planned but the college has no common policy on the teaching and assessment of languages, so that practice varied widely. Schemes of work were often confined to lists of topics and/or the examination syllabus. Some outstanding teaching was seen, where

students were appropriately challenged and encouraged to explore beyond the confines of the syllabus, but in other sessions, pace and purpose were lost, as tutors engaged in over-lengthy explanations. Most sessions were very teacher-centred and not always conducted in the language being learned, so that opportunities were lost for students to hear and practise the spoken language. Generally, written work was conscientiously marked and students valued the feedback they received on their progress. However, there was no consistency between tutors in the marking of students' work.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

61 Students enjoy their studies, generally participate in their programmes and speak positively about the support they receive from staff. In the majority of curriculum areas they demonstrated levels of knowledge, skill and practical applications which were appropriate to their stage of study and the level of the course. Students from a wide range of courses spoke enthusiastically about their work and achievements. Several students commented that the college's image had improved in recent years, and that they would recommend their course and the college to others.

62 Friendly and supportive relationships are quickly established between tutors and students during the induction process. These good relationships extend to many teaching groups in the curriculum subject areas and were seen to contribute to positive outcomes for learning. Students with different levels of attainment and competence benefit in their acquisition of confidence from the rapport established with lecturers. Students are assessed for core skills in basic numeracy and literacy upon entry to full-time courses. Although there is good provision of effective learner support the college does not make use of any value-added analysis to show the extent to which students achieve progress.

63 At the time of the specialist inspections, it was noted that in some areas the poor quality or lack of availability of specialist equipment militated against students' achievement. At the Hall Green Centre, for example, it was observed that students who were not taking computer subjects could only obtain access to computer resources on a very restricted basis, or not at all. Since then, the college has constructed a new, open-access learning development centre linked to the library.

64 Learning support staff, subject specialist staff and information technology staff are all timetabled to assist students in their use of the learning development centre. A tracking system is being developed to monitor student achievement through their use of the core skills development packages that are available in the open-access centres.

65 A college-wide approach to the promotion and support of information technology has been adopted and a member of staff has been appointed to co-ordinate this. The college has a good student to workstation ratio and

most workstations are able to support current software applications. Students in all of the centres, except the Welby construction centre have access to appropriate hardware and software and groups of staff in a range of curriculum areas have been given the responsibility of extending the use of information technology. At the time of the team visit, students expressed their satisfaction with their access to facilities. During the specialist visits, students in English, hairdressing and construction crafts had no information technology within their course programmes. It was noted that some part-time students in craft and technician work in construction were not able to develop information technology skills effectively because they did not form an integral part of the work.

66 The college does not have a record of attracting high achievers at GCSE. In most curriculum areas, there are students with diverse levels of educational attainment and experience on entry. In 1993-94, the 91 students aged 16-18 entered for GCE A level examinations scored, on average 1.8 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college among the bottom 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. The college recruits large numbers of mature students who follow vocational courses. Only 17 per cent of the student enrolments are in the 16-18 age range and 71 per cent of students are enrolled on foundation and intermediate level courses. Eighty-eight per cent of the 65 students in the final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education's 1994 performance tables were successful. This places the college among the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Student attainment in the college's vocational courses is generally good with notable levels of achievement in several curriculum areas.

67 Criticisms were made in the specialist inspection of business administration that there was a lack of appropriate quality workplace simulation and that this hindered student achievement. The college has responded by providing an attractive new office administration bureau. This model office provides a range of real administrative and secretarial work experience from within the college. The work ranges from wordprocessing and database and spreadsheet requirements to telephone enquiries, photocopying and sales of disks, books and manuals. Assessments for students on NVQ levels 1 to 3 in this area are based on the bureau work. Business administration students work together effectively in groups and individually and NVQ level 3 students are linked as personal assistants to members of staff. Students' performance in external examinations are creditable given the often low level of entry, and results in business administration are in many instances above the national norms. The access to business course is successful in enabling students to gain entry to higher education. Students' achievements in RSA Examination Board (RSA) courses were good and Association of

Accounting Technicians examination results were above the national average. Entry rates to higher education improved from those of the previous year.

