

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Abingdon College

January 1994

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a statutory duty to ensure that there are satisfactory arrangements to assess the quality of provision in the further education sector. It discharges this duty in part through its inspectorate, which reports on each college in the sector every four years. The Council's inspectorate also assesses and reports on a national basis in specific curriculum areas and advises the Council's quality assessment committee.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are given in FEFC Circular 93/28. In the course of inspecting colleges, inspectors are expected to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out clearly in their reports. Inspectors also summarise their judgements on the balance between strengths and weaknesses using a five-point scale. Each grade on the scale has the following descriptor:

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 02/94

ABINGDON COLLEGE, OXFORDSHIRE

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected September-November 1993

Summary

Abingdon is a well-managed college. It is responsive to the local community and to the needs of its students and has a commitment to students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Good teaching and student support ensure high levels of student achievement. Results in external examinations, although uneven, are generally good and improving. Teachers are appropriately qualified. There is good teaching accommodation on the main site. The developing quality assurance systems and well-established staff appraisal and staff development arrangements support the college's rigorous commitment to improving quality. The college has forged effective links with schools in the Abingdon 16-18 Consortium, the local training and enterprise council and local employers. Plans for the development of art and design provision are not yet fully implemented, and the range and quality of catering courses are in urgent need of review. Other weaknesses are that the management information system does not meet the requirements of all principal users, assessment strategies for students with learning difficulties and disabilities are not fully effective, the accreditation of prior learning has yet to be widely adopted, the library bookstock is small and outdated, some students have insufficient access to information technology and teachers are inconsistent in the attention they give to correcting students' spelling and grammar.

The grades awarded to aspects of cross-college provision and subject areas 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	3

Subject area	Grade	Subject area	Grade
Business and management	2	Leisure and tourism	2
Caring and social studies	3	Engineering and technology	3
Catering	4	Finance	2
Communications	2	General education	2
Community and continuing education	2	Information and office technology	2
Art and design	4	Science and mathematics	3

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INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection of Abingdon college, Oxfordshire, took place in three stages during the Autumn Term 1993. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the beginning of the college term, specialist subject areas during the period 27-29 September and aspects of cross-college provision from 8-10 November. Thirteen full and part-time inspectors took part for a total of 61 inspector days. They visited 141 classes, attended by 1,417 students, and examined a representative sample of students' work. The participation of the college representative on the inspection team contributed much to the inspection.

2 Discussions were held with members of the college corporation, all members of the college executive group, heads of study areas, cross-college co-ordinators, course leaders, teaching staff and student-support staff. Meetings took place with a group of employers and the education manager of the Heart of England Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). There were also discussions with students including members of the student association. Policy statements and minutes of major committees were examined.

3 The report is based on inspections carried out according to the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. The framework describes a four-year inspection cycle. When this cycle becomes fully established, colleges will have the opportunity to respond to the findings of earlier inspection visits before their quadrennial inspection and the subsequent published report. As the inspection of Abingdon college occurred early in the cycle, the opportunity for such a response was not available.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

4 Abingdon is a general further education college. At the time of the inspection it had 1,404 full-time equivalent students on courses funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Of these, 915 were full-time students and 2,600 were students attending part-time day or evening vocational courses. There were also substantial numbers following professional and commercial updating (PICKUP) courses and community education programmes. The college has significantly exceeded the student recruitment target agreed with the FEFC for 1993-1994. It has grown by 30 per cent in the last three years and anticipates a further 25 per cent growth by 1996. The number of 16-18 year olds attending Abingdon college full time has increased by 50 per cent over the past three years. By contrast, the number of part-time day and evening students has declined slightly during the last two years. Figure 1 indicates enrolments by mode of attendance; figure 2 provides an age profile of full-time and part-time students.

5 The college is situated on the northern side of Abingdon in a residential part of the town close to three secondary schools. It serves an area with a population of about 130,000. Abingdon itself is a small market

town surrounded by farmland and by a remarkable concentration of science-based industries which include the Rutherford-Appleton Laboratory and the Harwell Atomic Energy Establishment. The working population is expected to grow by 2 per cent between 1993 and 1996, and by a further three per cent by the end of the century. Unemployment in southern Oxfordshire has trebled since 1990 and now stands at approximately 7 per cent. Local employers expect adults, particularly women, to form the majority of the increase in the labour force. The employment trends are towards service industries and away from manufacturing; towards managerial and skilled jobs and away from semi-skilled and unskilled employment. From 1994, the number of 16-19 year olds is expected to increase slowly after a fall of 20 per cent over the last five years. In 1992, 73 per cent of 16 year olds in Oxfordshire state schools stayed on in full-time education.

6 The college is located on four sites. The main site has buildings dating from the 1960s and later periods. Accommodation on the other three sites consists of a Georgian house with eight teaching rooms, a converted wing of a primary school with seven classrooms and two industrial units leased by the college. Some teaching takes place in other local education authority (LEA) establishments. A day nursery for 24 children has recently been opened as an additional facility for students and staff.

