

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**Bedford
College**

April 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-95

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 56/96

BEDFORD COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected March 1995-January 1996

Summary

Bedford College was established as a college of further education in 1994 following the transfer of most of its higher education provision to the university sector. The college offers a wide range of general education and vocational courses. It also has specialist courses which recruit regionally and nationally. There are valuable links with external organisations. The corporation is committed to the success of the college and to improving the standards of governance. Changes to the organisational structure are not yet clear to all staff although most courses and subjects are well managed. Action is being taken to improve the unsatisfactory quality of hairdressing and beauty therapy courses. The student services unit is providing a good level of support. Teaching is generally well planned but, in some areas of work, the narrow range of teaching methods limits learning. On some courses, the proportion of students progressing to higher education or employment is high. However, too many students are leaving their courses early. Examination results are satisfactory or good in a number of areas, but achievements on some vocational courses and on GCE A level courses for 16 to 18 year olds are below average for the sector. Poor statistical information seriously limits the effectiveness with which the college monitors aspects of its performance. The framework for quality assurance is comprehensive but has yet to have a significant impact on students' experience. Much of the accommodation has been improved but some specialist accommodation remains unsatisfactory. There is good accommodation and equipment for science and technology.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Construction	2	Health and community care	2
Engineering	2	Hairdressing and beauty therapy	4
Business and secretarial studies	2	Art and design	3
Hospitality, catering, leisure and tourism	3	General education (including sciences and humanities)	3
		Access	2

INTRODUCTION

1 Bedford College was inspected between March 1995 and January 1996. Inspectors visited the college for a total of 91 days. They inspected 201 classes, examined students' work and held discussions with staff, students, members of the corporation and representatives from Bedfordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), industry, higher education, and the local community. Inspectors also attended college meetings and examined a wide range of college documents.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 In 1977, Mander College of Further Education, Bedford College of Physical Education and Bedford College of Education merged to form Bedford College of Higher Education. In August 1994, some 16 months after incorporation, the majority of the higher education provision was transferred to De Montfort University. To reflect the significant changes to the college, including the new focus of its work, the college was given approval by the secretary of state to change its name to Bedford College.

3 There are four colleges of further education in Bedfordshire. Barnfield College, Dunstable College and Luton Sixth Form College are all in the south of the county. Bedford College is the only further education college in the north of the county. The college faces intense competition from local schools in recruiting school leavers. Bedfordshire has 18 upper schools providing education for students aged 13 to 18. Fourteen of these are maintained by the local education authority and four are grant maintained. Seven upper schools are in the town of Bedford. There are also six single-sex independent secondary schools in the town, four of which have sixth forms. Of the 16 special schools for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the county, four offer their own post-16 provision. Higher education in Bedfordshire is provided mainly by the University of Luton, Cranfield University and De Montfort University in Bedford. However, some higher education programmes are still offered at Bedford College itself. The college sponsors adult education in five centres in Bedford and the surrounding villages.

4 According to the 1991 census, manufacturing industry accounted for about 29 per cent of employment in Bedfordshire. Two-thirds of this was in engineering, including motor vehicle, electrical and mechanical engineering. About 20 per cent of jobs were in distribution, hotels and catering and a further 28 per cent in other service industries including public administration, public protection and defence, health and education. Since the census the economic recession and industrial redevelopment have led to a significant reduction in employment in engineering, vehicle and defence industries. The county's 29,000 self-employed work mainly in construction, distribution and other services. Luton and south Bedfordshire are more heavily industrialised than mid-Bedfordshire, which is extensively rural. In August 1995, when the national unemployment rate was 8.4 per cent, it was 8 per cent in the town of

Bedford and 7.5 per cent in the county. The town is close to a number of airports, has good rail links with the rest of the country and is close to a number of major roads. The college is in the Bedfordshire TEC area.

5 The college estimates that just over 50 per cent of its students are recruited from Bedford itself, 20 per cent from surrounding villages and a further 15 per cent from the areas of Hitchin and Huntingdon to the east. Specialised programmes, including aeronautical engineering, attract students from further afield. The percentage of 16 year olds in Bedfordshire continuing in full-time education has increased from 68 per cent in 1991 to 74 per cent in 1994. Over 65 per cent of the student population is over 19 years of age. Almost 10 per cent of the county's population is of minority ethnic origin, compared with 5.5 per cent for the United Kingdom as a whole.

6 At the end of the summer term 1995 there were 2,178 students enrolled on full-time programmes and 8,242 on part-time programmes. Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. There were 143 full-time equivalent teachers, over 56 full-time equivalent support staff and 84 full-time equivalent staff providing indirect support for teaching. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The college is organised into nine groups, each led by a group manager. Five of the groups have curriculum and cross-college responsibilities and four have responsibility for various business support activities.

7 The college's main three-acre site is in an attractive location, close to the town centre, overlooking the river Great Ouse. The college also makes use of three small annexes, all within three miles of the main site. There is a limited amount of residential accommodation.

8 The college's mission is fourfold: to act 'as a gateway to jobs, career progression, further study and more fulfilled lives'; to act 'as a magnet through unique courses, facilities and expertise'; to 'be a business partner for industry and commerce'; and to 'be a focus for the local community'.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 The college is making an effective contribution to the achievement of national targets for education and training by providing a wide range of vocational programmes covering all major curriculum areas except agriculture. In most curriculum areas, there is a wide choice of courses and good opportunities for progression. Engineering provision includes several specialist courses, such as robotics and aeronautical engineering, in addition to the normal range of engineering courses. Provision in hairdressing, beauty therapy and hospitality is much narrower.

10 Most National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programmes are offered at levels 1 to 3 and the range extends to level 4 in areas such as retailing, wholesaling and warehousing, and to level 5 in management courses.

Some of the vocational provision is designed to meet the needs of specific organisations and takes place off-site. For example, a programme for an NVQ in administration for employees of the local education authority offers monthly workshops at which students are given guidance on how to compile a portfolio of evidence. A successful initiative has been the development of NVQs in sport and recreation, and outdoor education. The college offers two foundation, six intermediate and three full-time advanced programmes for General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). At advanced level the college has chosen to retain or re-introduce Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diplomas in vocational areas where it feels that the course content is better suited to the needs of students or is preferred by employers. Overall, there is a good range of courses at advanced level, but the mix of intermediate GNVQ and national diploma courses produces discontinuity in the methods by which students are assessed. At foundation level the range of courses is limited. In leisure and tourism and in hospitality, students have been enrolled on intermediate courses where a foundation level course would have been more appropriate.

11 The college offers a wide range of general education provision. This includes 25 General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level), 13 GCE advanced supplementary (AS), and 22 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects. Some of the GCE A levels, such as Italian and philosophy, are not commonly offered in schools. The timetable is organised to allow students a wide choice of subject combinations, but most subjects are available only as one-year courses. Students choosing a combination of one-year and two-year courses have an unbalanced workload and they are often unable to present GCE A level grades obtained in the same year to university admissions tutors.

12 The college has a strong portfolio of access to higher education courses. Students are prepared for degree courses in art and design, law, science, health and social studies and for entry to primary or secondary phase Bachelor of Education courses. There is also a general 'access to degree studies' programme which is available on a full-time basis in Bedford and on a part-time basis at outreach centres in small towns about 10 miles from the college. A pre-access course is offered to students who require additional support before returning to study. Other programmes specifically for adults include new part-time counselling training courses, which have recruited over 80 students since September 1995.

13 The college is committed to meeting the needs of individual students. In some areas of work, an individual programme of study will be negotiated if existing courses are unsuitable. This enables students to join full-time classes on a part-time basis. In other areas, the structures of courses have been modified to enable more people to attend. For example, part-time health and social care students can join a modular programme which provides flexibility and choice both in the mode of study and the duration of the course. The college also provides workshops in information

technology, numeracy and communications, which students can attend as they choose. The development of open learning, which enables students to study at their own pace, is limited. Most of the 60 students who choose this mode of study are taking GCE A levels or GCSEs.

14 The college is an associate college of De Montfort University. It offers full-time and part-time franchised higher education courses in business studies, management, computing and engineering. The full-time courses exempt students from the first two years of related degree courses at the university. In addition, there are progression agreements with Cranfield University in sciences and with Luton University in childcare.