68 In trade union studies, the majority of learners enter the section's programmes with few qualifications. The levels of achievement in this field are high. Many students acquire the knowledge, skills and confidence that allow them to progress on to a higher level. In addition, students gain a marked degree of personal development and maturity which enables them to increase their confidence and to improve their communication skills as they become increasingly involved in managing their own learning. The section's portfolio has changed considerably in recent years and it now successfully responds to workplace representatives' achievements and future needs, and enables them to achieve their potential. Students from this curriculum area spoke about their own achievements with enthusiasm.

69 Examination success in construction was variable. In carpentry and joinery practical standards were poor. This was reflected in poor examination results at the first attempt and an advanced pass rate of only 36 per cent in 1992-93. Students were working well towards their primary learning objectives in brickwork courses within a safe and supportive atmosphere, and examination rates at the first attempt were good. A student from brickwork was successful in obtaining a City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) bronze medal. In the division of finishes and mechanical services, achievements were variable. Some students produced work of a high standard while in some practical workshops students had not developed the appropriate levels of knowledge and skill to complete their practical exercises successfully. The number of students achieving a successful outcome was modest and there were low retention rates, though entry into employment from this area was good and this affected the retention rates. In construction management, examination pass rates between 81 and 87 per cent were better than the national average.

70 Work for assessed practicals and assignments was well presented in science. GCSE results in science were poor with no subject receiving a 50 per cent pass rate. The attendance rates for most subjects were unsatisfactory. The drop-out rate from the full-time courses was 44 per cent and the attendance rate was 50 per cent. Low student numbers resulted in mixed student groups for BTEC and GCSE courses. GCE A level results were satisfactory and some high grades were obtained. Results in biology in 1994 were a marked improvement on the previous year. There was a significant improvement in the overall GCE A level results in 1993-94 although fewer students were entered than in the previous year. Pass rates of 100 per cent were obtained by students in C&G photography and C&G amenity horticulture. A student from the latter course won a BT eco-science award for organic gardening in the community.

71 The division of languages was invited by the Nuffield Foundation to be one of only seven in the country to participate in the piloting of the public service interpreter's certificate. Most students work with commitment and are generally satisfied with their language courses. For the majority of students who complete examination courses there is a successful outcome. There were good results in GCE A level Urdu with 71 per cent gaining grades A-C and an overall 100 per cent pass rate. Similar successful pass rates of 100 per cent were obtained with small numbers of entrants in GCSE Urdu, French, German, Hindi, and Modern Greek. There was flourishing provision of English for speakers of other languages with around 100 students. These students gain considerably in self-confidence and have access to information technology skills to gain accreditation. Students were acquiring skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing languages and most were making good progress. Low numbers are entered for language examinations. There are generally good results at both GCSE and GCE A level. Student written work at GCSE and GCE A level and in access programmes in English was of good quality and was well supported and assessed.

72 In hairdressing, students' achievement in practical lessons was only adequate and in some cases their skills and progress were not sufficiently advanced for the stage of the course. This was specifically so for first-year students where the course is in need of technical updating. Students were not always challenged and there were insufficient clients resulting in students often working on hairdressing practice blocks or on other students. The course had no elements of science, design, or information technology. It was also noted that a student was given a work placement in a local salon which had its own juniors and the student was given little opportunity to work on clients. Students were not achieving NVQs at an appropriate rate.

73 There is separate specialist provision for approximately 100 statemented students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The introduction of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into mainstream work has promoted individual and collective student attainment. Twenty students gained the English Speaking Board certificate this year, representing a 100 per cent success rate. Individual successes include a mature student originally referred to the college from an adult training centre who has successfully moved into an NVQ level 2 course. Large numbers of students are successfully entered in first-aid examinations. A travel training programme was initiated to give individual attention to some students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This has enabled students who previously had little or no experience of being able to travel on their own to negotiate and use public and private transport systems in order to attend the college.