7 The college is organised into eleven study areas: business and management, caring and social studies, catering, communications, continuing and community education, creative and leisure studies, engineering and technology, finance, general education, information and office technology, and mathematics and science. The percentages of full-time equivalent students in each of the study areas is given in figure 3. Most of the college's work is at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) levels 2 and 3 or their equivalents.

8 There are 85 full-time and 350 part-time lecturers and approximately 50 full-time equivalent support staff. A staff profile is given in figure 4. The college executive group, which is responsible for the day-to-day management of the college, consists of the principal, the vice-principal, three assistant principals, the chief administrative officer and the head of student services.

9 The college's mission is to provide accessible education and training of undisputed quality for the people of Abingdon and southern Oxfordshire. Its aims include the provision of a flexible and comprehensive range of learning opportunities for the whole community; the development of partnerships with industry, commerce, community groups, local schools and other colleges and universities; and the promotion of high standards of student achievement which will enable its students to progress to further study and employment. It seeks to achieve its aims efficiently.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

10 Staff are well aware of major developments in further education such as NVQ, General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) and the national targets for education and training. At the time of the inspection, teachers' and students' knowledge of the requirements of the Charter for Further Education was limited and the corporation had established a charter development group to remedy this.

11 The college liaises with the many agencies which have an interest in its provision. These links are effective and enable the college to keep in close touch with the needs of its various client groups. The 16-18 Abingdon Consortium provides a forum for working with the three secondary schools in the town. The main functions of the consortium are to widen students' choice of course, examination board and place of study. The consortium has also played a valuable role in improving quality by offering careful analysis of students' attainments in each of the consortium centres. The role now includes reference to the A level Information System which produces added value measurements for some 200 schools nationwide. Access courses are provided in partnership with the Oxford Brookes University. The college is an active partner of the Heart of England TEC. There is much interchange with employers through day-release provision, students' work-experience placements, tailor-made courses and the use of people employed in industry to teach on college courses. An employers' advisory committee is proving to be a lively channel of communication.

12 The college's provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities has led to close working relationships with the careers service and with social services. Vocational courses for adults are provided in collaboration with various community education centres in southern Oxfordshire and with the Vale of the White Horse division of the LEA. Non-vocational courses for adults are offered at a number of centres.

13 The college relies heavily on intelligence from external sources. It obtains specific information on employment trends from the Heart of England TEC and from Oxfordshire County Council and this is reflected in the college plan. Employers themselves provide useful information: their contributions are especially helpful in the engineering and social-care areas. The college's quality assurance system provides information about client satisfaction and this, too, influences college provision.

14 There is a good range of full-time programmes for the 16-19 age group which includes General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) courses, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses, and vocational courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Wherever possible, NVQs are offered in all programme areas. The college took a decision not to offer GNVQ from the earliest available date. It is now actively preparing for its introduction in 1994.

15 The college has shown itself to be responsive to market demands in introducing new courses, such as one for nursery nurses. There has been

a growth in part-time day social-care courses to meet both local and regional needs. Access to higher education courses are now well established. In response to demands from industry and commerce, full-cost courses for students in employment are mounted with considerable success. There is a small and successful provision for overseas students and a good range of foreign language provision. Provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities ranges from discrete specialist courses to the integration of students into mainstream courses.

16 There are parts of the college's curriculum offer which are weaker. The range and quality of catering courses are in urgent need of review and plans for the development of art and design provision are not yet fully implemented. There are also some gaps in provision: for instance, there is no access course available for part-time evening students and a part-time Institute of Welfare Officers course has been discontinued although there is still a demand.

17 Few of the college courses offer a facility for recognising and crediting relevant knowledge which students may already possess when they enrol on courses. The college is working with the Heart of England TEC to develop schemes for the accreditation of prior learning. Although the demand for prior accreditation is not currently high, the college could seek to stimulate greater awareness now that the funding issues have been resolved.

18 The college's provision is well marketed and market intelligence has been used to good effect in preventing premature closure of some courses. Publicity material is generally effective but opportunities for study for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, those from ethnic minorities and mature students do not feature sufficiently prominently. A decision to target the recruitment of specific groups of students has led to the separation of publicity material for community education from that for vocational part-time courses.

19 The college has been successful in enrolling traditionally under-represented groups of students. The proportion of college students from ethnic minorities is higher than that in the local community. The college's preparatory work with the Heart of England TEC has put it in a strong position to take advantage of training credits when they become available in 1994.

20 The college has adopted an equal opportunities policy. It is well understood and supported by staff though students are less aware of the policy. The inclusion of equal opportunities issues in induction programmes for both staff and students is a helpful step.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

21 The college is well served by active and informed members of the governing board who devote much time to the business of the corporation. The board currently consists of 13 members including the principal. Eight

of the members are from industry, one represents local community interests, two are members of staff of the college and one a college student. Four additional places will be filled early in 1994 to complete the membership. These will include two more industrial representatives, a member from a higher education institution and a co-opted member from the local district council. Governors are appropriately involved in the strategic planning process. Their wide range of business experience and their substantial community links are used to the advantage of the college.

