

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Aylesbury College

March 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 29/95

AYLESBURY COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected May – December 1994

Summary

Aylesbury College provides a wide range of vocational courses. Staff are appropriately qualified. They have a good knowledge of their subject but the quality of teaching varies. There is a good rapport between staff and students and a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere is evident in many classes. Students' achievements on vocational courses are good but in the limited range of GCE AS/A level subjects offered they are poor. Student support services are insufficiently resourced and vary in quality. There are some examples of good student guidance and counselling but the services are too limited. Resources are not always effectively managed. Management responsibilities are often unclear, communication is weak, and staff lack a corporate sense of purpose. Curriculum teams are insufficiently involved in setting college priorities and targets. There is no strategy for managing information, and computer-based management information systems are inadequate. Marketing activity is not effectively co-ordinated. Procedures for monitoring the quality of provision lack a clear relationship to the process of bringing about improvements in quality. A scheme for the appraisal of teaching staff has not yet been implemented. Specialist accommodation is of variable standard, though generally adequately equipped. Library facilities are poor and there are insufficient computers to support students' work.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision	Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision	3
Governance and management	4
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	3
Quality assurance	4
Resources: staffing	3
equipment/learning resources	4
accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Agriculture	3	Health and community care	3
		Hairdressing, beauty and sports therapy	2
Construction	2	Art and design	4
Engineering	3	Humanities	3
Business	3	Basic education and students with learning difficulties and/or difficulties	3
Hotel and catering	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1 Aylesbury College was inspected between May and December 1994. A team of nine inspectors spent a week in the college from 5-9 December 1994. A further 55 inspector days were used to inspect specialist aspects of college provision. Inspectors visited 192 classes and examined samples of students' work. They also held discussions with governors, staff, students, local employers, representatives of the local education authority (LEA), schools, the prison education service, the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and the Thames Valley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Aylesbury College, founded in 1962, is a medium-size general further education college. It draws most of its students from Aylesbury Vale which covers the central part of Buckinghamshire. The college operates on a main site close to the town centre, and a second site, Hampden Hall, about three miles away, which includes a 280 acre farm. The nearest further education colleges are at Amersham and Dunstable, both some 15 miles from the college.

3 There are nine LEA-maintained secondary schools and two grant-maintained schools, all with sixth forms, in the college's catchment area. Buckinghamshire LEA supports a selective system of secondary education with transfer at 12 years of age. The Henry Floyd Grammar School lies adjacent to the main site of the college and there is shared access to the two sites. There are also four schools providing education for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the area. In 1993, the proportion of young people in Buckinghamshire staying on in full-time education at 16 was 75 per cent. Included in this figure are the 18 per cent of young people who go on to further education. These figures do not include pupils at independent schools.

4 The population of Buckinghamshire is about 640,000. Of these, 44,000 are aged 15-19. Minority ethnic groups, mainly of Asian and Afro-Caribbean origin, make up some 4 per cent of the population. Manufacturing, engineering, distribution, hospitality and business and financial services provide the major sources of employment in the Aylesbury Vale. In the town of Aylesbury itself the largest employers are the county council, the health authority and the district council. In July 1994, the unemployment rate for Buckinghamshire was 6.3 per cent.

5 In the academic year 1993-94, there were 6,017 on roll. The enrolment returns to the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) show a reduction of over 10 per cent between the early statistical return in November 1993 and the position at the end of year. For 1993-94 the college set itself the target of enrolling 2,823 weighted full-time equivalents and failed to achieve this by over 10 per cent. Figures 1 and 2 show enrolments by age and level of study. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3.

6 The college has revised its target figures for 1994-95 and is aiming for 5.4 per cent growth on the previous year. At the time of the inspection, there were 4,800 students on roll, 1,250 full time and 3,550 part time, representing 90 per cent of the college's target. Further enrolments were expected during the academic year. The college was unable to provide consistent data on student enrolments at the time of the inspection. The figures presented are those given to the FEFC and represent the most accurate available.

7 The main areas of full-time provision are hairdressing and beauty therapy, tourism and hospitality studies, child and community studies, business studies, and general education including access programmes. There are large numbers of students on part-time courses in construction and technology and on part-time business and professional courses. The college also provides education programmes for Grendon and Spring Hill prisons. The college acts as a sponsor for Buckinghamshire County Council for part of the provision of adult education including vocational, non-vocational and basic skills education. In 1993-94, there were 1,674 such enrolments of which about half were on basic education courses. The college sees education for adults as a potential area for growth.

8 There are 144 full-time lecturers, including fractional appointments, and 109 staff supporting the work of the college in administrative, technical and clerical positions. A profile of staff, expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

9 The college in its mission aims to be a centre of excellence in providing high quality education and training. The principles of operation defined in the strategic plan identify the main objectives of the college as serving the changing education and training needs of the community and continually improving accessibility to the college. The college plans to make a significant contribution to the achievement of national targets for training and education by maintaining its commitment to a broad vocational provision and achieving growth in student numbers.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

10 The college provides a wide range of vocational courses. In some programme areas, the current range of courses is appropriate and effectively meets the needs of the community served by the college. However, the development of opportunities for education and training is hampered by the lack of a clearly-stated marketing strategy and by limitations in the liaison arrangements with industry. The college requires a clearer framework for curriculum planning, which is linked to identified needs.

11 The college has developed a broad range of full-time courses. Courses leading to General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) have largely replaced other vocational awards. In some areas, the full-time courses are based on BTEC or City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G)

programmes. There are suitable opportunities for progression from intermediate to advanced courses. A GNVQ committee has been established to co-ordinate the development of GNVQs across the college. It has achieved some success in providing a framework for induction, common timetables and a range of additional studies. GNVQ courses are provided in art and design, business studies, catering, health and social care and computing. There is a narrow range of provision in art and design and the full-time provision in agriculture is limited.

12 The full-time courses are complemented by a wide range of part-time courses, many of which lead to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). There are clearly-defined progression routes for students. There is an appropriate range of part-time craft courses in agriculture, amenity horticulture and floristry. Engineering courses provide suitable opportunities for students to study and progress. Construction craft courses reflect local needs and are offered in a variety of attendance patterns which have helped mature students. Courses in business administration are offered at NVQ levels 2 and 3 and may be combined with tuition in shorthand and typewriting. The courses are partially modular, which allows students a degree of choice and ensures efficient group sizes.

13 In business and management studies, there is a wide range of professional courses, including those which lead to the examinations for the Institute of Export. The college collaborates with Luton University in offering the certificate and the diploma in management studies. Little has been done to develop open and flexible learning packages for the delivery of management and professional courses, in order to help sustain part-time provision in such areas as supervisory management.

14 The catering and hospitality area has responded positively to industry's training needs by identifying skill shortages and providing suitable courses. Part-time students are able to join full-time programmes, thus increasing the range of courses open to them. Opportunities exist for full-time students to progress within the college and to take NVQ units in addition to a GNVQ. All students are able to study for an additional hygiene certificate. Provision for leisure has also been responsive to the needs of the area and the marketing of the courses is sound. Links with Aylesbury District Council have led to the creation of a fitness centre which, together with the sports hall facility, is aiding the development of a wider range of courses. The range of courses in childcare is enhanced because the college is accredited as an NVQ assessment centre. The range of courses in health care is narrow and the opportunities for students to progress are limited. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, the modular courses offer the flexibility in patterns of study which are attractive to mature students, and there are suitable opportunities for progression.