74 In the community outreach programme, the students enjoyed their studies and worked purposefully in almost all classes. They were developing their skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject and

many students had improved their English language and computing skills. Students worked effectively, both individually and in groups, although, in one class, student numbers were too low for effective group work. Students spoke clearly and with enthusiasm about their achievements. Adults who had not participated in education for a long time were particularly proud of their progress.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

75 The college charter was published in time for the September enrolment of students. All members of staff and all full-time and some part-time students received a copy. During the induction period, tutors were required to work through the charter with students. Staff have a commitment to delivering quality but there is still some work to be done to ensure that all staff, students, employers and the community are fully aware of the detail of the charter commitments.

76 Since 1988, the college has been developing a total quality management approach, which includes a system of annual curriculum reviews. In 1993, this was extended to include reviews of cross-college teams, including administrative and support functions. Where quality problems are identified, groups of staff and users of the services are convened into quality circles to achieve solutions. This has led to significant improvements. College managers decided to work to achieve the British Standards (BS 5750) award and to commit themselves to achieve Investors in People status. The college director of quality assurance and the quality development team led the development of internal audits on key areas of the college's operations in the first six months of 1994. The audits were conducted by internal auditors trained in house. Internal audits now form a continuing and key aspect of the college's quality assurance system.

77 At the time of the inspection, the college had recently achieved initial certification for BS EN ISO 9002 (the former BS 5750). Quality manuals were in place covering all aspects of the college's operations and procedures. Copies are held by the team of quality leaders, who meet regularly and are responsible for ensuring that all staff are kept informed of changes to procedures. Compliance with the quality system is to be ensured through larger scale internal audits and the external assessments conducted by the British Standards Institute. It was too early to judge the full effect of the new system but indications were that staff had a good understanding of quality assurance. Agreed procedures and policies are now contained in a single, carefully-controlled framework to which all staff have access. This should achieve consistency of practice across the college. There is an effective and carefully-monitored complaints procedure. Further development is needed to incorporate policy documents produced outside the document control system, as their status is unclear.

78 College-wide surveys of student satisfaction have been conducted, the most recent focusing on the induction programme. In future, these

surveys will be the responsibility of faculty teams. Course team reviews, conducted twice a year, also include evaluations by students. There is little evidence of action plans resulting from these evaluations. The college plans to conduct surveys of employers and the local community but has not yet done so. The lack of feedback from employers in particular should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

79 The annual reviews conducted by curriculum divisions draw upon course reviews and are of variable quality. In theory, all reviews are conducted to a common format and include statements on performance indicators, responsiveness, management, quality control and resources. Actual reviews differ in their format, scope and level of detail. While some divisions make comprehensive use of the quality system, the use of performance indicators is limited or absent in some of the reviews. More attention should be paid to the setting of measurable targets, for example on retention rates, and action plans. The results of the reviews feed into an annual quality report which informs the next phase of strategic planning. However, the absence of measurable targets and performance indicators is reflected in a lack of precision in some parts of the operating statement contained within the strategic plan.

80 The college has amended its review systems in line with the Council's inspection framework and has produced an assessment of its own quality using the seven headings from the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Some of the strengths identified are still in the planning stage and some items give an over-generous analysis of the current provision. Nevertheless, the document shows evidence of the college's basically sound evaluation of its present position. The gradings which the college awarded to its provision accorded well with the findings of the inspection team.