22 The management structure of the college is clear and the allocation of responsibilities within it is well defined. Considerable autonomy has been devolved by the college executive group to the eleven heads of study. They are accountable to the three assistant principals who also have significant cross-college roles. Heads of study are well informed and energetic. The executive group is continually reviewing the increasing workloads of the heads of study.

23 The college has a clear mission statement which staff understand and support. The principal has encouraged an open style of management with an emphasis on effective communication with all members of staff. The strategic planning process is well managed and facilitates the involvement of a wide range of staff. Within most of the study areas, staff are effectively involved in planning.

24 College policies for equal opportunities, health and safety, and student support have been established. Responsibilities for implementing these policies are clearly allocated. The equal opportunities committee has been particularly active and effective.

25 Figures 5 and 6, respectively, show the college's recurrent income and estimated expenditure 1993-94. The strategy for the allocation of funds across the college is sound. Within each area, targets are set and monitored. Revenue and staffing budgets are linked to student numbers but can be varied in response to curriculum changes. The devolution of revenue budgets has given heads of study full control over their expenditure. A positive development is the introduction of a zero-based budgeting approach in the support and administrative areas. Unit costs, as measures of efficiency, are currently applied to marginally-costed provision and income-generating work. The college's unit of funding for 1992-93, set by the local education authority, is recorded in the FEFC report, *Funding Allocations 1993-93*, as £2,514 per weighted full-time equivalent student. This is slightly above the median of £2,436 for general further education colleges.

26 The college's management information system, consisting of both manual and electronic systems, is developing at a rapid pace. It currently produces data on enrolment, retention and completion rates, examination results and destination statistics. Some aspects of the retrieval system are cumbersome and the information is not easily accessible to all users.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

27 The college's guidance and support system for students is thorough and well documented. The student services unit is the main focus in the college for recruitment, guidance and support. Both students and staff express satisfaction with the work of the unit and for the support they receive. The unit plays a major role in the admissions process. It makes available a good range of materials to assist tutors with the induction of students and their guidance through college.

28 All applicants for full-time courses are interviewed in order to ensure that they are placed on a course appropriate to their aspirations. Potential part-time students receive well-structured information on courses and the college. Some applicants for part-time courses are counselled over the telephone or at interview.

29 Student recruitment starts early in the new year and continues through the summer. The availability of telephone and postal enrolment for part-time students means that the September enrolment days are not congested. Staff are able to give time to those students most in need of guidance at any stage of the process. Students' applications are carefully tracked throughout the application and admission process, mainly using handwritten records. The system is effective, although the use of a single electronic database would make it more efficient.

30 The college works closely with the three local secondary schools in the Abingdon 16-18 Consortium. The consortium helps to widen choice and increase opportunities for students, and college staff and governors devote considerable time and energy to ensuring its success. The college finds it more difficult to gain access to other secondary schools in the area.

31 Full-time students follow a well-planned induction programme. Sessions are both informative and diagnostic. Students find that the programme helps them to settle quickly into their new surroundings and studies. They are clearly advised of their rights and responsibilities. Those finding themselves on a course unsuited to their needs are helped to negotiate a change of course, including, if appropriate, transfer to another institution.

32 A well-structured tutorial system supports the work of full-time students. Action planning and records of achievement are being introduced as part of the system. Part-time students are allocated a tutor who has the responsibility of keeping a watching brief on their progress. Evening-only students have access to the student services unit.

33 The attendance of students is carefully monitored. A simple system for reporting on students causing concern works effectively.

34 The college counselling service is highly regarded and well used. Demand for its services is rising. An analysis of the contribution of the service in the light of the college's aims and objectives is needed to judge the adequacy of the existing resources and to identify future resource needs.

35 The level of provision for careers education and guidance is sufficient to meet current demand. The student services unit contains a useful careers library. Consideration is currently being given to expanding this resource and to its location in terms of accessibility and effectiveness.

36 Students have an additional source of support in the students' association. Representatives of the association sit on the governing body, academic board and the disciplinary board. The current officers are anxious to provide an effective service to students.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

37 Overall, the work inspected clearly had more strengths than weaknesses. Of the 141 teaching sessions inspected, 76 were graded 1 or 2, and 46 graded 3. Those graded 4 or 5 totalled 19 classes. The most consistently good practice was to be found in the business and management, finance and communications study areas. These areas comprise approximately 40 per cent of the full-time equivalent student enrolments.

38 Most of the study areas in the college offer courses which are coherent and meet the needs of clearly-identified groups of students. The aims and objectives of programmes of study are clearly stated and communicated effectively to the students. There was some good practice in the implementation of systems for the review and assessment of full-time students' progress. Most study areas are taking positive steps to encourage students' own identification of targets for further progress but this development is less well advanced for part-time students. Examples were observed of students with physical and other learning difficulties and disabilities being well integrated into the mainstream courses of the college.