15 The college has a limited provision of 18 General Certificate of Education advanced supplementary/advanced level (GCE AS/A level) subjects mainly in humanities and social studies. It has decided to offer a

GNVQ in science rather than GCE A level in science. A similar range of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects is provided, mainly as additional studies for students taking GNVQ courses. The access to higher education course recruits small numbers. Links with other access course providers and with higher education institutions are weak. There is a well-established tutor training course providing progression to the second-year certificate of education awarded by Oxford Brookes University. The range of courses in foreign languages caters for a variety of interests and there are suitable opportunities for students to progress.

16 There is a wide range of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including provision for students with profound and complex learning difficulties at Manor House, a long-stay hospital. Some of the work at both Manor House and at Hampden Hall is imaginative. At the main college site, although the new Pathways course has increased the range of opportunities, the provision is narrower, and the opportunities for students to progress to other courses are limited. There is ineffective liaison with local special schools, the LEA and other agencies. Little has been done to identify the educational needs of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the local community.

17 The college has few full-cost courses which generate income and no college-wide approach to the co-ordination of such work or of other income-generating activities. There are no targets for work in this area and no overall monitoring of the income being achieved.

18 There is a productive relationship with Thames Valley Enterprise TEC. The college has been active in analysing trends and identifying areas for the expansion of 'traineeship' programmes for young people. Its work in this area is well managed. The college also participates in training schemes for adults but is not as active or effective in this area. Most of the college income from non-FEFC sources derives from courses provided for the Thames Valley Enterprise TEC.

19 The college has established good working relationships with both Grendon and Spring Hill prisons. The educational provision is highly regarded by prison management. At both prisons, a wide range of courses including C&G, GCSE, and GCE A level subjects, is available. There is also the opportunity to progress to Open University degree courses. At Spring Hill, vocational education within the prison is supplemented by day-release attendance at the college. College staff help to provide education for prisoners immediately before they are released, in order to help them gain jobs. Grendon is a category B therapeutic establishment, dealing with prisoners from all over the country, and provides opportunities for inmates to benefit from education and rehabilitative therapy. The college has responded flexibly to the needs of inmates and prison staff and has extended the range of work as a result of requests from the prisons.

20 The college's marketing plan contains key targets with specific proposals for action. It is not supported by annual operating plans or a

review process. Marketing activity is fragmented and reliant on curriculum teams who operate in isolation. As a consequence, there is insufficient co-ordination of this work across the college. Inadequate marketing has contributed to small classes in a number of areas. The governing body has established a committee to examine the college's approach to marketing. Promotional activity and publicity are generally effective. There are well-organised and informative full-time and part-time course guides. Currently, all course leaflets are being rewritten to a standard house style to promote a corporate identity.

21 Individual course tutors have established useful links with employers in areas such as engineering, management, accountancy and supervisory studies for the National Health Service. Good external links have also been established with hospital trusts, the Red Cross and RAF Halton. The activity of the college's 15 employers' advisory committees provides some support for the development of the curriculum. However, the information given at committee meetings is often retrospective and attendance is inconsistent and sometimes poor. Committee membership does not always reflect the profile of local employers; many are dominated by small employers; large local industries are under represented. In engineering, attempts have been made to re-establish the former industrial consultative committee but industrialists have shown little enthusiasm. Recently, a newsletter has been introduced as a means of keeping employers informed of college developments.

22 There is some effective liaison with schools. A number of partnership ventures have supported the development and operation of courses in business. There are links with a local special school for the provision of programmes in agriculture, fabrication and motor vehicle work. In construction, there are strong contacts with local schools. College staff participate in schools' careers events, attend meetings with careers teachers and host the careers and higher education convention for Aylesbury Vale which, this year, was combined with the college open day. The college is developing its policy for schools' liaison and has drafted a statement outlining its commitment to working in partnership with local schools to provide a range of high-quality education and training. The focus for this collaborative provision will remain the links between individual programme teams and schools.

23 The college is working towards equalising opportunities. A committee has met regularly with a representative membership including two members from the Aylesbury Vale Racial Equality Council. They have agreed a clear action plan and there are arrangements for monitoring its implementation. Some attempts have been made to target minority ethnic interests. As a result of the work of this committee a GCSE evening class in Urdu is now being provided. There are few other instances of attempts being made to target groups of people who do not usually take further education courses. In some cases, there has been insufficient consultation

with the committee. For example, it has not yet been involved in the review of course leaflets and promotional materials.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

24 The corporation has a large governing body of 20 members. There are 10 members with backgrounds in business and industry who bring particular expertise in accountancy, personnel management and legal matters. One member represents the TEC, and a co-opted member has an adult and continuing education background. In addition, there are two elected staff members and one elected student member. The principal, deputy-principal and the college accountant are ex-officio members. One of two governor positions reserved for community representation is currently unfilled.

25 The governing body is active and works through a wide range of committees, making good use of the individual talents of members. Immediately prior to incorporation, the board reviewed its operation. The recommendations of the task group, that the board establish a wider set of committees, were implemented in early 1994. There are now committees for finance and premises, personnel, remuneration, audit, farm and marketing. Other committees meet as required to consider planning, staff and student discipline and the appointment of new governors. Most of the corporation's business is carried out by the committees. Meetings are well attended. Governors also support the college through individual membership of over half of the 15 employer advisory committees.

26 The corporation has been involved both through the planning committee, and as a board, in the review, development and agreement of the college's strategic plan. It has also contributed to the formulation of the mission statement. However, the board has not had any formal discussion about its overall information requirements, or of the indicators required to measure the performance of the college in achieving its aims. Other than the reports on finance and examination results, there is no formal reporting of performance data to the corporation. The governing body has not determined a set of performance indicators to measure its own achievements.

27 The college's teachers are organised into 10 programme teams which are responsible for curriculum development and delivery. Each team is led by a programme team manager who reports to the deputy principal. Three assistant principals are responsible across the college for learning resources, personnel, marketing and students. The deputy principal, assistant principals and college accountant report directly to the principal. These five people and the principal form the principal's management group. A college management group consists of the principal's group and the 10 programme team managers. Both groups meet on a regular weekly basis.

28 Although the current organisation has been in place for three years, there are problems, identified by staff, which are difficult to resolve because of the uncertainty of the roles of the cross-college managers. Recently, the job descriptions for these senior posts have been reconsidered in an attempt to reduce these uncertainties. Many of the senior and middle management posts filled during reorganisation went to existing staff with no opportunity for them to retrain. As a consequence, middle managers perform with varying degrees of effectiveness. There is limited delegation of authority and accountability to senior managers which has resulted in a large number of decisions being referred to the principal.