81 The college only recently introduced an appraisal scheme. It has registered its commitment to Investors in People and has a target for achieving this by September 1995. An effective staff-development scheme includes induction for all staff, and opportunities for staff to discuss development needs in the context of divisional and college priorities. The college has plans and strategies for meeting staff-development needs. Evaluations of the effectiveness of the various activities are conducted, but collated reports are not produced. The dissemination of the outcomes of staff development takes place through the system of course team and divisional meetings. A highly-developed system of annual staff-development reviews for all staff was in place from 1989 but was replaced in 1994 by a voluntary scheme, pending the introduction of appraisal.

82 The college has a strong commitment to staff development, including support staff to which it commits just over 1 per cent of its total expenditure. The commitment to Investors in People envisages a target of 2 per cent. Fifty per cent of the total staff-development budget is now devolved to curriculum divisions. The procedures and criteria for approval of requests

and granting of funding are clear and staff understand them. A particular feature of the scheme is that staff are supported if they wish to attend college courses not directly related to their current job responsibilities. In the past two years, the major staff-development expenditure has been focused on NVQ training awards and general management development. Eighty-two per cent of full-time staff have achieved NVQ assessor awards and 15 per cent have achieved the internal verifier award. Other priorities have been teacher training, special education and information technology.

83 There is a structured three-tier system for staff development with priority support given to training needs identified in the strategic plan. There is also a planned schedule for staff to acquire teaching qualifications through RSA and C&G certificated courses. The college offers a certificate of education course for the University of Central England with two-thirds of the places available to South Birmingham College staff who have completed parts 1 and 2 of the C&G 7307 course. At the time of the team visit, 111 staff had gained Training and Development Lead Body assessor awards at D32/D33 level and a further 99 were registered. There were 23 staff holding the D34 award with a further 39 registered and two with D36 accreditation of prior learning adviser awards with 28 registered.

RESOURCES

Staffing

84 Forty-three appointments have been made since April 1994 and of these about 50 per cent were support staff. The college has well-qualified support staff, including technical support, in most areas of its operations. In making new appointments, the college has responded to weaknesses highlighted during specialist inspections; for example, the appointment of a technician in electrical/electronic engineering. The new appointments also include a director of student services, two specialist careers advisers, two information officers, an assistant librarian and three library assistants. There is a staff-induction programme, which includes input from the personnel section, but there is no staff handbook.

85 The senior management team has six men and three women. There are two tiers of curriculum managers comprising a total of 57 staff: 40 men and 17 women.

86 Staff from minority ethnic groups are represented at all levels of the college organisational structure and comprise about 13 per cent of the permanently-contracted staff and 22 per cent of the visiting teacher staff. At the time of the inspection, 98 per cent of the teaching staff had transferred to the new college contract of employment.

87 Staff in all the curriculum areas are generally well qualified and experienced for the subjects they teach. The need for some updating was identified in hairdressing and some staff providing language tuition lack a teaching qualification. Many staff have considerable industrial experience and/or postgraduate qualifications. Specialist staff in care are qualified to

teach students with severe learning difficulties, and the humanities division includes a dyslexia unit, also with well-trained staff.

88 Support staff are deployed effectively. They have the same level of opportunity for training and staff development as do teaching staff. A small team of security staff provide a friendly, welcoming and helpful service to visitors at the college's main reception. All secretarial staff have received internal training in the college's software packages and information technology staff receive updating training in new applications. The college has qualified personnel staff and also operates its own payroll system.

Equipment/learning resources

89 The provision of equipment and materials to support teaching and learning is generally adequate in quality and quantity. However, there is a need to update equipment in engineering and to improve laboratory facilities in construction. Extra microscopes are required in science, and art has no equipment for three-dimensional work. The resources for social care courses are barely adequate. The college has been asked to check the use and adequacy of the mobile fume cupboards available to the chemistry laboratory.

90 A significant amount of capital has been invested by the college in information technology. The college enjoys a generous ratio of students to computers of 8:1, with many of the information technology workstations able to support the most up-to-date software applications. A wide range of applications is available for students' use, particularly on the college network system.