39 Most teaching sessions were well planned and well organised. A variety of learning methods was employed which included teachers addressing the whole class, small-group work and practical work. Methods were carefully related to learning objectives. Of particular note was the use of workshops in the communications study area which enabled teachers to respond flexibly to the differing learning needs of individual students. In the information and office technology and business studies courses, the use of part-time students' own work-experience to enhance learning was excellent. Classes in the finance study area were well attuned to the requirements of the professional examinations and included some stimulating case studies. Lively presentation in adult and continuing education classes encouraged the participation of students and stimulated a thirst for learning.

40 In a few of the study areas, the range of teaching methods employed was limited. The pace of work was occasionally slow and undemanding and there was an over-reliance on formal lectures. In some classes, the presentation was dull and uninspiring and students found it difficult to concentrate. In others, teachers made excessive use of dictation or there

was copying from the board when the use of visual aids would have been more appropriate.

41 Insufficient use was made of available computing facilities in engineering, catering and adult basic education classes. Lectures in art history were greatly reduced in effectiveness because of the unavailability of illustrative slides of works of art. Practical sessions on the catering courses were delivered in a way which did not provide assessment opportunities on a sufficiently regular basis.

42 In most study areas, assignments and projects for assessment are clear and well organised. They are of an appropriate standard and test the achievement of the aims and objectives of the programme. Assignments on the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national programmes are particularly well developed. The course-team approach ensures careful and thorough planning of integrated assignments. Assessments on the leisure and tourism programme are often imaginative and well suited to the needs of the market.

43 The college has not succeeded in establishing an effective system of accurate individual assessments for students with learning difficulties and disabilities who are following discrete courses, and this affects the quality of the planning and delivery of learning programmes. Effective records which demonstrate the competencies achieved by students are lacking.

44 There is a clearly defined programme of written work to be completed by students on most courses. Staff are generally conscientious in their marking of work and most return work within a timescale which allows students to benefit from teachers' comments before tackling their next assignments.

45 A notable feature of most full-time courses was the attention given to the personal and social development of students. This was particularly evident on the caring courses to which good work-experience links made an important contribution.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

46 Most students in the college are enthusiastic about their work and settle quickly to purposeful study. Relations between students and staff are warm and effective. The working environment is informal and there is good class discipline. Collegiate facilities are well used and contribute to the sense of a productive community. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities are well integrated into the wider life of the college.

47 The supportive atmosphere in the college helps to build students' confidence. In turn, this confidence is reflected in good oral presentation on many of the courses. The standard of written work is generally high. It could be further improved if the careful correction of spelling and grammatical mistakes which is practised in some courses became college policy for all staff.

48 Practical work is carried out safely and effectively. Study skills are well taught in adult basic education and adult access to higher education courses. In other study areas, ineffective use is made of the basic skills workshops for numeracy and literacy. Some students' ability to use information technology is limited.

49 A generally-applied system of learning targets for individual students, monitored through tutorials, is at an early stage of development. When in operation, it should help some of the students whose aspirations are low and who pass from one course to another at the same academic level.

50 Students' assessment is generally well planned and executed. External moderators attest to the accuracy of teachers' evaluations of student work. Most forms of college assessment are diagnostic in character and a positive aid to learning. In the few courses which are not subject to external examination, the quality of some assessment schemes is not as high.

51 The college aims that its students on GCSE and GCE A level courses should perform at least as well as those in the other member institutions in the local consortium. During the past four years, the percentage of GCSE passes at grades A-C has shown a slight rise and is now 6 per cent above the national average of 51.3 per cent. In some subjects students achieve good results. In 1993, for example, 97.5 per cent of English students achieved grades A-C compared with a national average of 55.3 per cent. However, the upward trend is not consistent across all subjects. Results in the sciences, mathematics and computer studies are poor. In the sciences, only biology reaches the GCSE national average rate for passes at grades A-C. In mathematics, some 10 per cent of students in the college attained grades A-C compared with a national average of 45 per cent.

52 GCE A level students in the consortium as a whole have consistently achieved results at, or slightly above, the national average for passes at grades A-E which in 1993 was 79.8 per cent. During the past four years students at the college have improved their performance from 65 per cent achieving A-E grades in 1989 to the consortium average of 87.6 per cent in 1993. This is a significant achievement.

53 There is a lack of reliable national statistics about the performance of students on vocational courses. With that reservation, the rates of attainment of qualifications in the college appear to be similar to the national average in most subjects. In 1993, 84 per cent of students in the final year of BTEC national diploma or the City and Guilds national diploma achieved their qualifications, a performance which places the college in the top half of further education colleges nationally. In finance studies, results are generally better than the national average and there are some outstanding levels of achievement in accountancy courses. For example, part-time evening students sitting for three levels of examination offered by the Association of Accounting Technicians achieved pass rates of over 85 per cent against an historic average of about 55 per cent for comparable

examinations.