29 The lines of management and communication are unclear and the communication channels established through meetings are not fully effective. The principal's and college management groups do not have written terms of reference. The meetings are often long and they lack purposeful outcomes. Team managers have made limited contributions to these meetings. Where items are noted for action, there is no evidence of follow up, and there is no routine review by the members of the usefulness of the meetings. The academic board has made little effective contribution to the running of the college. The principal has introduced a briefing paper to help keep staff up to date on current issues and a working party has been established to consider ways in which communications might be improved.

30 There is little sense of the college working together with a coherent set of common aims. A number of well-documented college policies have been approved by the governing body, but only senior managers and governors have been involved in their development. The staff of the college have had little say in determining these policies. As a consequence, they do not feel committed to them, and the policies are operated with varying degrees of effectiveness. Policies on health and safety and equal opportunities are well established but other policies require further attention.

31 The management of most programme teams is effective. There are clear, well-understood lines of communication and members work well as a team. The teams are well structured and, in some cases, make good use of their advisory committees to support their planning processes. They operate in isolation from each other, however, and the opportunities to share good practice are limited. There are no formal procedures to ensure that programme team managers consult their line manager on objectives, progress toward achievement and the identification of issues requiring resolution.

32 The planning process within the college has been developing over the last two years. There has been insufficient integration of the programme team plans with the college's overall curriculum plan. The cross-college support functions do not follow the same procedures and some of their plans are under developed. Curriculum area teams and managers do not

sufficiently understand the college's planning process or the criteria for agreeing new courses. Teams have had insufficient opportunity to share and discuss their plans in the context of the college's overall development. A review of the achievement of last year's targets is under way and includes contributions from course tutors, programme teams, the college management group and the principal's management group. This review process needs strengthening.

33 The college has not developed a fully-effective approach to resource management. Expenditure is not directly related to curriculum development but is based on a roll forward of the previous year's expenditure. Allocations to programme areas have been made on the basis of their historical proportion of the budget, with some opportunity for budget holders at programme area level to influence the allocations. Revenue and capital allocations are public but are not fully understood by all managers. Budget profiles of monthly expenditure to assist in monitoring the achievement of financial targets are not routinely provided to budget holders.

34 The college has maintained a healthy cash reserve. The finance committee and senior management receive monthly financial reports covering income and expenditure and a balance sheet. There is effective computer support for financial accounting, although the timely delivery of management reports would provide better support for senior staff.

35 Summaries of the college's income and expenditure for 1993-94 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The average level of funding per unit in 1994-95 is £15.36. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £18.17. Recurrent funding from the FEFC forms 62.5 per cent of the total income and is supplemented by income from the Thames Valley Enterprise TEC, contracts for prison education, income from fees and the materials charges levied on students.

36 The college does not effectively manage the collection or use of information. Computerised systems are under developed. For example the college provides no computer-based support for registers, examination entries or achievements. No steps have been taken to analyse the information needs of the college or to develop a prioritised information and data-management strategy. The college does not have an agreed plan to improve management information. The advice of a consultant has been sought and this has stimulated some proposals to replace the computer hardware and software and to employ expert technical help.

37 The central information function, serving both the college management and external reporting requirements, is wholly ineffective. It has been unable to develop the student count and the calculation of learning units in line with funding parameters. It is unable to produce consistent and reliable information on 1993-94 completions. There is little confidence in its ability to be able to provide meaningful information on the past or present. At programme and college level, there are gaps in the availability

and use of information on attendance, retention, completion and students' destinations. There is a lack of quantifiable indicators on the effectiveness of resource utilisation. There are no rigorous measures of staff utilisation by programme area.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

38 There is no overall statement of policy for student recruitment, guidance and support, and no common practice covering all aspects of activity. Some facets of student support are sound. Procedures are being documented but practice has not yet caught up with the new initiatives introduced to promote consistent practice across all programme areas. The good-quality services provided in careers guidance and student counselling are too limited. The arrangements for identifying and supporting students who need additional help with literacy, numeracy and information technology skills have a number of weaknesses. While programme teams have reviewed aspects of their own provision, there is no college-wide monitoring or evaluation of the support services.

39 Student support services are located in several areas on the main site. The careers counselling and student services rooms are not well signposted, provide limited space and are some distance apart. The counsellor's room provides opportunities for confidential interviews and for the safekeeping of records. A range of reference materials, complementing those held in the library, is held in a careers guidance office, but they are not readily available to students. A well-resourced, registered day nursery, with 30 places, is available for the children of students. The governors have established a student support fund to provide additional financial support to students facing hardship.

40 There are useful links with schools which enable pre-entry advice and guidance to be given at schools' careers conventions. Arrangements are also made for prospective students to attend the college for 'taster' days in specific vocational areas. A full-time member of teaching staff works half time as the co-ordinator of careers activity. In addition, the post carries responsibility for developing and maintaining links with higher education. There is insufficient time allowed to complete this work, and individual programme team managers often take the initiative and contact local schools directly, offering to visit and give careers advice. College staff also work closely with the Buckinghamshire Careers Service to ensure that impartial advice is given to prospective students. The college is able to gain access to all but two of the local schools.

41 Students applying for a full-time course are invited for interview. Part-time students are rarely interviewed. A checklist providing guidance on interviewing has been produced for admissions tutors but interviewing practices vary. The guidance system is fragile: the quality of guidance on courses and careers is dependent on the programme area and the particular member of staff involved. While many students were satisfied with the advice they received, some students reported receiving little help.

42 A checklist for student induction procedures is being developed to enable course tutors to plan the process more effectively. Existing arrangements differ between the programme areas. During induction, there are opportunities for the college counsellor, schools' link and careers adviser and librarian to visit student groups to present information about the services provided. The careers adviser is also available to give further advice to students. Most full-time and part-time students had received the student diary/handbook, signed a learner agreement and knew about the charter. A policy for the accreditation of students' prior learning has been introduced, but few lecturers are qualified to implement it and the procedures are insufficiently developed. Most students spoke well of the induction process and found it useful.

43 Students on full-time courses and many of those on part-time courses have timetabled tutorial periods. The arrangements for personal tutoring are determined by each programme area and the quality of support varies. Typically, course tutors perform the role of personal tutors for students enrolled on their courses. A checklist has been prepared to provide overall guidance on the conduct of tutorials but as yet there is no tutor handbook. In some programme areas, a scheme of work has been prepared for tutorial activity on full-time courses. On a number of courses, the tutorial is used for action planning in which students, in consultation with their tutors, set their own learning objectives and evaluate their own progress. There is no college policy for recording students' achievements. National records of achievement are not generally maintained.

44 In some areas of work, tests are being piloted to identify those students who require additional support with literacy and numeracy. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, for example, students are participating in an Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit pilot. Programme team managers subsequently decide what assistance is required. All students admitted to GNVQ programmes this year completed psychometric tests. Oral feedback was provided to course tutors but not to individual students. This testing led to two students being redirected to other programmes of study.

45 The current provision made for students requiring additional learning support is unsatisfactory. The college has recently drafted a policy document on the introduction and implementation of core skills and learning support. In September 1994, an appointment was made to co-ordinate additional learning support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for other students requiring support in core skills. A learning workshop co-ordinator was also appointed. The roles of these post-holders overlap and should be clarified. Students in a number of areas reported that although they had indicated at enrolment they needed additional learning support they had not received it.

