

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Bilston Community College

**September
1994**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

College inspections involve both full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have specialist knowledge and experience in the areas they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member from outside the world of education and a nominated member of staff from the college being inspected.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are described in the Council Circular 93/28. In the course of inspecting colleges, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also summarise their judgements on the balance between strengths and weaknesses using a five-point scale. 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 69/94

BILSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected September 1993 - June 1994

Summary

Bilston Community College is an open access college, and one of the major providers of post-16 education in Wolverhampton and the Black Country. It has strong links and partnerships with the local community, local agencies, voluntary organisations, schools and higher education institutions. Senior management have ensured that the strategic planning is thorough and have set measurable targets. The college is developing innovative programmes designed to offer students appropriate courses and ways of learning in locations and at times convenient to them. The support and guidance given to students has many strengths, and the teaching reaches a high standard. Staff are well qualified. The quality assurance system is developing well, and greater benefits will be obtained as coherence develops between the various initiatives. The college should improve its measurement of efficiency and effectiveness. Unit costing should be further developed and there is weakness in the monitoring of attendance, completion rates, and the destinations of students. Since the college's aims, programmes, and student intakes are distinctive, urgent consideration should be given to devising suitable measures of students' achievements. The college should also address the low attendance and pass rates on some courses. The state of repair and decoration of many buildings requires attention. Better access for people with disabilities is also needed.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		1
Governance and management		3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		2
Quality assurance		2
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	3
	accommodation	4

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Construction	2	Health and social care	2
Business, management and administration	3	Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
		Access	2

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INTRODUCTION

1 Bilston Community College was inspected from September 1993 to June 1994. Specialist subject areas were inspected on two occasions and cross-college provision was inspected from 20 to 24 June 1994. Sixteen inspectors took part in the inspection for a total of 52 inspector days. They saw 72 classes attended by some 800 students and scrutinised a representative sample of work. Discussions were held with staff, students, members of the corporation, and with representatives of the local community, local schools, and the Wolverhampton Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

2 The inspection was carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines set out in Council Circular 93/28. The framework describes a four-year inspection cycle. When the cycle becomes fully established colleges will have the opportunity to respond to the findings of early inspection visits before their quadrennial inspection and the subsequent published report. As the inspection of Bilston Community College took place early in the inspection cycle, the opportunity for such a response was limited.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 Bilston Community College opened in 1984 as one of the first community tertiary colleges under further education regulations. It was created as a result of the closure of a traditional further education college and a sixth form centre, and is one of two further education institutions in the Wolverhampton borough. Within a radius of 10 miles there are three other further education colleges. There are 22 secondary schools in the borough and 20 have sixth forms. Bilston's geographical position means that the college enrolls significant numbers of students from Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall. It has a growing number of courses which recruit on a regional basis and, in the case of some open learning provision, from outside the region.

4 The college is situated in the south-east of Wolverhampton. There are particular demographic, social, and economic features which bear directly on educational and training needs and the patterns of provision required to satisfy them. The locality has experienced major industrial decline. In June 1994, 17 per cent of the population of Bilston East and 14 per cent of Bilston North were unemployed. The main employment sectors of Wolverhampton are services, manufacturing, and construction. One-third of employment is in manufacturing but it is expected to continue to decline. The number of manual and low skilled jobs is above average in the local occupational structure. The effects of the area's industrial decline are still apparent.

5 The college occupies six main sites, and in addition delivers programmes in a wide range of outreach centres. Approximately 30 per cent of its students are based in outreach centres.

6 During 1993-94, the college predicts a total enrolment of 24,133 of which 21,132 are fully or partially funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college has 2,573 full-time students. Enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 1. There are slightly more females than males. In 1992-93, 37 per cent of enrolments were from people from ethnic minority backgrounds, who comprise 18 per cent of the population of Wolverhampton. More than 50 per cent of enrolments were from the unemployed and 89 per cent were from students over the age of 19. Percentage enrolments by age are shown in figure 2. There is large provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

7 There are 220 full-time teaching staff and, in addition, the college employed 167 part-time teaching staff last year. The support staff comprises 215 full-time and 67 part-time appointments. Fifty-eight per cent of staff are women, and 27 per cent are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Staff expressed as full-time equivalents are shown in figure 3.

8 There are five programme directorates in the college offering a wide range of academic and vocational study opportunities, including higher education, community, and full-cost courses. The college has established a number of subsidiary companies, including Stowlawn Ltd which manages full-cost courses. Some of the college's work is funded by the European Social Fund. There is a strong and developing international dimension which includes links with the USA, Russia and other Eastern European countries. Since September 1993, the college has rapidly expanded curriculum provision for evenings, weekends and holiday periods. It enrolls both full-time and part-time students throughout the year.