54 Information published by BTEC suggests that the national average for the retention of students on full-time vocational courses is about 85 per cent and on part-time courses about 75 per cent. Some vocational courses across the college fall below these levels.

55 Students' rates of progression to further study and full-time employment are good. Of students who left the college in the past three years 60 per cent went on to further study, approximately half of these to higher education. Between 20 and 25 per cent of students secured full-time jobs which in almost every case were related to their studies. Eight per cent took temporary jobs or youth training and five per cent were unemployed. Major local companies speak favourably of students placed with them during courses or who became permanently employed by them after leaving college.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

56 The college demonstrates an increasingly rigorous commitment to quality improvement. This is supported by the development of measurable service standards at both central executive group and college service levels. It is important that attention continues to be paid to how the system enables improvement as well as to how it monitors outcomes and results.

57 The college has developed its own quality improvement system and this is understood and supported by the staff. It includes an evaluation and review process which extends to all full-time and part-time students, including students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The present focus on courses is now being extended to other support and administrative services.

58 The quality system involves all full-time and, increasingly, part-time staff in systematically monitoring and reviewing programmes. This includes analysing the performance indicators relating to enrolment targets and to retention and achievement rates. Percentage improvement targets are not yet agreed. The views of all full-time and part-time students are surveyed twice a year. Feedback data are systematically collated, analysed, summarised and acted upon by course team members and/or tutors. This process, together with the staff's own end-of-year analysis, gives rise to recommendations for further action. These are reported to the central executive group, academic board and the corporation board.

59 The end-of-year course review action plan does not currently make reference to the previous year's plan, nor does it give an indication of previous objectives met and unmet. Students' comments are not systematically monitored year on year to assess the degree to which these comments re-appear. The review system could be further enhanced by the greater use of quantified data for decision making. Action taken at central executive group level as a result of the evaluation and review process should be more effectively communicated to students as well as to staff.

60 The evaluation of cross-college services is thorough but could benefit from those closest to the daily operations being given greater responsibility for judgements and recommendations.

61 The staff appraisal and staff development arrangements are well established. They generally support the college's strategy for improving quality. New teaching and support staff undergo a well-structured induction programme which includes mentoring. New teaching staff are observed in a teaching situation. Identified staff development needs are prioritised against the college plan. They are not currently evaluated against the contribution they make to improving overall institutional performance.

62 The performance indicators used by course teams for review and evaluation purposes are collected systematically and analysed centrally through the developing management information system. Procedures for the central collection and retrieval of statistics for quality monitoring and analysis are under review.

63 It is important that account is taken of the various needs of users at a number of levels. Present statistical reports do not provide sufficient data on students' progression for course team use. The review provides an opportunity to consider how best to demonstrate the degree to which the college fulfils the requirements of the new Charter for Further Education.

RESOURCES

64 The management of staff is effective. All managers have received training in equal opportunities including interview techniques. All heads of study have attended a management development programme. The college is now working toward the Investors in People award.

65 The number of lecturers is determined annually for the portfolio of courses to be offered. There has been a steady improvement in the student-staff ratio, for which the most recent available figure is 12:1. The level of technical support is satisfactory and in some areas good.

66 All teachers are appropriately qualified for the courses offered. More than 80 per cent have a teaching qualification. Most have relevant industrial experience although in many cases this was gained some years ago.

67 The central executive group has a short and long-term accommodation strategy. An accommodation review has been conducted and proposals for changes have been made, including the building of a sports centre. Most accommodation is efficiently and effectively managed and used. Regular monitoring of the loading of rooms informs the college manager of difficulties which are likely to occur.

68 The quality of teaching accommodation on the main site is good. Some is very good. The huts provide a satisfactory teaching environment. There is a shortage of larger teaching rooms. Ramps and lifts enable

students with physical disability to gain access to all parts of this accommodation.

69 Accommodation at the college is generally well furnished, well decorated and well maintained. Although some of the areas in which students work are cramped, the college provides a good and supportive learning environment. The accommodation for staff is crowded. There is limited space for the storage of teaching materials and students' work.

70 Northcourt House is mainly used for full-cost courses. The teaching rooms are small for the numbers now using them. The Carswell annex is the least satisfactory of the college buildings. The two industrial units do not provide a particularly good environment and are expensive to lease.

71 The college regularly uses the main sports hall in the town to support leisure courses. Students on these courses also use excellent swimming facilities at Radley College. The college runs full-cost courses for clients on their premises, for example, at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory.

72 The book stock in the library is limited. It still contains many out-dated texts despite having been reduced in the last two years. Some study areas maintain small technical book collections for use by their own students. These collections, and the provision of free text books to all full-time students, discourage students from using the library as much as they should. The library has no security system. Although the number of books lost is low, it is often the new and expensive books which are taken.