46 The college provides a limited student counselling service. A member of the teaching staff, who is a qualified counsellor, has been given six hours a week remission from teaching to provide counselling. Assistance is

provided by a network of 10 suitably-qualified members of staff who provide a voluntary service. A full-time member of the support staff plays a major role in informing students about finance, accommodation, transport, and liaison with LEAs and other agencies. Students can request an appointment or may drop in to the counselling service at certain designated times during the week. Students are normally seen within five days of asking for an appointment, as stated in the charter, but this does not constitute an adequate service. Some appointments have to be made during these drop-in periods. While the quality of what is provided is good, the time which is allocated is insufficient to meet the demands from students.

47 Continuing careers advice and guidance are provided throughout the year by course tutors and the careers service staff. More attention is given to providing guidance nearer the end of a student's course of study. Help is available to advise and guide students when applying to higher education, including completing the clearing-house application form. The careers service provides a structured programme of talks and a formal careers education programme. Destinations of full-time students are collected and used at programme team level, but such information is not collated centrally.

48 The student union aims to provide advice and support on careers, and on sports and social matters, and generally to raise the students' awareness of opportunities in education. College managers consult student union officers on a wide range of issues, particularly those relating to students' welfare. Not all students belong to the union and its membership is not representative of the student body as a whole. A draft constitution has been prepared. A student advisory committee has been established but had not met in the current term up to the time of the inspection.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

49 The strengths outweigh the weakness in 46 per cent of the 192 sessions inspected, which is a lower percentage than is normally the case in sector colleges. The weaknesses clearly outweighed the strengths in 11 per cent of the sessions. There were no sessions in which there were many weaknesses and very few strengths. The grades awarded during the inspection are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Access to higher education		1	4	2	0	0	7
GCE AS/A level		1	5	8	2	0	16
Basic education		0	3	5	1	0	9
GCSE		1	0	0	1	0	2
GNVQ		0	8	22	6	0	36
NVQ		2	25	18	6	0	51
Other vocational*		4	21	25	6	0	56
Other**		4	9	2	0	0	15
Total		13	75	82	22	0	192

Note: * mainly BTEC and C&G courses.

** short courses and evening-only courses in areas such as language and business skills.

50 Lecturers have a good knowledge of their subject. The majority of lessons were effectively conducted and the objectives and aims of sessions were made known to students. There is a good rapport between staff and students and lecturers create a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere in classes. In vocational courses, there is a good balance between theoretical and practical work, and lecturers make constructive use of relevant examples to relate theory to industrial and commercial practice. Teachers, generally, take insufficient account of the range of student ability. They often fail to challenge students intellectually, to develop critical thinking or to check students' understanding. In some classes, group work was inadequately planned and ineffectively managed; students frequently lost interest. On GNVQ courses, teachers do not give enough attention to the development of core skills. In general, teachers show insufficient awareness of the teaching methods and learning materials most appropriate for differing levels of work and differing levels of student ability. In some classes, the presentational materials used with overhead projectors and the handouts for students were of poor quality.

51 Assessments are set at an appropriate level, but the marking of assignments is sometimes perfunctory and teachers' comments fail to provide helpful feedback to students. The documentation for recording students' achievements is available, but it is not always completed. The procedures for tracking and monitoring of student achievements are neither consistent nor comprehensive.

52 In horticulture and floristry, students achieve a satisfactory level of knowledge and understanding. There is an appropriate emphasis on the development of practical skills, and effective use is made of the practical facilities in horticulture. In farming, students' knowledge and

understanding of the full range of farm enterprises, including the farm's dairy unit, are less well developed.

53 Learning activities in construction are focused on realistic practical projects. Self-study learning materials are used effectively to enable practical work to be underpinned by theoretical understanding. In one class, activities were well organised to encourage the development of interpersonal skills. Brickwork students were required to work in groups of three to lay out the run for a drain, and one student acted as supervisor, directing the work of the others. In some classes, the attention given to ensuring safe working practices is not as thorough as it should be. The recording of students' progress and achievements is comprehensive.

54 In engineering and motor vehicle engineering courses, lecturers make effective use of the industrial experience of individual students to support and enhance learning. Teaching is well matched to the abilities of the students and good use is made of student handouts. Some well-planned use is also made of computer-aided design in electronics courses. The practice of encouraging students to develop portfolios of their work is improving the presentation and organisation of assessed work.

55 Business studies lessons are set in context and activities are well paced. Students develop an appropriate knowledge and understanding of business but there is limited use of up-to-date software and insufficient development of study and core skills. In business administration, effective use is made of a model office and work experience to develop commercial practices. There is particularly effective organisation of assignments to ensure timely completion and assessment of student work. There are well-designed course handbooks and teaching schemes to support management courses and professional courses.

56 Catering courses provide good opportunities for students to learn in restaurant facilities which are open to the public. In practical sessions, some students act as mentors to others, and this encourages them to learn from each other whilst under the supervision and direction of teachers. The integration of part-time and mature students with full-time students further enhances learning opportunities. Students take part in external visits, but some of these lack clearly-defined aims. Work experience is not assessed on all programmes, and students are sometimes not clear how to claim accreditation against performance criteria.

57 In child and community care courses, lecturers provided sympathetic support for students and dealt effectively with the range of individual students' needs. In some sessions, students' work was well supported by learning materials which provided opportunity for them to be creative and to develop their analytical skills. In a number of sessions, where students worked solely from written instructions, the material provided was not of an appropriate level for the group. Work placements are chosen carefully and monitored closely to provide students with the appropriate practical

work experience. Teachers keep full records of their visits to students on placement.

58 Hairdressing students develop a high level of practical skill. Teachers employ an effective range of methods, including group activity, teacher input and student presentation, and use a wide variety of teaching aids. Teachers make effective reference to previous learning and make good use of students' experience in work placements and practical sessions. Suitable assessments were carried out during classes. However, students do not work at a pace which is appropriate to achieve and complete the necessary assessments for accreditation in NVQ programmes.

59 In art and design, poor class control and ineffective organisation of lessons resulted in unsatisfactory learning experiences for many students. There are insufficient resources to support the range of courses offered. Teaching staff lack recent professional experience and some teaching of drawing was based on inappropriate techniques. There is insufficient support for the development of core skills, particularly for those students with previous low attainments in numeracy, information technology or literacy.

60 Modern language classes were conducted in the language which was being studied, and there was an emphasis on oral work. In the best lessons, the teacher acted as the facilitator of group work rather than as the focal point of class activity. One typical class involved the students in a variety of activities which included role play using the telephone, group discussion, listening and written comprehension work. Good progress was made in the acquisition of language skills. In a few classes, there was excessive use of spoken English. Teachers did not make much use of video and overhead projector facilities, although at times they would have been helpful to learning.

61 The quality of teaching and learning in GCE A level and GCSE subjects varied. In some subjects, the teaching was well organised, related to the syllabus, and based on well-structured schemes of work. English students were able to participate in a variety of classroom activities and good use was made of handouts. Geography classes were well managed. In other subjects, there was a narrow range of teaching methods. Students were not given enough opportunity to take the initiative, to think for themselves, or to discuss issues with each other. There is no consistent approach to setting or marking homework.