15 The college offers two courses designed for students with moderate and severe learning difficulties and there are good links with social services, special schools and employers who provide work experience places. Students' needs are thoroughly assessed so that the college's provision builds on their previous experiences. To support students with dyslexia the college has recently set up a dyslexia workshop.

16 The college has strong links with the community and with the county and borough authorities. Valuable discussions have taken place with the county council education department on a number of policy matters; for example, transport policy and the funding of provision for students aged under 16. Community links have been strengthened by the college's participation in a major regeneration project in the Queens Park area of Bedford. College students are regularly involved in local events. For example, leisure and tourism, and performing arts students assist in the organisation of the May Bank Holiday River Festival. The college is beginning to develop overseas partnerships but as yet there are no student exchanges.

17 The highly-competitive market for post-16 students in north Bedfordshire has led to some difficulties in relationships with secondary schools. There is a link with a local independent school which enables pupils to study at college for secretarial qualifications one day each week. The college construction staff team also holds an activity day each year when primary school children can try their hand at plumbing, painting, bricklaying and carpentry. However, in most curriculum areas there are no links with schools. The chief executive meets with local head teachers but there are no forums at which post-16 provision is discussed or promoted.

18 The college has a good relationship with Bedfordshire TEC which regards it as an increasingly responsive and effective provider. The college has contracts for 'skills match', an assessment and basic skills programme to assist young people to bridge the gap between school and work, youth training and adult training. It has also made successful bids for projects such as those providing skills for small businesses. Although there is no institution-wide approach to the development of links with industry, the college has established good working relationships with industry through

NVQ provision, work experience arrangements, and advisory panels and through its network of over 100 development consultants who work on a voluntary basis, advising on new course proposals and other issues. Senior staff, including the chief executive, represent the college on local industry groups. Employers are satisfied with the service they receive from the college and the quality of its courses. The college provides full-cost courses to meet customers' needs. It has achieved its targets for the income to be derived from such courses but there is no business plan for the development of full-cost provision.

19 College programmes are publicised through attractive posters, a course catalogue and basic leaflets. There has been extensive advertising by direct mail to over 160,000 homes and there is a full range of open days and taster days. The college is developing its marketing strategy. It obtains published information on the labour market and has carried out some competitor analysis but it does not have a systematic approach to market research. There is little evaluation of the effectiveness of marketing activities and no central marketing database. The college has begun to address some of these weaknesses by re-allocating responsibilities for marketing and appointing a marketing co-ordinator.

20 The equal opportunities policy was recently reviewed following consultation with staff. This has improved the profile of equal opportunities in the college and contributed to progress on, for example, interview procedures and access for wheelchair users. However, the policy is not supported by standards to guide practice, action plans or monitoring systems. Consequently, the requirement that course evaluations include comment on equal opportunities is often not carried out. The focus for equal opportunities is a small subgroup of the college management team. It does not have a formal remit, the outcomes of its meetings are not recorded and as a result some staff are unaware of its existence. Although staff are sensitive to equal opportunities they have insufficient opportunities to discuss issues and promote good practice.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

21 The corporation has 13 members including the chief executive. Most of the nine business members, who include a nominee of Bedfordshire TEC, have considerable relevant expertise gained from their time in senior positions in local industries or commercial organisations. One of the two co-opted members is a member of the local borough council; the other is the college's deputy chief executive. Four of the members are women. None of the members have current experience of higher education but the vice-chair serves on the local board of De Montfort University. At the time of the inspection, there were vacancies for two business members, a student member and a member of the academic staff. The board are reviewing the vacancies in relation to the overall composition of the corporation.

22 The corporation members are committed to the success of the college and give their time willingly. They provide effective support to the chief executive and senior management. Agendas and supporting papers for board meetings are well prepared. Members are encouraged to develop links with one of the five academic groups or the four business support groups to further their understanding of the college's work. Much of the detailed work of the corporation is carried out by its four committees: audit; remuneration; finance, estates and policy; and human resources. An estates subcommittee has been established which includes members with specialist expertise drawn from outside the membership of the corporation.

23 The corporation is concerned to improve the standards of governance. In 1994, it established a register of members' interests and a code of conduct. It has also agreed a performance target for stewardship and leadership. The corporation holds an annual away day to discuss broad issues and review its performance. One outcome has been the decision to establish a corporate governance committee that will consider the structure, balance and size of the corporation.

24 The corporation has spent considerable time overseeing the ceding of much of the college's higher education provision to De Montfort University. Recently, the corporation and senior managers have focused on the financial situation, arrangements for monitoring student recruitment, strategies for improving accommodation and for increasing the use of information technology in teaching and learning and the negotiation and introduction of new contracts for teaching staff. These issues have placed heavy demands on the time of members of the corporation and have reduced the time available to consider other aspects of college performance.

25 In 1994, the corporation agreed to monitor the college's performance using 10 performance indicators each of which required the accumulation of substantial numerical and quantitative data. In the event, the full range of performance indicators was not presented to them because there was a lack of confidence in the accuracy of the student data and a recognition that a more succinct, and easily-assimilated set of measures was required. Initial data on retention rates presented to the corporation gave an over optimistic picture because of the way in which retention was defined. The corporation has not yet received information on students' achievements for the 1994-95 session.

26 In addition to the chief executive, appointed in July 1995, the college management team comprises the deputy chief executive, managers of the academic and business support groups and the recently-appointed finance director. The team meets fortnightly. At each meeting there is a regular review of student recruitment. Any deviation from target numbers is discussed. Other working groups have been set up as required to take

forward management initiatives although they do not always have clearly-defined tasks and targets. Academic and business support group managers are responsible for communicating information to their staff. The arrangements made are not equally effective. Support staff are generally less well informed than teaching staff.

27 The college's new organisational structures are not sufficiently clear to staff. The five academic groups responsible for managing and delivering courses and subjects vary significantly in size. They also have different management structures. In all groups, course leaders or co-ordinators are responsible for managing courses. Many courses and subjects are well managed although the workloads and responsibilities of managers with similar designations often differ substantially. The college is aware of the imbalance in the distribution of staffing and intends to address the issue.

28 Most staff have had little involvement in strategic planning. As a result, course teams have a limited understanding and appreciation of the strategic plan and performance targets. The present plan does not contain a comprehensive, up-to-date set of college operating statements for 1995-96. There is, however, an annual review of what has been achieved, based on each group's assessment of its own performance. Some groups have detailed action plans which are reviewed regularly, but this is not common practice across the institution. The college intends that the strategic plan for 1996-97 will be based on wider consultation.

29 All of the academic group managers have recently assumed additional responsibility for a cross-college activity although, in some cases, these have not been clearly defined. Changes in the management structures within academic groups are required to ensure that courses, subjects and cross-college developments receive appropriate attention. Academic group managers have considerable autonomy and practices vary. Procedures for reporting non-attendance, for example, are not documented and arrangements differ widely across the groups.

30 Budget allocations are based on bids from group managers. The bids are critically examined in the context of the strategic plan and the weightings adopted in the funding mechanism from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Capital expenditure is also based on a bidding process. Academic group managers have delegated budgets for consumables and part-time staffing. The allocations they receive form part of their delivery contracts. In some groups, the budget is further devolved to course teams. Budget holders receive monthly statements. There has been no development of unit costs. In 1994-95, the college was funded at £19.27 per unit; the median for general further education colleges was £17.97 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The average level of funding for 1995-96 is £18.66 per unit compared with a median for general further education and tertiary colleges of £17.84 per unit.

31 The college is currently addressing the limited nature and poor quality of management information available to support teachers and managers in their decision making. The student record database has not been effectively maintained. Consequently it has not been able to provide accurate and reliable information on student retention. These difficulties have prevented the college making a number of important statistical returns to a variety of agencies. The computer system provides limited support for the administrative work of support groups and academic groups. Groups receive class lists and details on students but there is no help with registers and little help with monitoring attendance. There is no routine reporting of information stored on paper and limited on-line access to information stored on computer. The college plans to address the wider use of computer-based management information once the database has been brought up to date and is accurate. The college has an accurate and useful personnel database.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

32 Students are well served by a knowledgeable enquiries and admissions staff. They are given a comprehensive range of information on courses and receive appropriate guidance and advice. There are effective procedures for referring students to specialist careers advice as required. An efficient computerised system is used to track students from the point of initial enquiry through to enrolment. The student services unit provides advice on student welfare, counselling, careers and additional learning support. The area occupied by admissions and student services staff has recently been refurbished. It is appropriately sited in a convenient and prominent location and provides a welcoming and friendly environment. Its use is closely monitored.