73 There is sufficient equipment to support most courses. The main exception is in catering where, in courses leading to NVQ qualifications, equipment does not mirror industrial standards. In microelectronics, the quality of the equipment needs to be improved.

74 There are about 180 computers in the college which provide a good student-to-computer ratio. However, the main college information technology drop-in facility is small and heavily used. Some students, especially catering and engineering students, find it difficult to gain access.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

75 The college is a thriving institution which is making good progress towards fulfilling its mission of providing accessible education and training of undisputed quality for the people of Abingdon and southern Oxfordshire.

76 The particular strengths of the college are that:

- the college is well managed
- the provision meets the needs of students and employers
- the quality of teaching is good
- despite some unevenness, examination results are generally good
- the quality assurance system is established and involves all staff and all students
- there is a strong commitment to students with learning difficulties and disabilities
- the quality of most of the accommodation is good

-
- there are effective links between college and schools in the Abingdon 16-18 Consortium, with major employers and the Heart of England TEC
 - the college listens and responds well to students' views and perceptions
 - the support which students receive from the student services unit is good.

77 The college has to address each of the following areas if it is to raise yet further the high standards achieved by its students:

- the range and quality of catering courses
- aspects of art and design provision
- the assessment and accreditation of prior learning
- assessment strategies for students with learning difficulties and disabilities
- the library bookstock
- access to information technology equipment
- more consistent attention to spelling and grammar in students' written work.

FIGURES

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- 1 Enrolments by mode of attendance (1993-94)

 - 2 Age profile of full-time and part-time students (1993-94)

 - 3 Enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)

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

 - 5 Income (1993-94 extended financial year)

 - 6 Estimated expenditure (1993-94)

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

Figure 1

Abingdon College: enrolments by mode of attendance (1993-94)

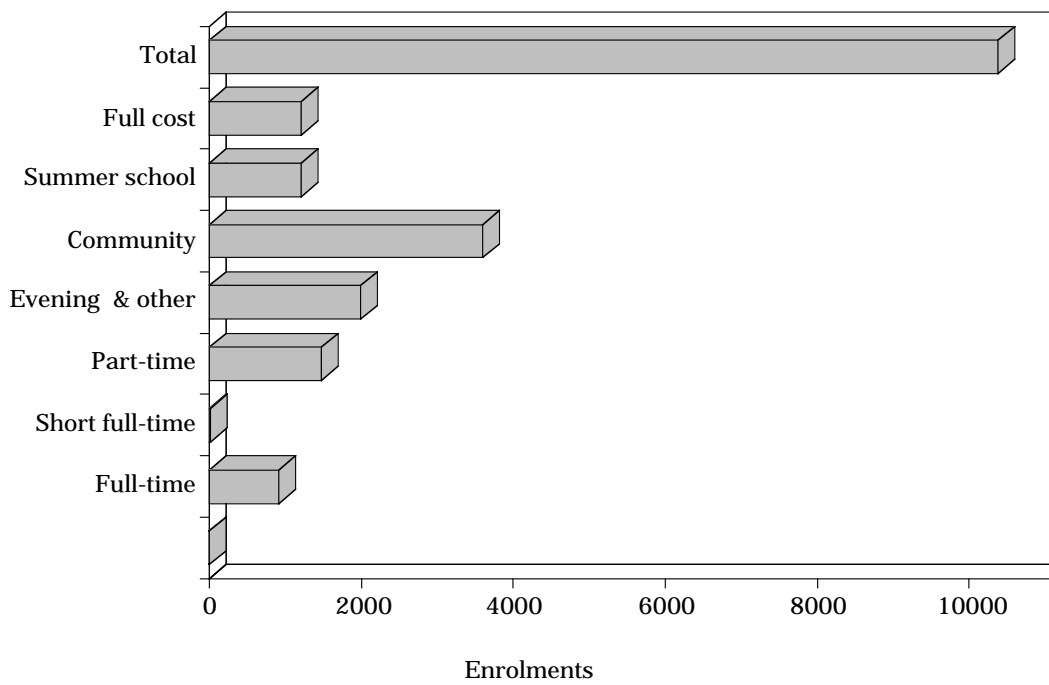


Figure 2

Abingdon College: age profile of full-time and part-time students (1993-94)