9 Since its opening, the college has been driven by a vision to provide for under-represented community groups, and in particular, for women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, the unemployed, and people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff and student statistics confirm this commitment.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

10 The college's vision is to achieve the highest standards in providing open access to courses and equal opportunities through partnership with employers and the community. Many of the programmes are for those with little or no previous post-school education and training, or for those in employment who need to acquire new skills. There is a commitment to the national targets for education and training. The strategic plan, the thorough needs analysis, and directorate plans all support this. Versatile and imaginative policies in course development indicate that this commitment is widely shared throughout the college. Arrangements for courses are highly flexible, to enable students to attend them at a cost and time suited to personal circumstances. The college is now dividing many areas of its curriculum into a credit based unit system which fits particularly well with the college's flexible course provision.

11 There is effective liaison with local schools and other colleges. There is a strong commitment to partnership with local schools, for example in the development of General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses and through the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) extension. The college provides some teaching in local schools and some school pupils join college courses. The college supported by the TEC works with Wulfrun College in Wolverhampton in the development of basic skills. The college also belongs to an open learning network consortium which includes the Wirral, Accrington and Rossendale and Milton Keynes colleges. This enables students in each member college to access software, CD-ROMs and other databases. This system is also linked to some local schools.

12 The college provides franchised higher education courses from Sheffield, Wolverhampton and Keele universities. There is a joint research project, funded by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU), with the University of Central England, into the effectiveness of adult literacy and numeracy teaching in colleges. The college is also involved in a joint higher education schools compact with the University of Wolverhampton.

13 There are good relations with the local education authority. The college is involved with Wolverhampton City Challenge and the Prince's Trust support for community developments. The local education authority also funds on a contractual basis some non-vocational work offered by the college.

14 The college has assessed the demand for industrial training through Black Country Training and the pre-recruitment training unit. The TEC has assisted the college in successfully mounting pre-recruitment training for the police, the fire service and private companies. TEC requirements contributed to the college seeking the British Standards quality control Kitemark (BS5750) accreditation. The TEC has a high regard for the college's wholehearted commitment to the national targets for education and training, its work in the development of basic skills, its partnership with schools, and its role in Training Development Lead Body assessor training. Trade union studies have been developed in co-operation with the Trades Union Congress and national and local trade unions. Courses on trade union development have been offered for ethnic minority groups.

15 The college's community emphasis is fully reflected in the breadth of its partnerships with local organisations. These include consultancy, links with the youth services, assistance to people wishing to build their own housing, and the teaching of Asian community languages. Courses are offered in many local centres which range from churches and temples to local schools and community centres. There is a May festival which promotes the college in the community. Community representatives who were met during the inspection were strongly supportive of the college's role and its open and approachable style.

16 The college provides a wide range of courses in most vocational areas. It offers foundation courses which enable access to further education and

access to higher education, and women's courses, such as Women into Science and Engineering. It is moving forward rapidly with the introduction of GNVQ courses. The Open College of the Black Country is a unit of the college which offers weekend and vacation programmes. It has secured some 2,500 enrolments, including 1,000 for sports programmes. There is provision for year-11 pupils who have been excluded or are non-attenders at school. There is a widespread community education programme including the College of the Third Age which provides leisure and vocational courses for the over 50s. The college's course provision meets well the needs of the local community. Percentage enrolments by level of study are shown in figure 4.

17 The college has good links with special schools and is committed to ensuring appropriate progression for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It provides some separate specialist courses for these students, and whenever possible, they are placed on mainstream courses. In addition, the college finds work placements for all of these students and provides employment in sheltered workshops.

18 Local employers were supportive of the college's efforts to meet their training needs. There are no industrial and commercial advisory committees in place. Construction has links with the TEC's regional advisory board which brings together employers and the providers of training. Health and social care has partnerships with the Wolverhampton social services department and the Child Care Agency. Other curriculum areas, for example, business, may wish to consider establishing advisory committees which can bring employers' perspectives to their work. A work experience unit has recently been established to co-ordinate industrial placement activity on a college wide basis. There is some employer sponsorship of students but most of it is from the public sector.

19 The college has established Stowlawn Ltd and a number of subsidiary companies. These co-ordinate bidding for United Kingdom, European Union and some private funding to provide education and training in Russia and Eastern Europe. They market the college's own publications and sell furniture and other goods produced in workshops for the disabled. Any surpluses are covenanted to the Bilston Community College Foundation, a separate charitable trust, which funds a number of community initiatives, some of which are provided by the college.