33 Prospective full-time students are guaranteed an interview with academic staff. Occasionally, there is a delay in processing applications and conducting these interviews and, at busy periods, interviews are sometimes conducted in unsuitable rooms. Some tutors request that students bring their record of achievement to the interview; others give it little attention. Although the outcomes of interviews are promptly communicated to students, the college does not always meet its charter commitment to process applications and communicate decisions to applicants within six weeks. Some part-time students are interviewed by academic staff prior to enrolment. Entry criteria published in the prospectus are interpreted flexibly. There is no admissions adviser to deal with the accreditation of students' prior learning; prospective students are referred to academic staff for advice. Procedures for the accreditation of prior learning are underdeveloped in most curriculum areas. The college offers flexible arrangements for enrolment. Students can enrol at any time during the academic year. Postal enrolment is available for part-time students.

34 Students receive an induction programme which usually lasts one or two weeks. A helpful induction checklist is provided for tutors and students. On most programmes, induction activities are well planned although students are not always given adequate information about college facilities and services. Students receive a useful pocket-size handbook that contains a summary of the college charter, an outline of their rights and responsibilities and information about college services. Some of the course handbooks issued during induction are excellent.

35 The college's tutorial policy has recently been revised. New procedures are not yet fully operational and practice, therefore, varies. Most full-time and some part-time students have timetabled tutorials with a designated tutor. Individual tutorials are held at least once a month. Tutors generally provide a good level of academic and pastoral support; students speak appreciatively of the help and support they receive. Nevertheless, some tutorial sessions were poorly attended. Guidelines for tutorials are provided but there is no formal tutorial curriculum. Tutors do not have a tutor handbook to support them and there has been no specific staff development. There are no formal monitoring arrangements for the tutorial system.

36 Full-time students have an individual meeting with their tutor during the first six weeks of their course. They complete a tutor dialogue form as the initial stage of action planning which involves them in setting their own learning objectives. Students can transfer courses at this stage. Completion of the tutor dialogue form should result in the management information system generating a student learning agreement for students to sign but these had still not been completed by the cross-college inspection week in January. Students' progress is monitored through the tutorial system. There are some examples of good action planning and effective updating of personal portfolios. Registers are used to record the attendance of full-time and part-time students. Procedures for reporting and following up absences vary. Reports on full-time students' attendance and progress are sent out twice a year to parents of students under 18 and directly to students over 18. Employers sponsoring students also receive two reports a year.

37 All full-time students are given initial tests for numeracy and literacy. Part-time students are also offered this service. Clear guidelines are given to tutors who administer and mark the tests. In the current academic year only 70 per cent of test results have been returned to the college's basic skills unit. These indicate that 9 per cent of students are in need of additional support. Following the recent appointment of a co-ordinator, there has been an improvement in the co-ordination of additional support for students. All students using the service complete an individual learning plan and work record. These are regularly updated at progress review meetings. Attendance at basic skills workshops is voluntary although students identified as needing support are expected to attend. There is no formal way of informing personal tutors if students do not attend.

38 The college offers students sound financial advice including counselling on debts. In addition to the access fund of £15,000, the college last year established a scholarship fund of some £45,000. Approximately 370 students benefited from these funds. Grants have been awarded mainly for course fees, support with travel costs, course materials and contributions towards childcare. The progress of students who received financial support from the college was closely monitored. All completed their studies. The college also provides a confidential counselling service staffed by a full-time qualified counsellor, based in a room which has been appropriately furnished for the purpose. The service is well used. The counsellor also offers workshops; for example, in stress management, preparation for examinations and assertiveness. There is effective liaison with specialist external agencies.

39 Students on further education courses have ready access to a professional careers adviser under an agreement with Bedfordshire careers and guidance services. The adviser is in college for three hours each day on a drop-in basis, alternatively appointments may be made. In addition, the adviser is usually present at important times during the year: at enrolment, on college open days, and in August when the GCE and GCSE results are published. Support continues after enrolment. There is an on-going series of careers activities including presentations on opportunities for progression in education and to employment. Students are also offered help in completing Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) application forms, preparing curricula vitae and developing interview skills. The library holds a wide range of careers information. Higher education students of the college have access to the careers advice service of De Montfort University.

40 The college has a students' association whose constitution is comprehensively explained in the students' handbook. There are places for a student member on the corporation board and the academic board but, at the time of inspection, both these positions were vacant. Students can elect 10 students to a student council which is responsible for presenting their views. However, the council has not been allocated a room from which it can operate and it has not generally proved an effective body. There are some examples of elected group representatives making effective contributions at course team level. Students also have a student affairs committee. It contributed to the development of the charter and the student handbook but it has not met in the current academic year.

41 Higher education students have a common room; further education students do not. Some students use the facilities in Youth House which is on college premises and operated by Bedfordshire youth service. It has a small 'cyber cafe' with three computers linked to the Internet and set up jointly with the college. There are also a range of other recreational facilities and a creche. The college has an agreement with the youth service; two youth workers organise a wide range of social and recreation events. The college has an active sports programme and is affiliated to the Southern England Students Sports Association. College teams for football,

hockey, netball and athletics are well supported. Students and staff are able to make use of the subsidised 40-place nursery for children aged two to five.

42 The college has residential accommodation for 46 students in a group of town houses. Students must be on higher education courses or over the age of 18. The college has not produced its own accommodation list but makes available a list compiled by De Montfort University. Student services assist students in finding emergency accommodation but there are no formal procedures for vetting private sector accommodation used by students. A useful guidance booklet and checklist has been produced to help students when they are arranging accommodation.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

43 Inspectors observed 201 teaching sessions involving 1,780 students. Fifty-five per cent of the teaching sessions inspected had strengths that outweighed the weaknesses, which is 9 per cent lower than the national average reported by the chief inspector in his annual report for 1994-95. Just under 10 per cent of sessions had weaknesses that outweighed the strengths. The grades given to the teaching sessions inspected are summarised in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		2	7	8	4	0	21
GCSE		0	3	4	0	0	7
GNVQ		2	12	11	2	0	27
NVQ		7	12	9	5	0	33
Basic education		0	6	9	1	0	16
Other vocational		5	28	16	4	0	53
Higher education		1	6	3	1	0	11
Other		1	19	10	3	0	33
Total		18	93	70	20	0	201

44 In almost all programme areas, lessons were well prepared. Often teachers followed lesson plans based on schemes of work. A few schemes of work lacked sufficient detail; for example, on the method of teaching to be used. A strong feature of many lessons was the purposeful working relationship between teacher and students. Course teams maintained detailed records of students' progress, particularly on NVQ programmes. These were often available to students, enabling them to monitor their own progress.

45 In construction, schemes of work were included in study packs. Although the emphasis was on the teaching of practical competences,

programmes of study contained an appropriate balance of practical and theoretical aspects. Generally, teachers employed suitable methods of teaching and learning. In some sessions, however, students spent too long working from study packs; they eventually lost interest and time was wasted. There was clear evidence that many students found practical work interesting, relevant and challenging. During practical sessions, students were clear about what they had to do; they used tools correctly or were taught how to use them. In one of the good classes seen students were undertaking practical work which formed part of their NVQ brickwork course. The work area was tidy and each student had sufficient space to work in comfort. The activity had been well planned, students worked from information in learning packs and made few demands on their tutor. Safe working practices were followed and students worked at a suitable pace. The quality of the work produced was appropriate to the stage of study. The use of new bricks, made possible by industrial support, enabled high standards to be achieved. At intervals, the tutor discussed individual students' projects. He gave them encouragement and advice and commented on their performance. Students' work in construction was assessed regularly and teachers provided good feedback. Most of the core skills were suitably developed and assessed.