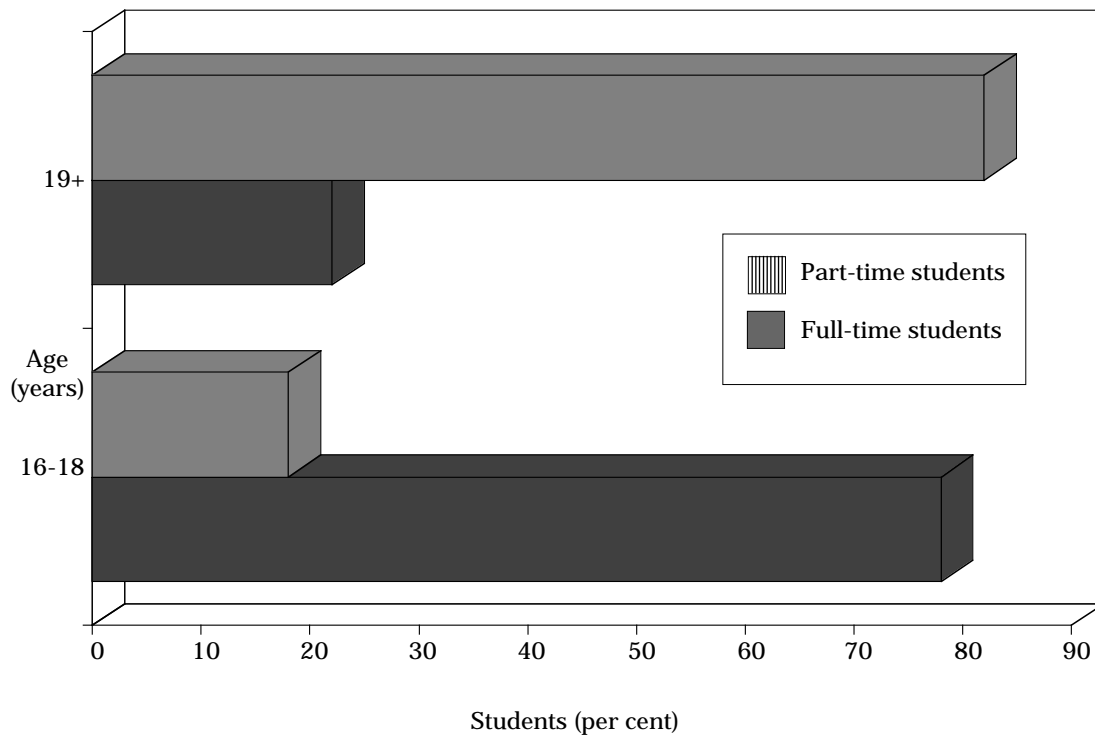


Figure 3

Abingdon College: enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents – percentages by study area (1993-94)

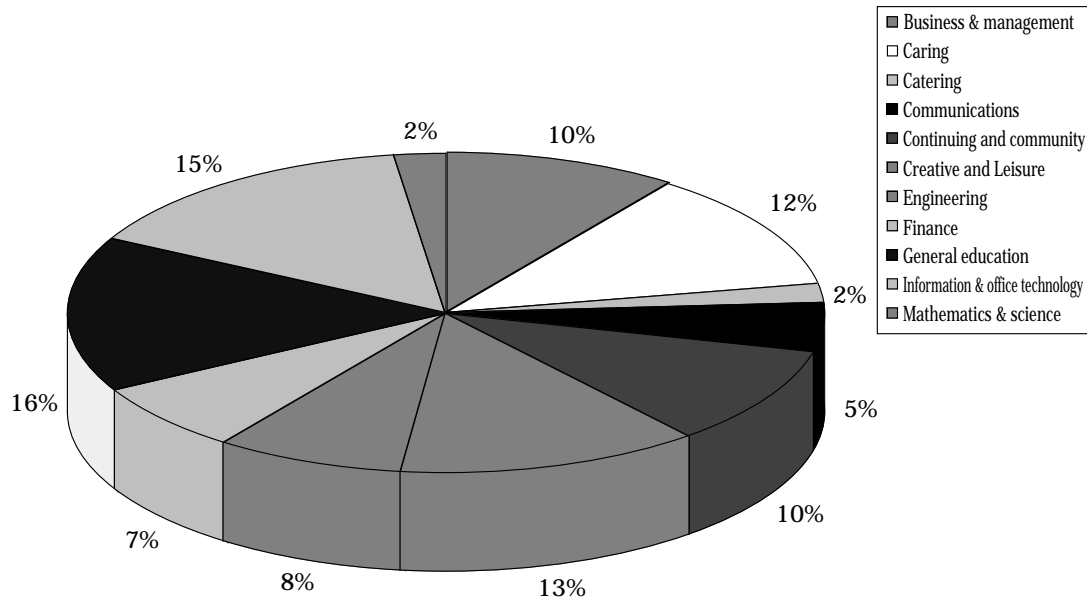
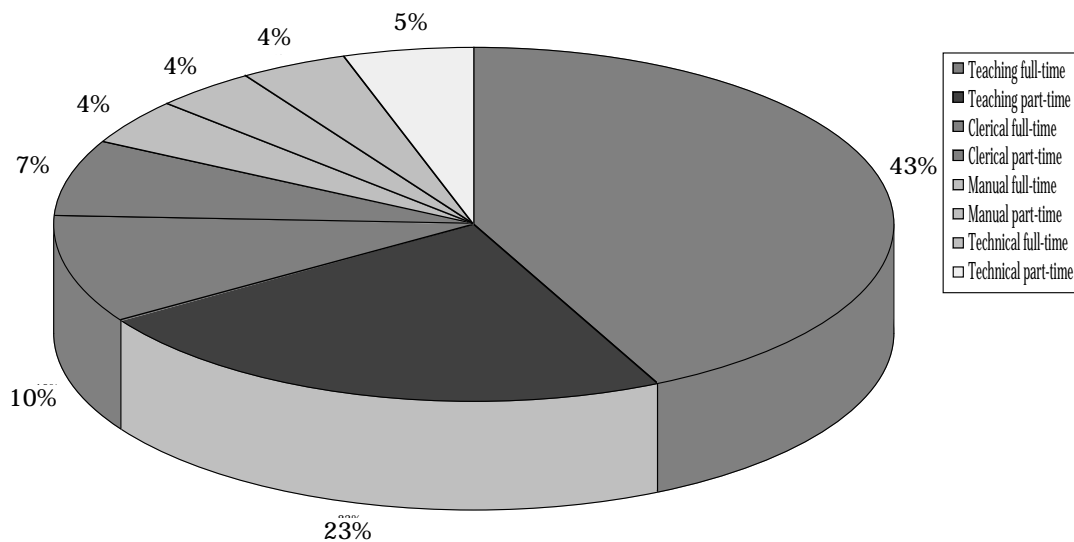