20 Courses are well marketed. The marketing budget is large and well matched to needs. A marketing manager is responsible for the production of college prospectuses and advertising campaigns. The college produces some prospectuses, which are aimed at particular groups, for example those from ethnic minority backgrounds and women, whose representation the college wishes to increase. Most prospectuses are well presented but, in some cases, they could be written in plainer English. Market research is not yet fully developed although there have been some useful initiatives, notably the survey of local companies to assess training needs. This indicated a significant potential demand for evening and

Saturday morning provision. Analysis of recruitment by postcode has also assisted the college in targeting its marketing more precisely. A new appointment has been made to develop market research further. The college should consider how all the market intelligence information held by the directorates could be shared.

21 The college has a strong commitment to advancing equality of opportunity. Targets are set for staffing to ensure that gender and ethnic minority groups are represented in proportion to the student population. All appointments are made on merit. The college is also actively seeking to achieve the national target of employing 3 per cent of staff with disabilities. Staff and student composition are monitored by gender and ethnicity. There is a complaints procedure to deal with cases of racial discrimination and sexual harassment. Formal procedures are only invoked if informal approaches fail to resolve the complaint. Work placements are reviewed to ensure that there is no discrimination. The college seeks to ensure that staff are aware of equal opportunities issues in teaching and learning to assist them in monitoring the curriculum in relation to these issues. In construction determined efforts have been made to encourage women to acquire skills in what is a traditionally male-dominated area. The college also liaises with the Wolverhampton Race Equality Council.

22 Equal opportunities are further advanced by the outstanding child care provision. There are nurseries at Westfield Road and Green Lanes and children can attend during the morning, afternoon, whole-day or occasional day sessions. Students are not charged; staff pay according to means, and some places are purchased by commercial organisations. The nursery is also open during weekends, enabling attendance by parents at weekend courses. There are also holiday play schemes. The college gives financial support for child minding. There are long waiting lists for the nurseries. Nursery activities are reviewed twice a year by a group which includes representatives of parents. The nursery is also imaginatively used to give nursery nursing students practical experience, including the achievement of NVQs.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

23 The college corporation has 20 members: 10 from business and the public services including four co-opted members, two staff, one student representative, a nominee from the local TEC, a person nominated from the community, and the chief executive.

24 Members of the corporation have recently sought to clarify their responsibilities and duties. They met at two weekend seminars to develop their own code of practice using the Cadbury recommendations and the FEFC Guide for College Governors. The relationship between the chief executive and corporation members is good. Senior college staff are invited to attend corporation meetings and often present papers. The chief executive meets regularly with the chairman and with individual members

of the corporation. Attendance at meetings has proved to be difficult for some members; at the last five corporation meetings there has been an average of seven absences.

25 The college's management structure was introduced in 1992. The previous matrix structure was replaced by a more conventional pyramid structure with the chief executive and the executive management team at its apex. The executive management team is an effective decision making body, well led by the chief executive. It meets weekly and is composed of the chief executive, the two deputy principals, and four assistant principals. The structure is complex below this level but the lines of accountability are clear and understood. Co-ordination below the level of the executive management team is achieved through fortnightly meetings of the five programme directors and similar meetings of the directors who have cross-college responsibilities. There is a need to strengthen co-ordination between the two groups of directors.

26 The strategic plan sets clear and comprehensive aims. It is supplemented by an operating statement which establishes more detailed targets. The plan has been widely debated within the executive management team, and many staff have contributed to the drafting of sections.

27 There are clear policies for equal opportunities, health and safety, and student support. Responsibilities for their implementation are clearly designated. A wide variety of channels exist for informing staff about the college's aims and policies. All senior college managers receive or have easy access to the chief executive's detailed reports to the corporation. Following meetings of the executive management team, other college managers are briefed and they in turn brief the staff who are responsible to them. All staff receive a regular diary of events, and various newsletters as well as a written briefing from the chief executive which is circulated every six to eight weeks.

28 Summaries of the college's estimated income and expenditure for 1993-94 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's unit of resource for 1992-93 was £2,056 per weighted full-time equivalent student. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges was £2,444.

29 The college's strategy for financial allocations is clear. The chief executive, principal finance officer, and executive management team decide allocations. Any surplus funds are available for distribution according to the priorities expressed in the strategic plan. This approach may not match the needs of a responsive and rapidly changing college such as Bilston.

30 Unit costs are calculated to enable the college to make applications for funding and to negotiate contracts but they are not used in routine planning of course provision. The college is considering ways of measuring efficiency more carefully. A resource management unit has been created

to analyse expenditure returns. A management consultant has been retained to advise and train senior managers on calculating the costs, benefits, and yield from full-cost courses.

31 Management information is collected through the further education management information system. This produces various types of information on students including age, gender, ethnicity, postcode, and, where relevant, employer. Information can be displayed in a variety of graphical formats and is accessible to the executive management team and all of the five directorates. The collection and use of some management information is inadequate. Student attendance is recorded manually at present and there is no overall monitoring of student attendance and absence rates. Currently there is duplication of data collection for the management information system and for the library in connection with its issue of passes for students. A particularly significant failing is the absence of regular up-dating of information on college assets and items of equipment.