46 Engineering students experienced a variety of teaching methods, including teachers' demonstrations of engineering phenomena. Most sessions were conducted at a pace and level appropriate to students' abilities. Coursework was returned promptly, with useful written comments which helped students' learning. In practical classes, teachers demonstrated tasks designed to develop skills; these were then repeated by students until they had acquired an acceptable level of skill. The good rapport between students and teachers was evident in a welding technology class in which the teacher made effective use of the overhead projector and whiteboard and involved all students in answering questions. The teacher skilfully persuaded students to share the welding experience gained at their place of work with other members of the class. The lesson was lively and challenging, and the students were clearly enjoying the learning experience. An appropriate range of techniques was used to assess students. A clear policy had been developed for the acquisition and assessment of common skills. Assignment briefs were well presented and accompanied by marking schemes and submission dates. Since the specialist inspection of engineering, a policy has been introduced to improve the phasing and submission of major assignments.

47 Secretarial studies teachers had developed work packs that allowed students with different levels of ability and skill to work on different tasks. They assessed students' work regularly and made helpful comments on how the work could be improved. Students on NVQ programmes were taught in groups rather than allowed to follow individual action plans. They were not obtaining adequate practical experience owing to the lack of realistic retail and office environments. NVQ portfolios were carefully

marked and internally moderated. Most business and management studies lessons were purposeful and effective. The management of core skills was well organised, particularly for GNVQ programmes. Students had been given a useful handbook containing details of their assignments, key dates, detailed schemes of work and a draft appeals procedure. Methods of assessment were appropriate for the relevant courses and students understood the assessment criteria. Some teachers made good use of the experience that part-time students had gained at work. For example, a class of students on the Association of Accounting Technicians foundation course had an excellent session on the reporting of accidents. The group were skilfully managed by the tutor who used the experiences of individuals to highlight the subject matter. They subsequently formed groups to discuss and recommend good practice. However, in some sessions, teachers' boardwork lacked clarity. In several sessions the end of class was too informal; teachers failed to summarise what had been learnt, to outline what was to be covered in the next session, or to indicate the preparation required of the students.

48 Hospitality, leisure and tourism students were issued with well-presented course handbooks. In leisure and tourism these were particularly informative, containing schemes of work and submission dates for assignments. Some lesson plans did not include the aims and objectives for the session and as a consequence the work lacked a clear focus. When staff had high expectations of students the standard of work was high but, in many instances, students were not challenged sufficiently because the lesson was pitched at the less able students. In GNVQ hospitality and catering programmes there was insufficient attention to the development, application and assessment of core skills as an integral part of programmes. Opportunities were missed to use visual aids to help students to learn effectively. In some restaurant and kitchen sessions, insufficient consideration was given to standards of dress and to health and safety issues as a means of instilling good professional practice. For example, kitchen preparation boards, coloured to help avoid cross-contamination when preparing food, were not always used for the correct purpose and were improperly stored. In restaurant and kitchen practical sessions tutors gave students a great deal of individual attention to help them to develop their skills. In hospitality, good use was made of NVQ workbooks to enable students to work independently, at their own speed. Students received regular homework and class tests, and teachers provided constructive feedback on their performance. Work experience was an integral part of students' learning on all hospitality programmes and on some leisure and tourism programmes.

49 GNVQ health and community care lessons had a strong emphasis on the development of core skills. Between a third and a half of the timetable was allocated to basic skills, numeracy and information technology. Students were provided with course handbooks and other supporting materials including guidance booklets on writing essays and the

development of study skills. In about one-third of the classes, there was an appropriate variety of activities, but overall the balance of time allocated to different activities was not well managed. There were instances of students being expected to listen and write for overlong periods. Most staff made good use of their own vocational experience to illustrate theoretical issues. Assignment briefs were detailed, well structured and relevant. Students received detailed feedback on their written work but teachers gave insufficient attention to students' difficulties with numeracy, which had been identified through basic skills testing.

50 There was good teaching in the beauty section. Programmes were well planned and sessions contained an appropriate variety of methods of working. Professional attitudes and attention to health and hygiene were promoted and encouraged. Strict rules were enforced on students' dress and general appearance. There were, however, few direct links with the industry and students did not undertake work experience. In hairdressing, the curriculum was very narrow and there were few attempts to enrich it. Students did not undertake work experience, there were few visiting speakers or visits and students did not take part in competition work. Theory sessions failed to motivate the students. Professionalism was not encouraged and students often dressed inappropriately. There was an imbalance in the time spent between theoretical and practical salon work; as a consequence, students did insufficient written work. The college had identified a number of problems in the hairdressing section and, at the time of the inspection, changes were imminent.

51 In art and design, most teaching took place in practical workshops or studios. There were also some well-delivered, formal lectures but some students lacked sufficient study skills to be able to benefit fully from this method of teaching. Classes were well prepared. Teachers had clear lesson plans but the limited range of teaching methods meant that some students were not being engaged as fully as they might have been. There was a consistent approach to the teaching of drawing and basic design. However, students received insufficient tuition in information technology and few students had adequate opportunities for screen printing. On average, there were about 10 students in each class and this enabled teachers to give them a lot of individual attention. Where groups were smaller than this, teachers' opportunities to generate group interactions were limited. A clear and helpful policy statement on assessment and grading was prominently displayed in studios and workshops.

52 Schemes of work for GCSE and GCE A level classes in humanities, mathematics and science often lacked detail. For example, those for mathematics and science contained no details of teaching methods, assessments or resource requirements. In a number of humanities classes, teachers made good use of video material to reinforce the learning. For example, in one English literature GCE A level class, the tutor showed a 10-minute sequence from *A Room with a View* and used this to encourage students to look in detail at the passage. The scene chosen was dramatic;

Lucy and George witnessing a murder in Florence. The video enhanced the text in a way which students found helpful. Students' work was usually carefully marked and teachers gave helpful written comments. Science teachers displayed a good knowledge of their subjects and generally gave clear explanations and good presentations. In many of the lessons, students spent a high proportion of their time writing notes or carrying out examples. Generally, lessons lacked variety and students were not sufficiently challenged. Practical work was carried out carefully but the college's safety rules on eye protection were not always enforced. Teachers often failed to speak to students who were late for class and who invariably disrupted the start of lessons.

53 Access courses were well organised and benefited from a common foundation phase during which students received guidance, counselling and study skills support. Innovative curricula have been introduced which included communication and interactive skills, the study of literature and the skills of conceptual and critical reasoning. Staff teaching on the 'access to teacher training' course showed considerable knowledge and sensitivity to the issues facing intending primary teachers. Some classes were lively; work was conducted at a good pace. Discussion was well managed and most students participated. Teaching methods were appropriately varied. In one lesson, the teachers included a quiz based on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* which allowed students to display their different levels of knowledge. Visual material was well prepared and presented in interesting ways. In a minority of lessons, teachers failed to make best use of the time available; for example, students sometimes spent long periods simply reading aloud from texts. There were also examples of poor feedback on students' written work.

54 Most teaching sessions for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, students learning English as a second language or students learning basic skills were well planned and teachers were flexible and responsive to individual students' requests for help. Some schemes of work for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities did not contain a coherent curriculum plan. The quality of teaching and learning for these students and for students learning English as a second language was enhanced by role-play, work experience and the challenge of homework. Overall, however, there was too much emphasis on whole-group activities led by the teacher and the checks on learning were inadequate. Students were sometimes unclear about the purpose of activities. In some sessions they found the work too easy. The quality of assessment, recording, review and evaluation of students' work was inconsistent; some work was unmarked and records were incomplete.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

55 Most students were positive about their learning experiences and were enjoying their time at college. Whilst there were some good examination pass rates for students who completed their course, the overall

levels of success were adversely affected by low retention rates on a significant proportion of courses. The following table gives the average retention rates for various groups of courses. The number of students on a course in May of the final year is compared with the number of students registered in November of the first year of the course.

Course type	Average course retention (%)
One-year vocational (77 courses)	77
Two-year vocational (43 courses)	68
GCSE one year (20 courses)	65
GCE AS/A level one year (18 courses)	72
GCE A level two year (9 courses)	62

56 There were examples of good practical work by students on construction craft courses. Many had made good progress in acquiring numeracy and information technology skills. Most students, particularly adult students, were keen to obtain their qualification as quickly as possible and they worked hard. A small minority of less mature students needed continual encouragement to work. There were several examples of well-presented and carefully-indexed portfolios. However, there were also a few examples of less satisfactory work, particularly in core skills. Many students had difficulty with spelling or could not express themselves clearly and a few did not write legibly. On 15 of the 21 courses analysed, over 60 per cent of students achieved the qualification for which they were aiming; on nine of the courses it was over 80 per cent. Most courses had retention rates of 80 per cent or above.