62 Skilful and expert teaching was observed on the Further and Adult Education Teachers Certificate. Classes were well prepared, structured and presented. Students were successfully involved in the work and encouraged to use their previous knowledge and experience. They achieved high standards and there were high rates of completion and progression from stage one to stage two.

63 The organisation and deployment of computing resources limits

effective development of information technology skills in some curriculum areas and there is not enough opportunity for students to use information technology independently at times of their own choosing. There is little use of information technology by business studies students and insufficient opportunity for students on hairdressing and beauty courses to make use of information technology facilities. However, there are some examples of effective teaching in computing and information technology. At an initial meeting with students one lecturer made good use of a short, well-constructed questionnaire to identify the level of their previous knowledge of business computer software. A class exercise was then used to determine the students' levels of skill in using particular software packages, thus enabling the lecturer to agree individual programmes of work. The class was effectively supported by a well-produced learning guide and up-to-date information technology facilities.

64 On courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities innovative use is made of a sensory room and sensory gardens which have been designed by the college. Students enjoy their work and have developed effective group identities. However, in some classes activities were repetitive and unchallenging, or not appropriate for adult students. There was an absence of positive feedback on students' written work and students were not involved in reviewing their own programmes. Student records are poorly managed and do not assist lecturers in developing their teaching. The liaison between teaching and non-teaching staff is sometimes ineffective. Although close contact with parents and carers is maintained, teachers have limited access to information about students' prior learning or learning difficulties. With the exception of a small number of deaf or hearing-impaired students there are few students on vocational courses whose learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been identified. There is effective support for deaf students on construction courses and good liaison between teachers, staff and communicators.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

65 Most students enjoy their studies and are enthusiastic and appreciative of their courses. In the majority of classes, students are able to build effectively on previous knowledge and acquire new skills. They are clear about assessment requirements and understand the methods used for monitoring their progress.

66 Although there are some weaknesses in basic literacy, students' written work is generally of a satisfactory standard. The written work in modern languages, hair and beauty, nursery nursing and access to higher education courses was generally of a high standard. Practical work was carried out competently. The quality of work seen in construction craft subjects, for those students nearing the completion of their programme, fully matched the requirements of industry. In modern languages, students achieve a high standard in their use of the spoken language.

67 Of the 94 student entries recorded in the Department for Education's 1994 performance tables, 97 per cent of students in the final year of study on vocational courses were successful. This is an improvement on the college's success rate of 90 per cent in 1993. It places the college among the top 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this measure of performance. Overall, there were over 2,000 entries for vocational courses in 1994, half of which were from 16-18 year olds.

68 Student achievements on vocational courses are generally good. A high proportion of students taking GNVQ or precursor awards in the areas of agriculture, catering, leisure and tourism and health and social care successfully achieve their qualification. On some of the externally-assessed examinations, such as that for the Institute of Export, the college achieves pass rates above the national average. In C&G examinations in construction the pass rates are above 90 per cent. In hairdressing, pass rates are generally over 80 per cent for courses other than those leading to NVQs. Results in other areas are less satisfactory. Initial results for the business studies intermediate GNVQ show low pass rates. The pass rate for the BTEC national diploma in computer studies is lower than the national average; and students' achievements on vocational art and design courses are generally poor.

69 Results for courses leading to NVQs are variable. In business, office skills, hairdressing and construction, few students achieve the complete NVQ qualification during the year of the course, and some single subject results in business administration are very poor. On the popular Association of Accounting Technicians programme there was a high level of partial completion at foundation and intermediate level but low pass rates in some assessments.

70 The 109 students aged 16-18 entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1993-94 scored on average 2.2 points per entry. This places the college in the bottom 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the tables published by the Department for Education. There are some good A level results in English, communications, philosophy and languages. Results in some other subjects, for example economics, politics, geography, science and mathematics, have been consistently poor over a number of years.

71 Results in GCSE examinations vary in quality. Students resitting GCSE English gained good results but results for GCSE mathematics are below the average for the further education sector.

72 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are insufficiently challenged and the opportunity for students to achieve accreditation is limited. Few opportunities are provided for students to progress to mainstream vocational routes and students following specialist courses make poor progress.

73 Retention targets of between 60 per cent and 85 per cent have been set for each programme area. Overall retention figures for students completing their courses in 1993 are recorded in the review of the college strategic plan. For students aged 16-18 years on entry, 75 per cent those who were full time and 60 per cent of those who were part time completed their courses. The figures for students aged 19 and above show the reverse pattern with 77 per cent of part-time students and 66 per cent of full-time students completing their courses. In most areas the proportion of students who complete their courses is satisfactory. There is a high level of completion for full-time business administration courses and for professional courses in management and personnel. In some cases, however, the number of students withdrawing from courses is high. For the first diploma in motor vehicle studies less than 50 per cent of students who initially enrolled completed the course. For the BTEC national diploma in computer studies the completion figure is only 63 per cent of students.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

74 The college has been slow to develop an effective quality assurance system. A revised policy for 'curriculum quality/monitoring and evaluation' was introduced in September 1994 in order to simplify existing procedures and incorporate measures of performance. The reporting procedures follow the line management structure but there is insufficient feedback to course tutors and programme team managers following the completion of reports, and reports are not fully considered by the academic board. The procedures do not constitute an effective quality assurance system. The college lacks a means of measuring its outcomes against targets to bring about improvements in quality.

75 Course monitoring is conducted through the completion of a series of forms and questionnaires. There has been little consultation with course tutors about the processes and these are not operated consistently by all programme teams. The system in use until the current year did not ensure a rigorous analysis of the quality of course delivery. The format adopted for course monitoring and review reports failed to provide for a comprehensive and critical evaluation of each course. Some course reviews include a summary of student questionnaires, but others do not. Examples of good practice exist in the Training and Development Lead Body training programmes, in student involvement with some GNVQ reviews and in the quality procedures used in hairdressing.

76 A number of improvements have been made for the current year. The new forms are more comprehensive and considered to be easier to complete than the previous documents. Targets have been established for retention rates and examination results against which performance can be measured. A series of quality criteria has also been introduced and course tutors are required to use these to evaluate the operation of their courses. The monitoring process does not result in action plans which can lead to improvements. There is no attempt to evaluate examination performance

in terms of the value added to students' achievements at the college by comparing examination results with entry qualifications. Student questionnaires have been completed but not yet analysed or collated. The revised approach to course review is not appropriate for unit-based programmes but no alternative has yet been devised.

77 A summary paper based on the monitoring reports is presented to the academic board annually. Senior staff do not comment directly to course teams on the content of the reports. Some of the reports together with examination results are presented to the appropriate specialist advisory committee. Examination results are also reviewed by the corporation annually. A process of in-depth investigation of selected courses has been discontinued. There is no formal procedure for reporting back to course tutors on either the quality of the reports or the need for action as a result of the evaluation conducted. Some teaching staff are unconvinced of the benefits of the system and complete the forms only because it is required.