91 Library services at the college are located on two sites: Hall Green and Digbeth. Considerable improvements have been made to the library service since the specialist inspections took place. In particular, a new learning development centre at Hall Green has been created which has improved the ability of the library to meet the demand for independent learning. Space for storage and staff facilities at Hall Green is limited. The number of books is small given the wide range of courses and the growing number of students for which the service must cater. The college has recognised the problem. In the past 18 months it has increased the library budget, with the result that the bookstock has increased by 22 per cent. The liaison between library staff and teachers should be improved in order to ensure that new book purchases and those books already held in stock meet students' needs. The present computerised library management system should be upgraded since it does not enable the library to control and arrange its loans of books efficiently.

Accommodation

92 Eight of the college's teaching divisions are based at the college's main Hall Green site which dates from 1960. There are four other centres:

Digbeth, 524 Stratford Road, Welby, and The Robin Hood centre each of which is the base for one or more teaching divisions.

93 The college is in the process of developing an accommodation strategy to include broad options and specific development proposals. Room use is planned centrally as part of the management information system and has been verified by checks on actual occupancy. A 10-year maintenance plan for the college has been developed.

94 Since the specialist inspections earlier in 1994, considerable efforts have been made to improve aspects of the accommodation. The main improvements at the Hall Green centre include the library, the open-access learning development centre and the office administration bureau. The student refectory is pleasant but can be overcrowded and untidy at peak meal times. The new students' common room is small. Access for those with mobility disabilities is variable. There is access to much of the Hall Green centre but it is limited in the four-storey building.

95 The 524 centre is housed in a converted former bank and retail premises. The centre provides a high-profile focal point for the college's community provision, and its popularity with the local community is such that it is often congested. Rooms have recently been refurbished. The Digbeth centre is a former school and a listed building, mainly used for trade union studies. This building has been substantially refurbished. The centre has a number of facilities including a newly-developed European information centre. The Welby centre is a former industrial complex with several large workshop areas which are ideally suited for construction craft work. The Robin Hood centre is a school building, part of which is still a school. The majority of accommodation occupied by the college is at ground floor level. Substantial refurbishment has recently been carried out and the site has a pleasant refectory. There is also a hall which is the only one the college possesses. Access for students with disabilities is limited to the ground floor areas in most of these centres. A number of college centres do not have enough space for car-parking but most are located in areas with good local transport.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

96 The strengths of the college are:

- a well-researched and sound strategic plan
- the extensive community network programme
- a good counselling service
- clear procedures for handling enquiries and applications
- generally good-quality teaching
- good examination results in most vocational areas
- recent achievement of quality assurance kitemarks
- good links with the local community, schools and higher education

-
- well-qualified and suitably experienced staff
 - effective staff development
 - recently-refurbished accommodation.

97 If the college is to succeed in achieving its aims it should:

- monitor the effectiveness of the management structure
- improve cross-college communications and information to parents
- carry out a systematic process of curriculum review and development
- improve examination results in those subjects where they are poor
- improve procedures for collecting and monitoring student destinations
- update and improve equipment in a number of vocational areas
- improve access for people with disabilities.

FIGURES

-
- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)