Figure 4

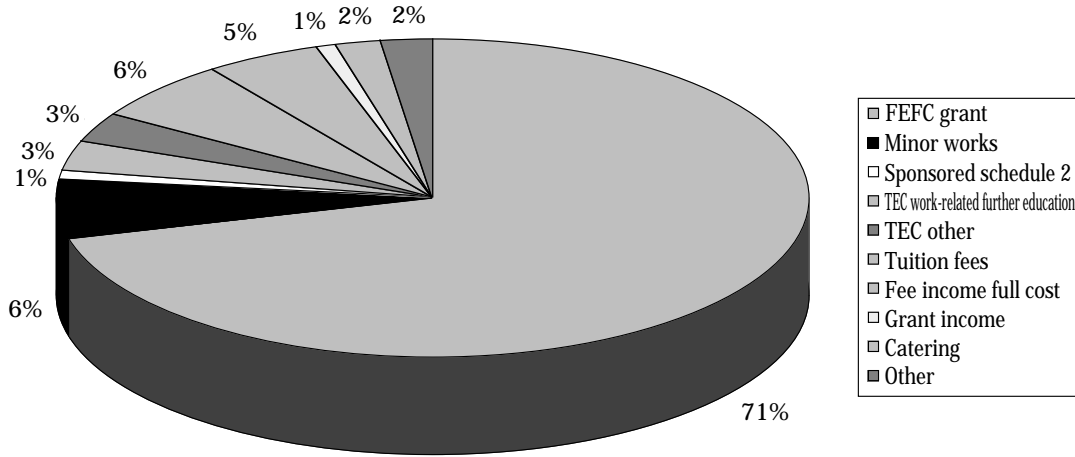
Abingdon College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)



Note: teaching part-time includes associate lecturers who are on fractional full-time contracts.

Figure 5

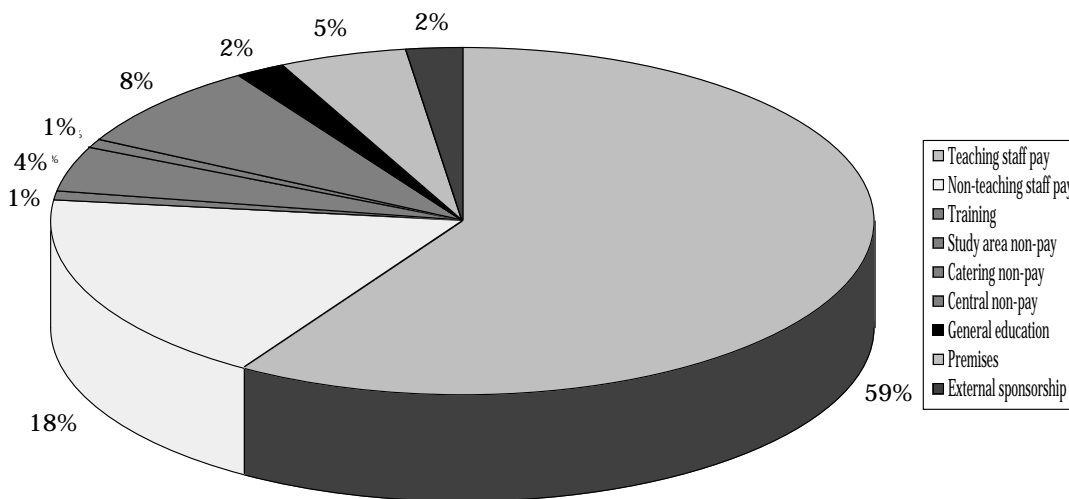
Abingdon College: income (1993-94 extended financial year)



Total income: £6,322,000

Figure 6

Abingdon College: estimated expenditure (1993-94)



Total expenditure: £6,172,000

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
January 1994