78 Internal verification procedures are developing. A college committee brings together the staff concerned once a term. There is no time allocated to staff to carry out the verification. Reports from moderators and external verifiers are not dealt with consistently although, in some instances, problems identified in moderators' reports have been taken up with the programme team concerned.

79 The college has taken action to identify its management and staff-development needs. There is a commitment to achieve the Investors in People award by December 1995, but progress to date has been slow and a revised target of summer 1996 is being considered. The personnel and staff-development strategy for 1994-97 has the stated aim of raising organisational effectiveness by further developing the contribution of staff. A positive feature of the strategy is its identification of strengths and weaknesses and its statement of key strategies to meet objectives. However, it is not supported by an operational plan indicating how human resource needs will be assessed.

80 Although some account is taken of college priorities, staff development is largely led by demands from individuals. The sum allocated to staff development is about 1.25 per cent of staff costs which is adequate to meet current demands. In-house staff development has resulted in an adequate number of trained assessors, but there are few staff qualified to carry out assessment of students' prior learning. One hour each week is reserved throughout the college for meetings related to staff development. However, the college does not have a planned programme of staff-development activities.

81 A system of appraisal for administrative staff was introduced by the LEA prior to incorporation and has been positively received. It is related to pay increments and results in the establishment of targets and identification of staff-development needs, some of which have been met.

A format for academic staff appraisal has been agreed but not yet implemented. Training for its introduction is planned for early 1995. A process of voluntary staff interviews has been introduced for management staff, including programme team managers. For the deputy principal and assistant principals, these lead to the establishing of targets which are subsequently reviewed. For programme team managers a staff-development interview takes place. The principal has not been appraised by the corporation or set personal targets.

82 The preparation of the college's self-assessment document was based on a process mainly limited to consultation between senior managers. The report, 'An Internal Management Quality Assessment Overview', failed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the college in important areas of activity such as quality assurance. It lacked evaluative comment and was insufficiently comprehensive to form the basis of an assessment of the quality of work in the college. In the period between the specialist inspections and the team inspection, the college's programme teams composed responses to the inspections of curriculum areas. However, these did not include proposed actions to resolve the issues raised.

83 All students are provided with an outline of students' rights and responsibilities under the Charter for Further Education. This is included in a well-designed pocket-sized diary describing the facilities available in the college. Students regularly use the diary and value the readily available guidance on the charter. Staff are aware of the commitments contained within the charter. The more detailed college charter addresses all the commitments in the Charter for Further Education. The college is making steady progress towards meeting these requirements.

RESOURCES

Staffing

84 Most teachers possess the appropriate qualifications and experience to deliver the current programme of courses. Over 50 per cent have degrees, 80 per cent are trained as teachers and more than half have achieved assessor training awards. In a few cases, staff lack appropriate vocational qualifications and expertise. Overall there is a good balance of male and female staff, but there are no women among the six members of the principal's management group and only two of the 10 programme team managers are women.

85 Approximately 15 per cent of teaching is carried out by part-time staff. The proportion of part-time staff is high in some areas of work. The college has a thorough procedure for the recruitment of part-time staff. In some curriculum areas new part-time staff are observed at work in the classroom. In others, the support for part-time staff is lacking.

86 Technician support is adequate in all areas, apart from computing. Administrative support for programme team managers and lecturers is

inadequate. Little progress has been made in identifying administrative tasks that could properly be carried out by support staff rather than lecturers. Staffing for the library is insufficient. There is only one qualified librarian.

Equipment/learning resources

87 Most specialist rooms are adequately equipped. Catering, sports therapy, beauty therapy and hairdressing are well equipped. There are deficiencies in the provision for art and design. Equipment for the 'outreach' course for students with learning difficulties, based on the main site, is not suitable for the age of the students. Little effort has been made to dispose of equipment which is not fit for its purpose. General teaching rooms have sufficient furniture of reasonable quality and they are adequately equipped with whiteboards and overhead projectors.

88 The college has 180 computer workstations. The ratio of 14 students to one workstation is unsatisfactory. Few computers have up-to-date specifications and many are in need of replacement. Computers are scattered in 15 different locations across the college. Efficiency would be improved by some centralisation of this resource. A reasonable range of software is available, although some machines will not run modern software. The college has acted on its commitment to develop information technology by beginning to develop a college network. It has also appointed an academic network manager and set up a computer users' group. However, the college has no policy for information technology and no programme for the replacement of computing equipment.

89 The library provision is inadequate. Much of the bookstock is out of date. Stock items per full-time student are 7.4 against a Library Association recommendation of 17 and an average for similar colleges of 11. The stock of 130 periodicals is close to the sector average. Full-time students per library staff member are approximately 640 against a Library Association recommendation of 311. The library is too small and it has inadequate and inflexible study space. Under-provision over the years has resulted in the library being under used. The college has appointed consultants to advise on improvements to the library facilities.

90 Central learning resource facilities also include a spacious core-skills workshop, an open-learning centre, audio-visual facilities and open-access computing facilities. Management of these central services is fragmented amongst a number of staff. Locations are also widely dispersed with the result that there is no integrated management and development of the facilities. Areas that should be inter-related are developing at different speeds in an unco-ordinated way. Programme teams also provide their own learning-resource centres or workshops. For example, the well-used resource centre for construction gives students access to reference material to support their practical work.

91 The college has recognised the need to support the development of numeracy, literacy and use of information technology. The recently-established core-skills workshop is equipped with computers and provides an appropriate working environment. However, the function of the workshop, its staffing and its place in cross-curricular provision has yet to be defined. Some staff are unclear about the arrangements for its use and support. There is a lack of learning resource materials for work in developing core skills, and the workshop has fallen considerably short of its potential. The computers in the workshop, for instance, are mainly used by students working on assignments.

92 There is no overall purchasing policy and no plan for the replacement of equipment. Programme team managers have delegated budgets for consumables and equipment valued up to £500. They submit annual bids for capital equipment. The college has a record of the capital purchases made since incorporation but there is no detailed asset register. There is a policy of charging students for materials. In some areas the charge is high; for example full-time students on construction courses pay £150 each.

Accommodation

93 General purpose classrooms are of an adequate size. Some rooms, particularly those used for management and professional courses at Hampden Hall, are of high quality. However, many are poorly maintained, in need of decoration or untidy. Some computing rooms are poorly furnished and equipment is badly organised.

94 Specialist accommodation is of variable standard. Sports therapy, beauty therapy, hairdressing, catering, ceramics and photography have good accommodation. The motor vehicle body shop is well kept and presents a professional image. The model office is large and well equipped. The college also has a large, well-lit gymnasium, a squash court and a well-equipped fitness centre. Specialist accommodation which is not satisfactory includes the language laboratory and the travel office. A particular weakness is the use of mobile classrooms for students with learning difficulties on the 'outreach' course. These rooms are untidy, unstimulating, and poorly laid out for students who have the greatest difficulty in learning.

95 Communal areas on the main site do not present the college to its full advantage. The reception area is not designed to provide a focus for visitors; the refectory is small and the service is closed in the evening; and the lack of a student common room is a significant weakness. Most of the site is accessible to wheelchair users: two purpose-built lifts provide access up short flights of stairs. Access to buildings on the main site is hampered by heavy doors.