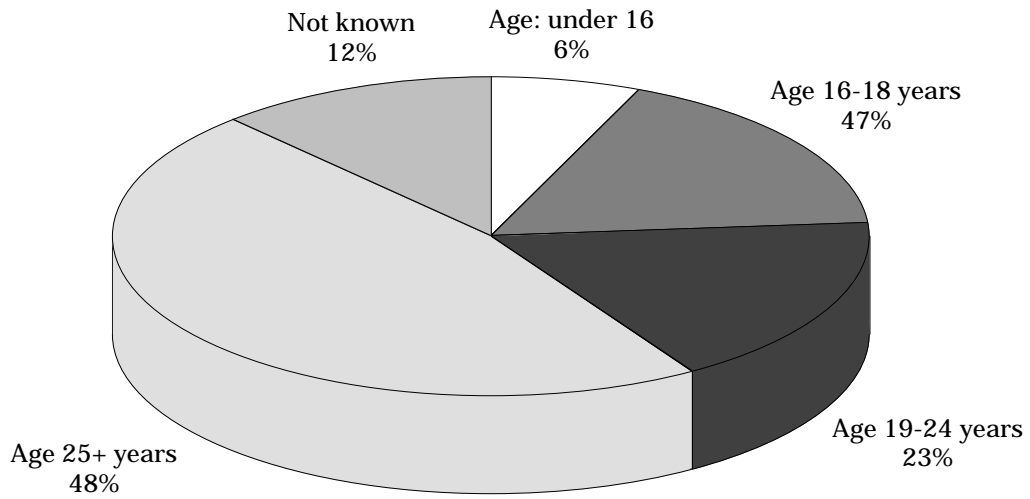
 - 5 Estimated income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Estimated expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

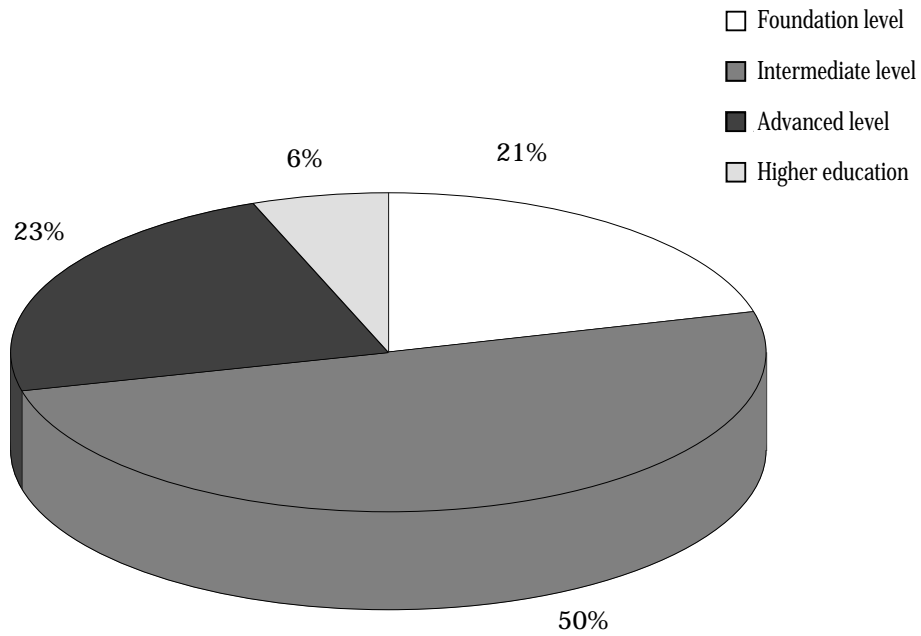
South Birmingham College: percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)