57 Engineering students handled equipment competently and safely. They were successfully developing practical and core skills and acquiring relevant technical expertise. Students appreciated being treated as adults and were able to comment accurately and realistically on their progress. Most assignments were well presented; they revealed good understanding and an ability to apply knowledge. Retention rates and examination pass rates vary significantly from year to year. For example, in 1993-94, 78 per cent of those enrolled for the BTEC national diploma in engineering completed the course and 62 per cent gained the qualification within the two years of the course; in the 1994-95 session, the comparative figures were 65 per cent and 35 per cent. Most retention figures for higher level courses completing in 1995 improved compared with the previous year. For example, on the higher national certificate in mechanical engineering retention increased from 73 per cent to 82 per cent. However, the percentage of students successfully completing the course has remained almost constant at 55 per cent. Following an analysis of students' performance, evening workshops for specific modules, such as mathematics and electronics, have been introduced in an attempt to improve examination results.

58 Secretarial studies students demonstrated good levels of knowledge and understanding. Retention rates were generally satisfactory; for example, 67 per cent on the full-time secretarial studies certificate and 74 per cent on the part-time private and executive secretary's diploma. The pass rates of those who completed these courses were 77 per cent and 74 per cent, respectively. On business and management programmes, students' work was generally of a high quality. Students worked effectively and efficiently in groups. Some had achieved high levels of skill in information technology. Examinations results were similar to or above national averages. Most courses had satisfactory retention rates. However, they were low on the full-time GCE A level business studies course (55 per cent in 1994, 69 per cent in 1995), on the GNVQ part-time advanced programme (47 per cent in 1995) and the higher national certificate course in business and finance (55 per cent in 1995). Management courses generally had high examination pass rates; many courses had pass rates of between 90 and 100 per cent. All students enrolled on the certificate in personnel practice, and 94 per cent of those enrolled on the part-time diploma in management studies, passed their course.

59 Hospitality, leisure and tourism students spoke positively about their studies and of the help and support given by tutors. The standard of work was satisfactory on most programmes. Nevertheless, the percentage of enrolled students who successfully completed their course was low. For example, 78 per cent of students who started the BTEC first diploma in hotel and catering at September 1994 completed the course, but only 43 per cent had gained the full award by the end of the session. Fifty-two per cent of the students enrolled on the national diploma in hotel, catering and institutional management course completed the course in 1995 and only 29 per cent gained the full award in the two-year period of the course. Of the first cohort of 36 students taking the GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism course, completing in 1995, 12 completed it and 11 of these (31 per cent of those starting) gained the full award.

60 Retention rates on health and community care courses were generally satisfactory and most students who completed their course were successful in gaining their award. For example, of the 39 students enrolled on the BTEC national diploma in nursery nursing in November 1993, 34 completed the course and all gained the full award. Results on the national diploma in social care were similar; 92 per cent of the students completed the course and all gained the award. Results were also good on some of the courses being offered for the first time. For example, of the 45 students who commenced the Council for Awards in Child Health and Education certificate in 1995, 62 per cent completed the course and gained the award. On the intermediate GNVQ in health and social care 40 per cent of students gained the award, compared with the national average of 46 per cent. Students worked willingly in class, sometimes with energy and clear enjoyment. Most were achieving appropriate standards. Many were making good use of wordprocessing skills.

61 Hair and beauty students were acquiring appropriate practical skills but core skills were inadequately developed. There were no opportunities for students to gain information technology skills as part of their hair or beauty courses. On many courses, a high proportion of students were absent and students were not always punctual for classes, particularly hairdressing classes. On some beauty therapy courses examination results have been poor. For example, of 16 students enrolled on the full-time course in 1992 only six (38 per cent) completed the course and achieved the award. The pass rate improved to 48 per cent for the following cohort of students. There have been significant retention problems on part-time beauty therapy courses. For example, on the one-year make-up and manicure certificate course the retention rate fell from 83 per cent in 1992-93 to 69 per cent in 1994-95. Hairdressing students who completed the course generally achieved their qualification. On the two-year full-time hairdressing course completing in 1995, 70 per cent of enrolled students completed the course and 65 per cent gained their award. On the corresponding part-time course, the retention rate was 39 per cent and all students who completed the course gained the award.

62 Most of the work in art and design students' portfolios was of a good standard. In some areas of the curriculum, for example print making and information technology, students' experience was adversely affected by poor levels of physical resource. Students' work was displayed throughout the college and this helped to raise their self-esteem. In 1994-95, the retention rate for the GCE A level programme was 73 per cent and 35 per cent of enrolled students gained a pass at grades A to E. Of the 102 students enrolled on the BTEC national diploma in foundation studies in art and design, 80 per cent completed the course and 73 per cent were successful in gaining the full award. Seventy-seven per cent of students registered on the foundation course went on to higher education. Of those who applied, 94 per cent were successful. On the GNVQ intermediate course in art and design, only 50 per cent of enrolled students completed the course and 31 per cent gained the award.

63 In 1995, the college entered 141 students aged 16 to 18 for GCE AS or A level examinations. According to the tables published by the Department for Education and Employment in 1995 students at the college scored on average 1.9 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). The college did not respond to the invitation to verify the data before they were published. Based on this performance measure, the college is among the bottom 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector. In 1995, the GCE A level pass rate for students aged 16 to 18 was 57 per cent which is significantly below the provisional national average of 72 per cent for general further education colleges. The 1995 results are markedly lower than in 1994 when the 125 GCE A level candidates had an average score of 2.9 points per entry. In 1995, the GCE A level pass rate for students of all ages was 57 per cent compared with the provisional national average of 69 per cent. In 1994, it was 70 per cent, 2 per cent above the national

average. Pass rates were at least 5 per cent above the provisional national average for general further education colleges in computing, economics, history, law and mathematics. They were at least 15 per cent below the provisional national average in biology, chemistry, communication studies, French, geography, philosophy and physics. The college did not submit details of students' performance in examinations for vocational qualifications for publication in the Department for Education and Employment tables in 1994 or 1995.

64 In 1995, the overall GCSE pass rate at grades A to C was close to the national average of 53 per cent. Pass rates were good in English, modern languages, physics, psychology and sociology. They were less satisfactory in biology, computer studies, geography and law. Most of the GCE and GCSE teaching is carried out by the humanities and science sections. Students worked sensibly. Their classroom contributions and written work were of an appropriate standard. However, retention rates are low in many subjects and there are high levels of absence from lessons.

65 Students on access courses had well-developed verbal, analytical and interpretative skills. The quality of some of the written work was excellent. Students' achievements on access courses vary significantly. In the 1994-95 session, performance on the part-time access to BEd primary course was good; all 15 of the 18 enrolled students who completed the course were successful. However, on a significant number of other access courses successful completions were below 60 per cent. For example, on the access course in art and design only 45 per cent of students passed. Overall, of the 202 students on access courses in 1994-95, 118 passed.

66 Despite a few instances of inappropriate behaviour, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were gaining new skills and were generally confident, enthusiastic and socially competent. Retention rates were good. Examples of good work were well displayed and this helped to build students' self-esteem. Eighty-five per cent of students on the bridging course completed their course as did 83 per cent of students on the foundation skill course. Students on courses specifically designed for those with learning difficulties have increasing opportunities to enrol on accredited courses and to progress to other courses within the college. However, they retain little evidence of their own achievements and have limited opportunity for self-evaluation.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

67 The college is committed to provide high-quality learning opportunities which are being continuously improved. The quality assurance system includes the internal validation of new course proposals, observation of teaching, course monitoring and review, self-assessment and the application of performance indicators. As part of the recent redistribution of cross-college responsibilities, the academic group manager of the health and leisure group has also been given the

responsibility for performance management. The quality assurance committee, one of two subcommittees of the academic board, co-ordinates the different aspects of quality assurance. The academic achievements of students for the 1994-95 session have not yet been reported to the academic board.