96 The vast majority of teaching rooms, including specialist rooms, are allocated to programme teams. The allocation is based on precedent and, in some cases, a team's rooms are scattered across the site, causing

inconvenience to staff and students. Some staffrooms are also located well away from the teaching rooms used by the staff concerned. Other accommodation is similarly dispersed, for example the library, the core-skills workshop and the open-learning centre.

97 The majority of buildings at Hampden Hall are farm buildings or greenhouses for horticulture. Some farm buildings are new, but many are redundant and in a state of decay. The farm is generally untidy: there is a large quantity of surplus and derelict farm machinery and other rubbish on the site. Although the farm is a profitable enterprise with a herd of 150 dairy cattle and good facilities for practical horticulture, the farm site as a whole is a poor example to students. Hampden Hall also has a small library. It is not staffed, and relies on an honour system for loans.

98 The college has recently produced an accommodation strategy. This describes the current accommodation in some detail and goes on to state that space is sufficient to meet foreseeable needs. A utilisation survey carried out by the college in autumn 1994 indicates low overall use of accommodation. The potential for development has been recognised, in particular the possibility of a management centre at Hampden Hall. No firm plans are in place. The accommodation strategy fails to identify and address accommodation issues in sufficient detail. Consultants have prepared a detailed five-year maintenance plan. This has been revised in view of available resources, and the college has been able to begin to improve the quality of the sites and buildings.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

99 The college has some way to go to achieve its aim of providing high-quality education and training which meets the needs of the community it serves. Its strengths are:

- the broad range of vocational courses
- the well-managed and effective courses for young people sponsored by the TEC
- the well-regarded education programmes for the prison service
- its sound financial base for institutional development
- the effective operation of programme teams
- some good examination results in vocational courses.

100 If it is to improve the quality of its provision the college should:

- establish effective arrangements for curriculum management
- involve programme teams in determining college priorities and targets
- improve arrangements for the allocation of resources to support the curriculum
- provide accurate and effective management information

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- develop a co-ordinated approach to marketing
 - improve students' achievements in GCE AS/A level examinations
 - achieve a more consistent quality of support and guidance for students
 - devise adequate procedures for monitoring and assessing quality
 - improve the provision and management of central learning resources
 - provide additional learning support in numeracy, literacy and information technology
 - improve the quality of the library
 - increase the number of computers available to students.

FIGURES

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- 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 (as at October 1994)

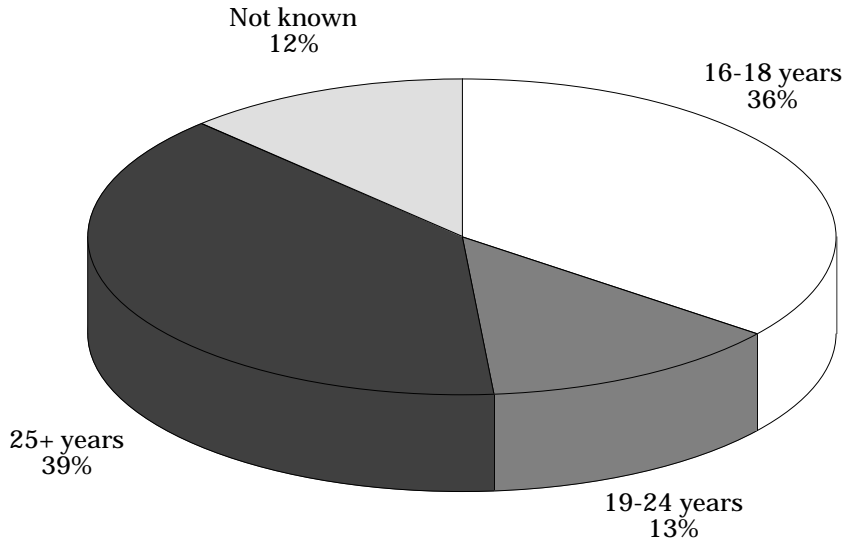
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 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

Aylesbury College: percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)

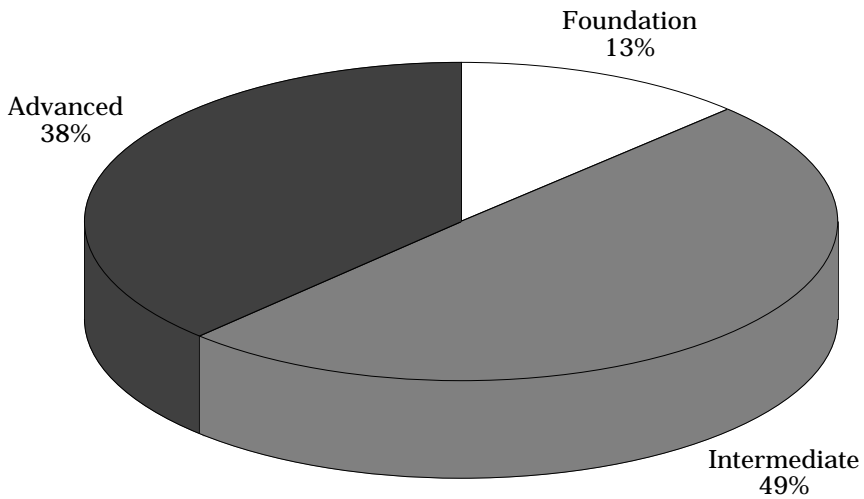


Enrolments: 6,017

Note: this chart excludes 24 enrolments aged under 16.

Figure 2

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

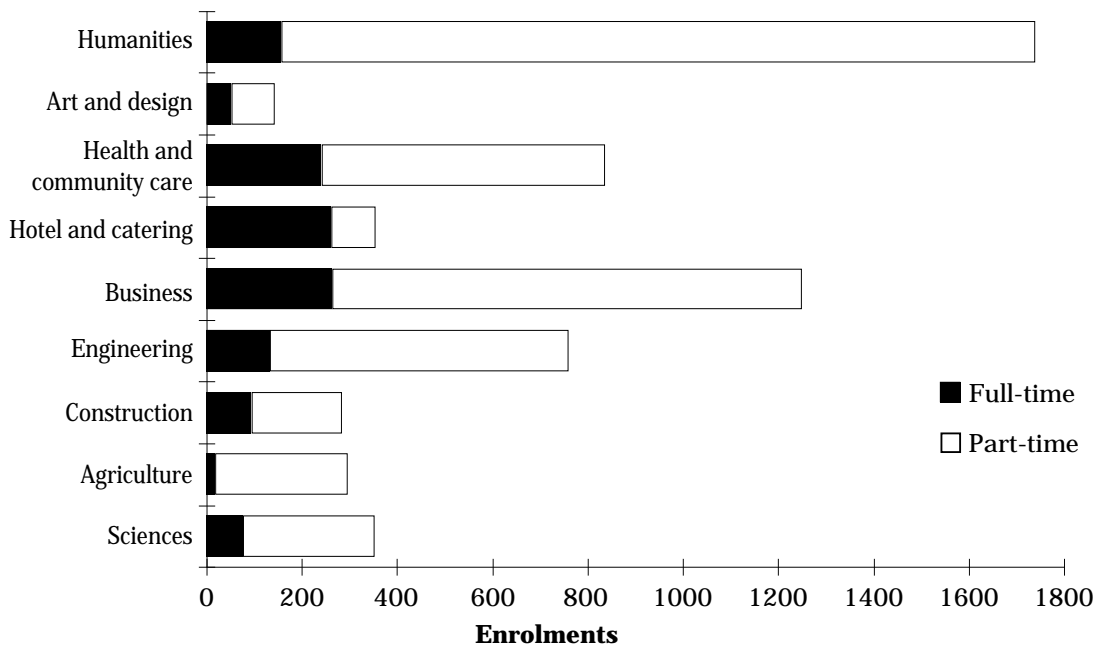


Enrolments: 6,017

Note: this chart excludes 28 higher education enrolments.