Enrolments: 9,866

Figure 2

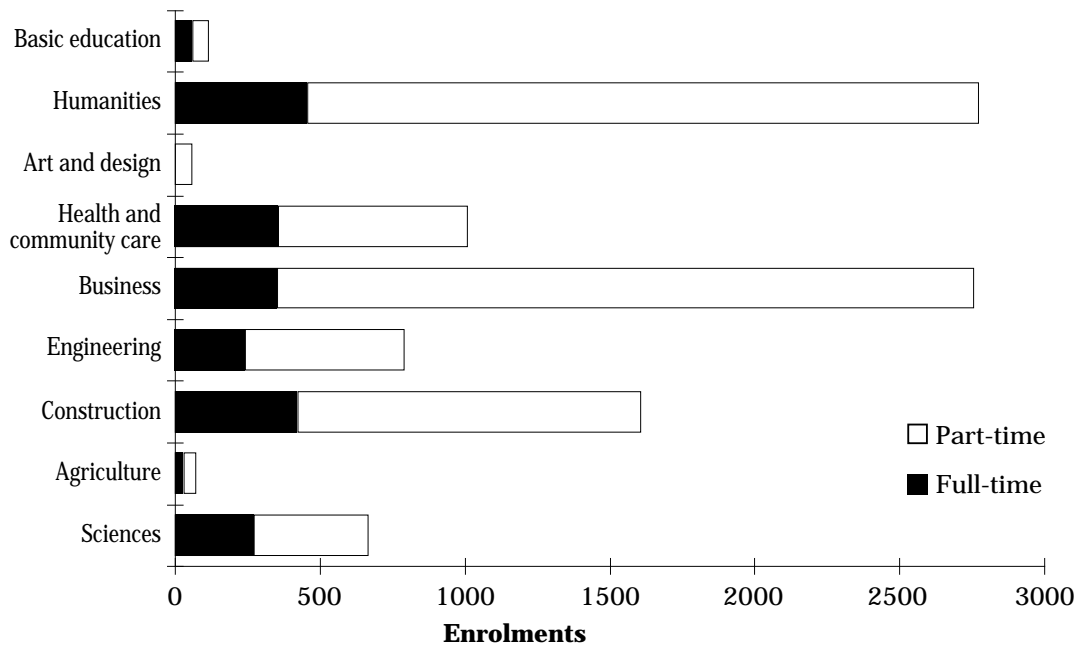
South Birmingham College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)



Enrolments: 9,866

Figure 3

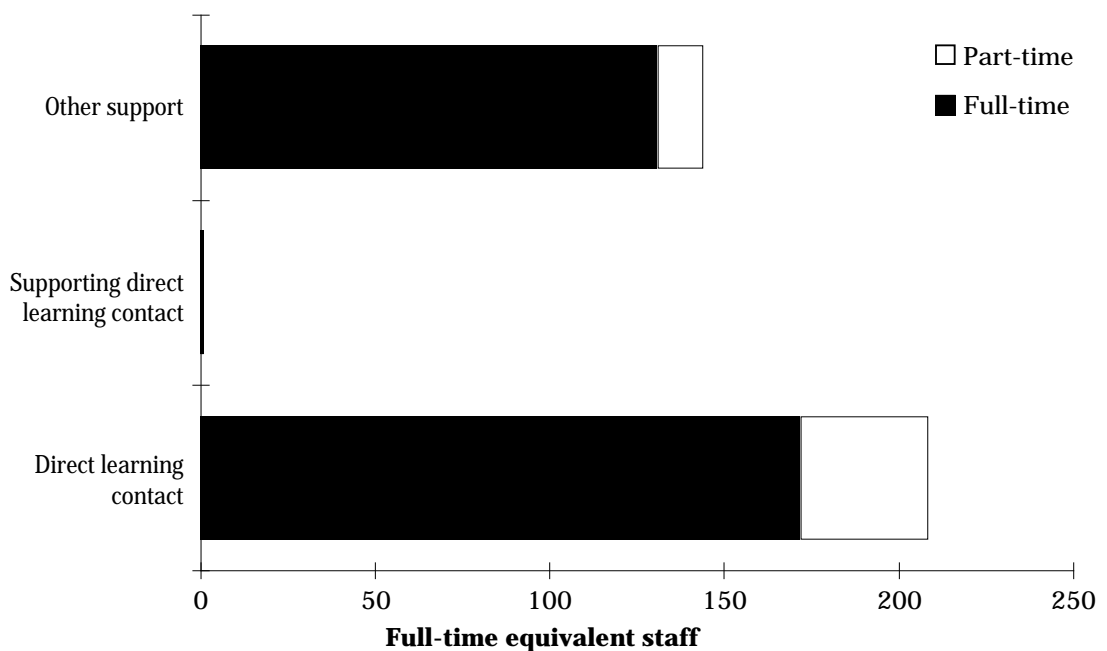
South Birmingham College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)