68 A teaching quality support unit was established a year ago with a brief to disseminate best teaching practice and to identify ineffective teaching so that remedial action could be taken. At the time of the inspection, approximately 90 per cent of the full-time and 75 per cent of the part-time teaching staff had been observed teaching and classroom observation was widely accepted by staff. Observation of a teacher is followed by an agreed statement of outcomes which is forwarded to the teacher's group manager and referred to when planning staff development. In addition to conducting classroom observation, members of the unit advise the panels established to appoint new teachers when candidates give a brief presentation.

69 Course teams carry out an annual review and evaluation of their courses. The process is supported by a well presented and comprehensive academic quality handbook. Teams are required to produce a report that addresses, and critically analyses, students' learning experiences, methods of teaching and learning, changes in the curriculum, and a range of performance indicators. The report is intended to form the basis for improving the quality of the course. All course teams are required to maintain a course log that acts as a record of all major events and developments associated with the course. A checklist of items for the log is prescribed in the handbook. Review procedures are operated with varying effectiveness. Annual reports often fail to contain an analysis of examination results and other performance indicators. Some do not include an action plan, or do not indicate who is responsible for ensuring that action is taken.

70 Two types of questionnaire are used to obtain students' views about numerous aspects of their course. The first is distributed in the autumn term, the second towards the end of the summer term. Course leaders exercise their discretion over whether to administer the first questionnaire to second-year students. They summarise the data obtained from their own courses and the college subsequently produces a summary. Course leaders are responsible for informing students about responses to the questionnaires. There is little evidence in the course team minutes and course logs that these responses are discussed and analysed.

71 The college's system of internal validation covers proposals for new courses and the review of existing courses on a five-year cycle. The periodic review of a programme is seen as a critical appraisal of its effectiveness and as an opportunity to identify the means of improvement. To date, two courses have been subjected to review. The academic quality handbook provides clear and concise guidelines about objectives and procedures for

validation. All new course proposals are subjected to internal validation before being submitted to external validating bodies such as BTEC. The validation panels comprise college staff, including some from academic groups not associated with the proposal, and external representatives with relevant subject expertise. Over the past 18 months, 20 new course proposals have been internally validated, all of which were subsequently approved by the relevant external validating body.

72 There are well documented and effective procedures for internal verification of NVQ and GNVQ programmes. The procedures are being adapted for other BTEC programmes. At programme unit level, there is a formal method of double marking which is checked by an internal verifier, usually by sampling scripts. External verifiers are satisfied with the implementation of these procedures.

73 The college has designated 10 performance indicators covering all college services. One indicator focuses exclusively on the performance of the corporation itself. Each performance indicator has performance benchmarks some of which are based on the previous year's performance. There are 58 of these benchmarks. During 1994-95, the corporation considered some of the benchmarks associated with nine of the 10 performance indicators. However, the procedure is now in abeyance, pending a review. At course level, teams are usually aware of enrolment targets and the significance of not meeting them. However, targets for retention and examination pass rates have not been identified. The college does not have a comprehensive system for measuring the value added to students' achievements since entering college.

74 Non-academic groups are alert to the need for quantifiable performance indicators and some are already using internally-devised performance measures. Business support staff have not received clear guidance on which of the college's 58 performance targets apply to them or whether reference should be made to them in the annual self-assessment reports submitted to the college management team.

75 Staff-development activities account for 1.5 per cent of the payroll. Approximately 40 per cent of the staff-development budget, administered by the personnel manager, is used for support staff. During 1994-95, staff-development activities involved teaching, administrative and technician staff. Activities are evaluated by the participants and there is a requirement that the information and expertise gained from an event is disseminated to colleagues. To date there has been no formal evaluation of staff-development activities. A two-day induction programme was introduced during the 1995 autumn term for full-time and part-time teachers and support staff who had been employed by the college for less than a year. As a result of the favourable feedback there are now proposals for an induction course for staff who began employment at the college within the past three years.

76 A planned system for the appraisal of teaching staff was agreed two years ago but it was not implemented. In the light of changes that have

occurred since, including the revised management structure and the introduction of the teaching quality support unit, the earlier appraisal model is no longer considered appropriate. The college recognises that the absence of an appraisal scheme is a significant obstacle to achieving the Investors in People award.

77 In preparation for inspection, the college produced a self-assessment report using the headings set out in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report was based on self-assessments produced by each of the groups, outlining the strengths and weaknesses of their provision. In the executive summary of the report, judgements were made about the balance of strengths and weaknesses against each inspection criterion. Some of these judgements differed from those of the inspection team.

78 The college charter was written in consultation with staff and students. It has two separate sections, one addressed to students, the other to the community and employers. The charter is distributed to students during induction and an abridged version of it is contained in the students' handbook. As the charter was not produced until the summer of 1995, the college has not yet reviewed it. However, there are no plans in place for monitoring the extent to which the charter commitments are fulfilled. Not all students have received a copy of the charter and some are not fully aware of its contents or the significance of its commitments.

RESOURCES

Staffing

79 The college has 280 permanent staff, 150 of whom are teachers. About half the teachers have more than 15 years experience in the sector. There are 135 part-time teachers who carry out approximately 15 per cent of the teaching. Teachers are effectively deployed across programme areas. All staff have job descriptions but these have not always been updated to reflect changes in organisational structure or responsibilities within curriculum groups. In general, the support for, and involvement of, part-time staff enables them to make a valuable contribution to the work of the college.

80 Teachers are well qualified and have relevant experience. A high proportion have a first or higher degrees. Sixty-eight per cent have a teaching qualification and almost 50 per cent have achieved assessor training awards. Some have wide experience as external examiners or moderators. About a quarter of the staff have no experience of industry or commerce. Most of these teach general education courses. However, in a few cases, staff in vocational areas lack recent industrial experience.

81 Teaching staff are well supported by technical, administrative and library staff. The deployment of technician staff is managed effectively. Good levels of technician support in technology and sciences are reflected by tidy, well-managed workshops and practical areas. The library is

appropriately staffed and provides support for students to work independently on resources which have been structured for this purpose. A computer services unit, comprising of four well-qualified staff, supports the installation and maintenance of computer equipment. The unit also provides a valuable help service to staff and students although this is limited by the low number of support staff for information technology. Arrangements for liaison between members of the computer services unit and teachers are not well defined.

Equipment/learning resources

82 There is sufficient equipment and materials to support most curriculum areas. Most specialist rooms are adequately equipped. General teaching rooms are well furnished and most have whiteboards and overhead projectors. A model for resourcing and replacing computing equipment is in use and is being further developed to provide a planned programme for the replacement of all equipment.

83 There is a good level of specialist equipment to support construction and engineering courses. Engineering workshops and laboratories are well organised. Science laboratories are well equipped but they offer insufficient access to computers. Students of nursery nursing are provided with a specially-equipped playroom, which enables them to develop insights into child development by observing the interaction between children and adults. The college has recently leased part of a surplus school building for use as a centre for business training and equipped it with up-to-date information technology facilities and an automated warehousing demonstration unit. In some areas of work the equipment is unsatisfactory. In catering, there is inadequate equipment to support reception and housekeeping and the kitchen facilities are old and not representative of that found in the industry. At the time of the subject inspection, equipment for hairdressing was unsatisfactory; realistic working conditions were not provided for students. Some equipment has since been removed. Students taking NVQ courses in retailing and office administration also lack the opportunity to develop their skills in realistic practical office areas. Teaching of some aspects of art and design is restricted by the limited access to specialist equipment for fashion and textiles.

84 About 320 computer workstations are available to students. Computers are well managed centrally and within curriculum groups. Their deployment provides a good level of access for students. A recent survey of the utilisation of computer resource areas indicates that about 50 per cent of the resource is available for students to use for private study and assignment work. In business studies and engineering, access to computing facilities is particularly good. Most computers have up-to-date specifications and there is a good range of modern software compatible with that found in industry and commerce. Most of the 12 computing rooms are well organised and contain appropriate furniture. A large

engineering workshop has been carefully refurbished to provide a good working environment and access to over 60 computers. There is also good computer provision for college staff. The college has a programme under which it plans to replace computer hardware every five years. The computer services unit is responsible for the purchase and support of all computer equipment and has proposed a development plan for information technology. An information systems strategy is currently under development.