Figure 3

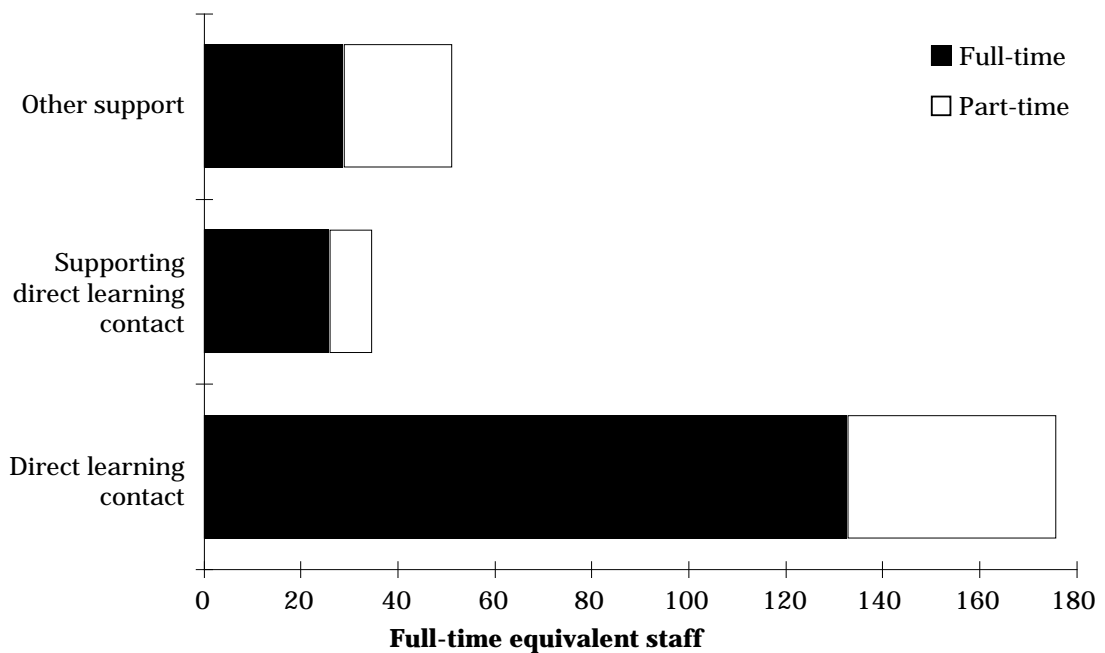
Aylesbury College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)



Enrolments: 6,017

Figure 4

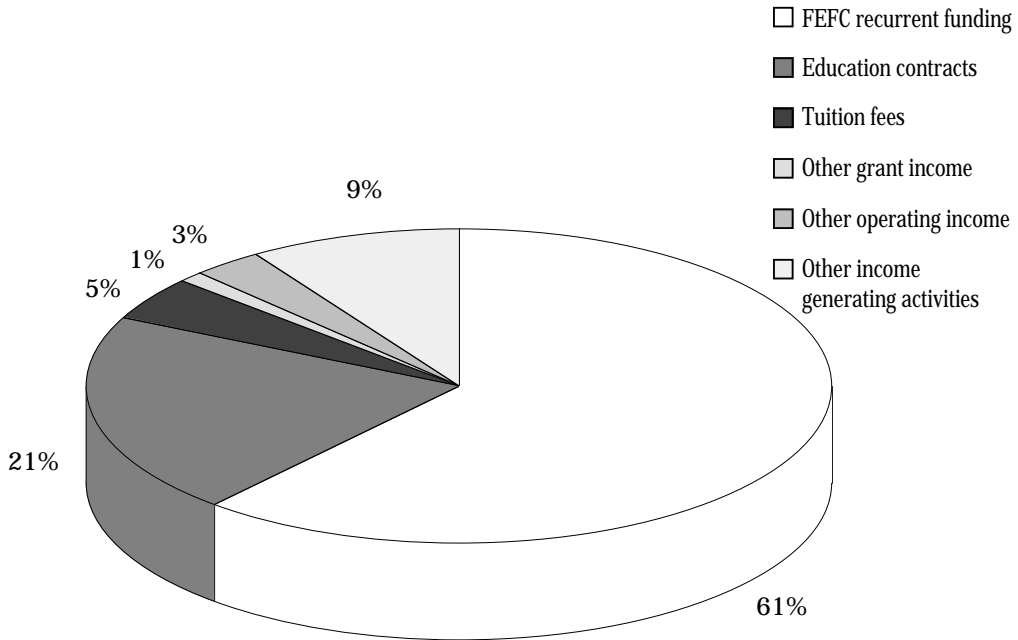
Aylesbury College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at October 1994)



Full-time equivalent staff: 262

Figure 5

Aylesbury College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)

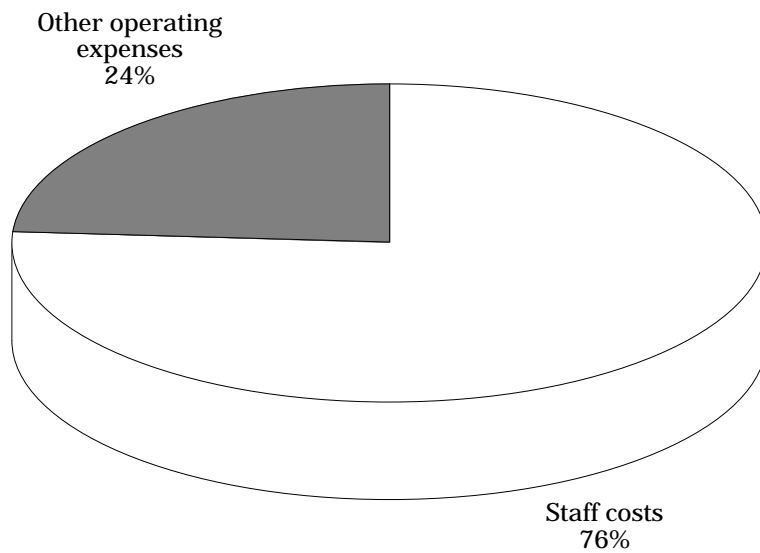


Income: £10,176,000

Note: this chart excludes £32,000 capital grants.

Figure 6

Aylesbury College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £10,073,000

Note: this chart excludes £36,000 depreciation and £23,000 interest payable.

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