Enrolments: 9,866

Figure 4

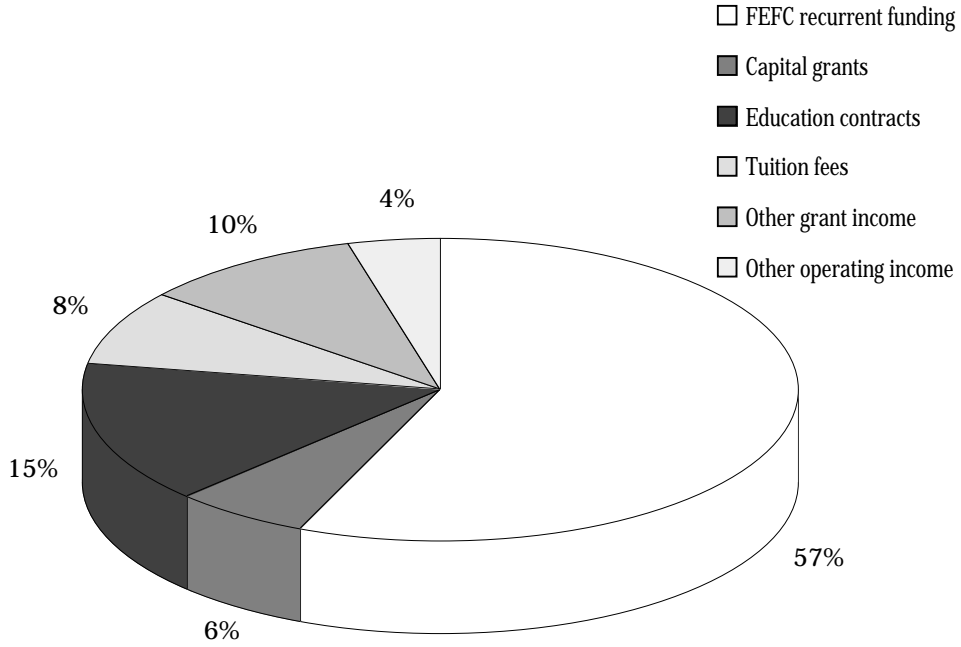
South Birmingham College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)



Full-time equivalent staff: 354

Figure 5

South Birmingham College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)

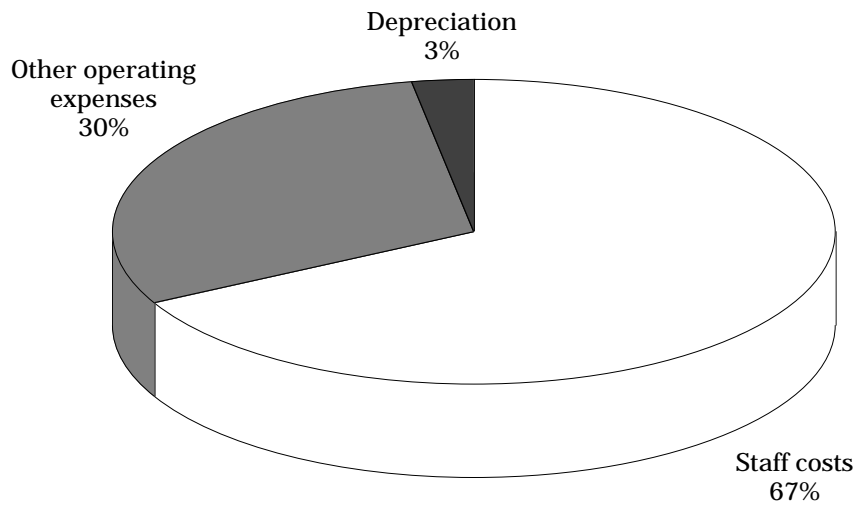


Income: £9,646,000

Note: this chart excludes £34,000 other income generating activities.

Figure 6

South Birmingham College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £9,601,000

Note: this chart excludes £28,000 interest payable.

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
March 1995