85 The library provides a comprehensive range of services. It is well stocked with textbooks, periodicals and other learning resource materials. However, some of the bookstock, for example in history and in science, is out of date and not relevant to current syllabuses. There is a wide range of other learning materials including a substantial collection of audio-visual material and a good range of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database software. A resource centre with a good range of audio-visual facilities and a 'flexible learning' area provides open access computing facilities. There is a limited number of multi-media computers for accessing material on CD-ROM. A strategy to develop multi-media facilities across the college has been agreed and two development projects are being undertaken. Library and learning resource services are well managed and well organised.

86 Some good-quality learning materials have been produced by curriculum teams. For example, construction students are provided with good support for their practical work. However, in most areas the learning support materials are limited. There are insufficient textbooks and other resources designed for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and limited resources to support the development of basic skills in literacy and numeracy.

Accommodation

87 In addition to the main building, which is in an attractive position, teaching also takes place in three main annexes: a large Edwardian house called The Crescent, situated in the town centre, which is used for access courses; an industrial unit, situated approximately three miles away, which is used for construction skills training; and a new business training centre in a residential area, also about three miles from the main site.

88 General purpose classrooms are of an adequate size. Most are furnished and decorated to a high standard. The 17 temporary classrooms are less well furnished but are adequate for teaching purposes. The use of rooms is monitored by a survey conducted annually by the college. This shows that rooms are occupied less on Fridays than during the rest of the week. On average, rooms have space for 18 students but the average group size is half this. The college is well below the target levels for utilisation of space set by the FEFC.

89 Specialist workshop and laboratory accommodation is generally good. Students have sufficient space to work comfortably. The construction training centre provides realistic working areas of a good standard. The college also has a large sports hall and a large assembly hall used for performing arts courses. Some specialist accommodation is not satisfactory, for example the catering kitchens are cramped and have insufficient storage space, the reception areas for hairdressing and beauty are unsatisfactory, and the location and ambience of the beauty salon is far below professional standards. The limited space in the library and its use for a wide range of learning activities, including group work, often distracts students wishing to study quietly.

90 There are few social areas for students. The lack of a student common room results in many students using the refectory as a recreational area. The refectory, which was refurbished two years ago, provides a pleasant facility. The college has established a policy to limit the number of areas where smoking is allowed. These include an enclosed area within the refectory.

91 The college has established a rolling programme of redecoration and is planning to improve the standard of all areas. The reception area on the main site has recently been resited and refurbished to provide an attractive entrance for visitors to the college. Much of the other accommodation has been updated and refurbished but some of the corridors on the main site are in a shabby condition. The residential accommodation is in a poor state internally and fails to provide facilities of an appropriate standard. It is not used to capacity. Some of the buildings on the main site are in need of repair. The college intends to complete this work as part of its long-term maintenance programme and has allocated a substantial part of its budget for this purpose. Most of the accommodation on the main site is accessible to wheelchair users; lifts provide access to the two multi-story blocks. However, access to a few areas on the main site and at The Crescent is difficult. The external appearance of the main site is marred by undisciplined parking.

92 The college is aware of the shortcomings in some of its accommodation and is investigating ways in which the facilities might be improved. The accommodation strategy submitted to the FEFC includes proposals for a new building to address these and other issues.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

93 The strengths of the college are:

- the wide range of vocational and general education provision
- good external links
- the commitment of the corporation to improving the standards of governance
- the increased attention given to student recruitment and curriculum delivery

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- the support provided by student services
 - the high proportion of students progressing from some courses to higher education or employment
 - the work of the teaching quality support unit in monitoring and enhancing the quality of teaching
 - the comprehensive framework for quality assurance
 - well-qualified teachers and effective support staff
 - good equipment and good workshop and laboratory accommodation for science and technology courses.
- 94 If the college is to continue to improve the quality of its provision, it should:
- develop a more effective organisational structure
 - increase participation in planning
 - further improve the quality of management information
 - establish a consistent level of tutorial support
 - further improve the standards of teaching and learning
 - improve the quality of provision in hairdressing and beauty therapy
 - address the poor retention rates on many courses
 - improve students' achievements on GCE A level and some vocational courses
 - address the variable implementation of course monitoring and review procedures
 - introduce a system for staff appraisal
 - improve the quality of some of its accommodation.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

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

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

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

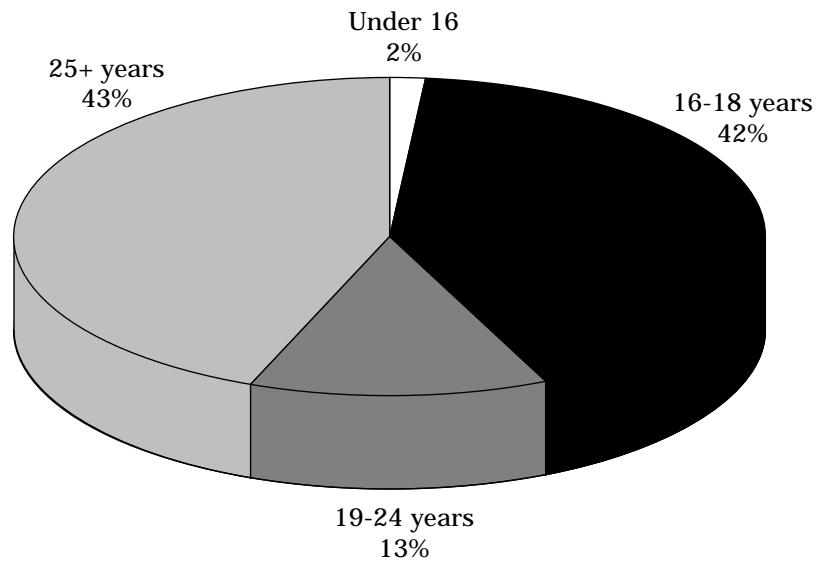
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

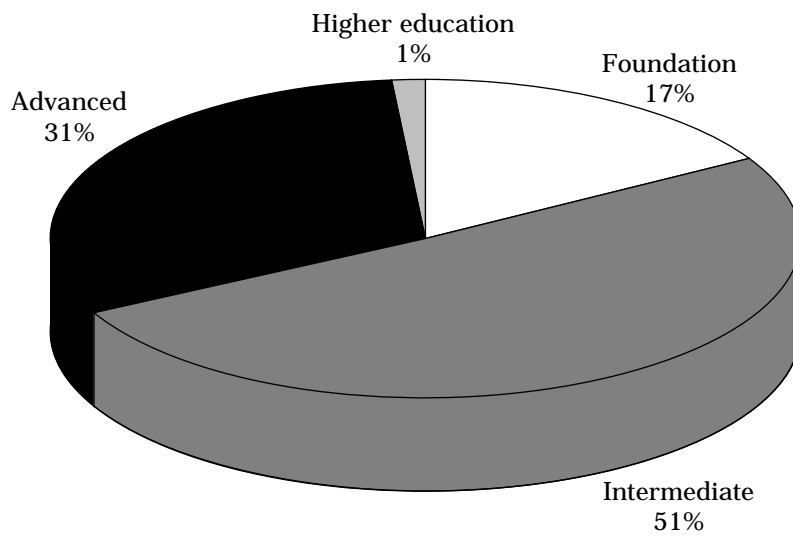
Bedford College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 10,420

Figure 2

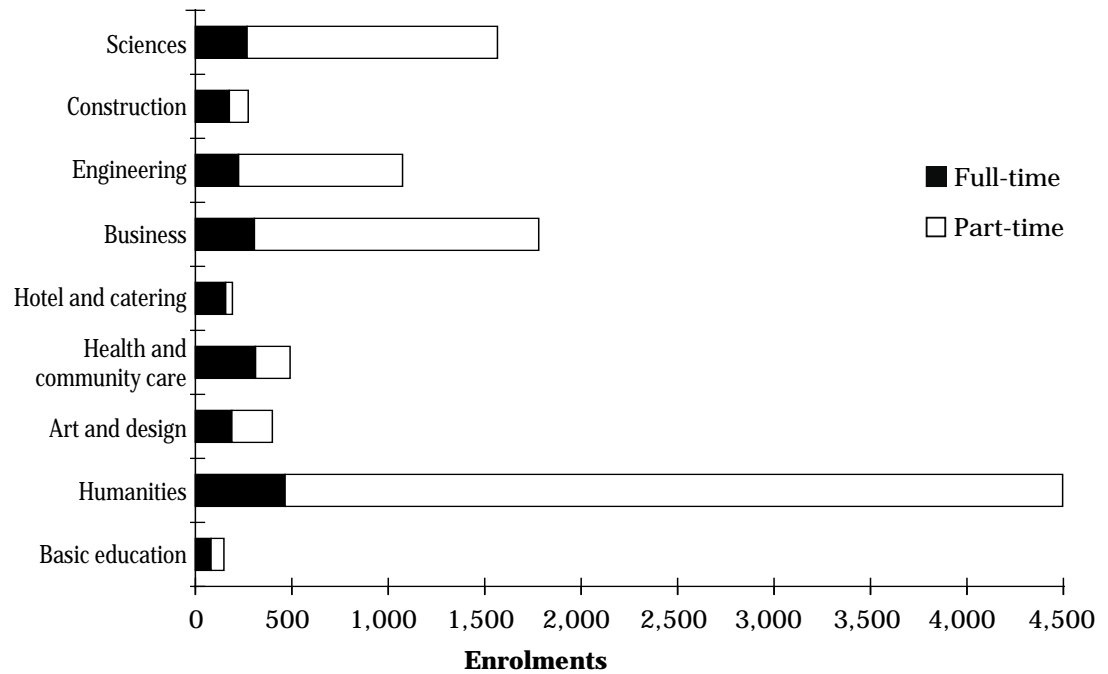
Bedford College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 10,420

Figure 3

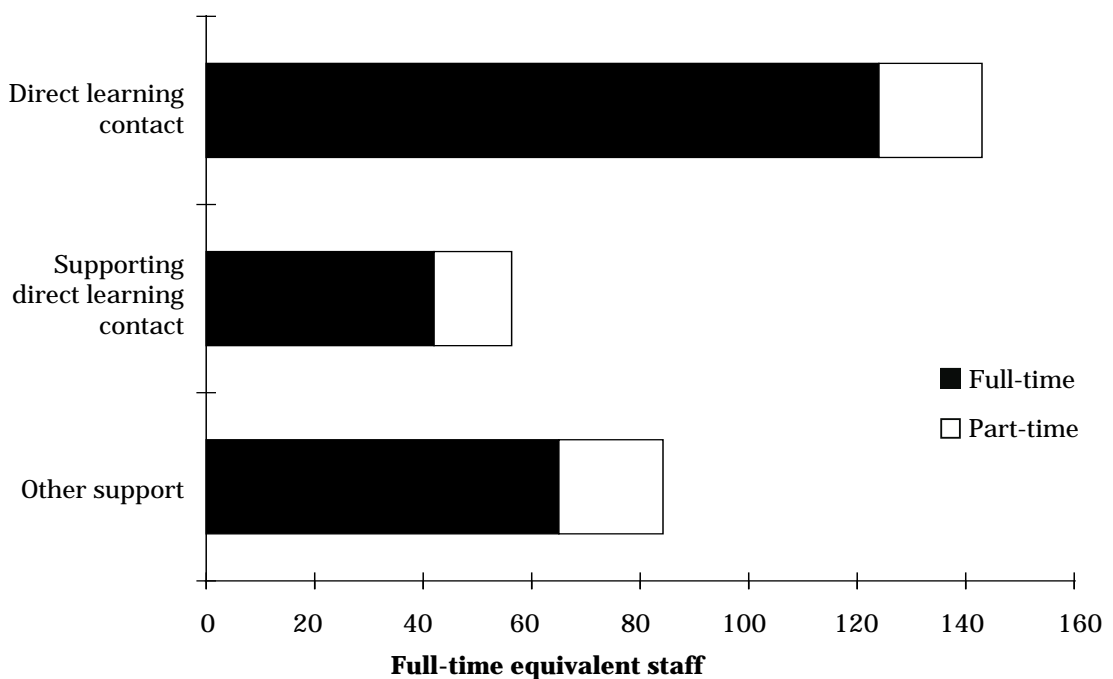
Bedford College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 10,420

Figure 4

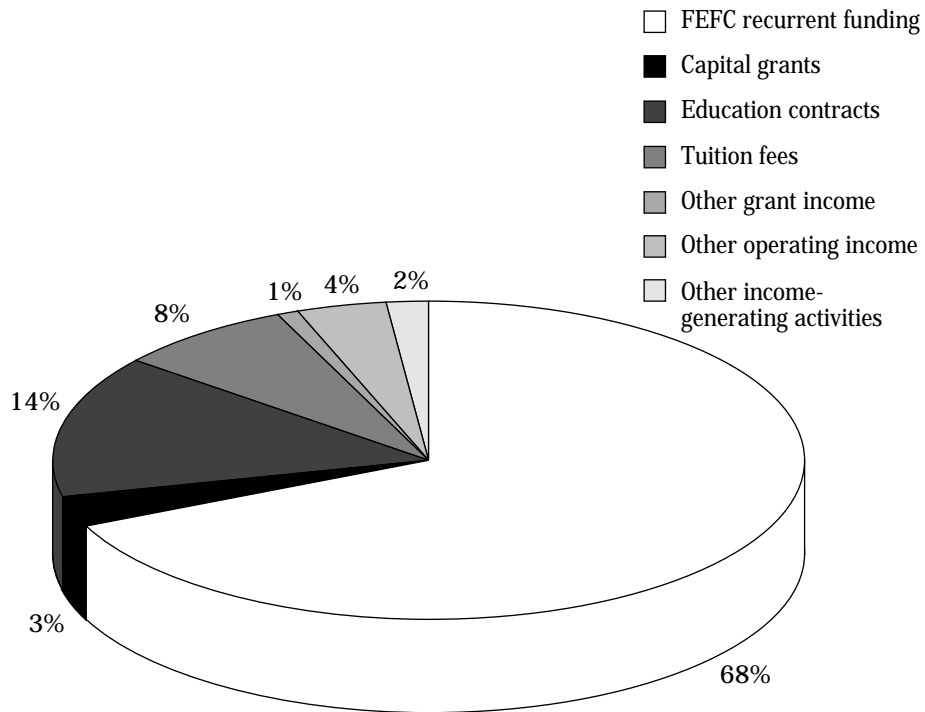
Bedford College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 284

Figure 5

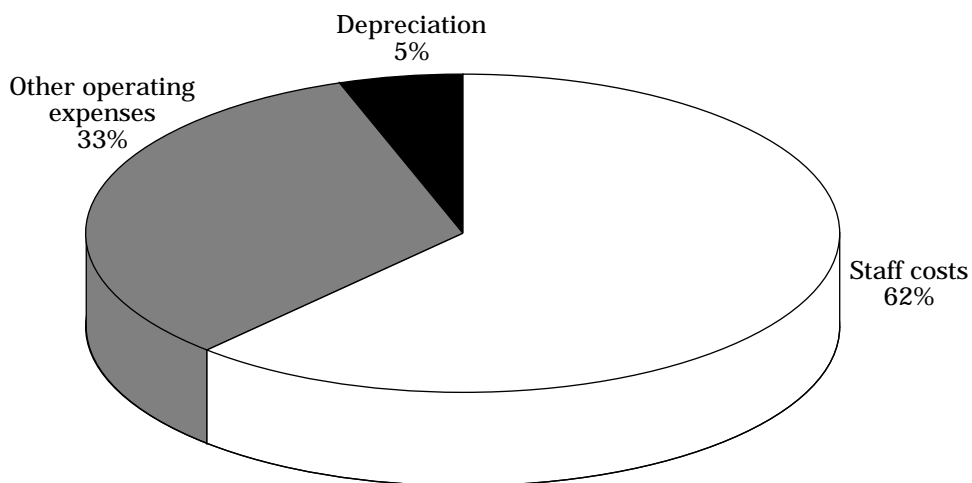
Bedford College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £10,490,000

Figure 6

Bedford College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £10,745,000

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
April 1996