32 The college has succeeded in meeting and surpassing its overall enrolment target. Enrolment targets are set for each programme area.

33 Information on the retention of students is unreliable: the forms for recording withdrawals are not completed immediately or even every time a student withdraws. The college has formed a special unit to monitor retention and withdrawals more accurately and to improve completion rates. Full-time student destinations are monitored in broad terms by obtaining student intentions rather than by collecting actual destinations. Destinations of part-time students are not collected and analysed adequately. Limitations in information restrict the college's ability to set measures aimed at improving students' success.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

34 The equal opportunities policy underpins the college's procedures in recruitment, guidance and support. Students are well supported by careful and thorough enrolment and tutorial processes. Students expressed much satisfaction with the college and for many it exceeded their expectations. However, there was some dissatisfaction in business studies where students had a restricted option choice in the early stages of GNVQ course development.

35 Recruitment is effectively supported by the marketing unit, who assist staff to develop leaflets which are directed at each of the target groups identified in the college vision statement. The leisure and 'return to learn' programmes in the summer offer an impressive range of taster courses. These are important in bringing new clients into education. Although there are partnership activities with local schools, recruitment of 16 to 18 year-olds accounts for only 11 per cent of college enrolments. All directorates are able to accredit the prior learning and experience of students, and an access to assessment centre has been established to help in this.

36 Student services is headed by a director who enjoys parity of status with the five programme directors, reflecting the importance attached to pastoral matters. She is responsible for cross-college developments and learning centres, and leads a number of effective guidance and support teams. The youth and security team is an outstanding innovatory feature of this college. It ensures personal security on the college's main sites and provides a wide ranging programme of sporting and other leisure activities, including residential activities away from the college. It plays an important part in creating a secure and harmonious atmosphere and in building bridges between the different communities attending the college. Team members are an important link between staff and those students needing guidance and support.

37 The guidance centre maintains a large collection of careers and other guidance materials. Referrals to staff are monitored to ensure that no enquiry is left unanswered. Students who are uncertain about which course to choose receive initial guidance at the centre, but the entitlement to a guidance interview is delivered by members of the admissions team in one of the five programme directorates. There is concern about the high proportion of applications in some sectors which do not result in an enrolment.

38 The admission procedures have recently been reviewed by a cross-college working group and an admissions manual has been produced to ensure greater consistency. Induction procedures combine consistency with flexibility. Centrally produced documents, supplemented by induction materials for each directorate, provide clear information for students and personal tutors. This ensures coverage of basic information including the comprehensive facilities available to students for supported study and personal guidance.

39 Support for students during their courses is highly effective. Full-time and part-time students are allocated a personal tutor. Some students with specific needs are also allocated a support tutor. A system of 'cause for concern' notes alerts tutors to students in difficulty. Learning centres cater for students with needs which range from basic skills help to support for General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) work. Staff are available at set times for tutorials and their presence is much appreciated by students. Usage of the centres is monitored.

40 A recently established counselling service has yet to become widely used and the system for requesting appointments is being reviewed. Students in financial difficulty are well supported, although there is some lack of expertise relating to the benefit system. Good support is given to those attending the Department of Employment's Restart Interview. The student union hardship fund, the Bilston Foundation and the access fund assist students in need. These strategies are important in enabling unemployed students to complete their courses.

41 There is an efficient system for providing careers guidance and for assisting students in completing their university application forms. The guidance centre provides a support pack and monitors the progress of all university applications. Assistance is also provided in the summer when examination results are received.

42 The links with local special schools ensure a substantial recruitment of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Support team members attend initial interviews. Induction documents are clear and helpful. Assessment of students' particular learning difficulties could be more rigorous. This would enable teaching and support staff to tailor the curriculum to meet individual needs. There is good specialist support for students with hearing loss. Records of achievement and individual action plans for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well used.

43 The student services directorate is meticulous in the evaluation of its own work. It mounts surveys of both tutors' and students' opinions and secures a high level of response. Staff are available at weekends to offer support for students who need to improve their skills.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

44 Of the 72 teaching sessions inspected, 61 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. The following table summarises the inspection grades.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCSE		0	0	5	1	0	6
GNVQ		1	5	7	2	0	15
NVQ		3	4	2	2	0	11
Other		2	29	8	1	0	40
Total		6	38	22	6	0	72

45 The college is developing innovative programmes designed to offer students appropriate courses and ways of learning in locations and at times convenient to them. Plans to introduce a unit-based modular curriculum are being implemented. This is supported by the development of information technology networks to provide access to individualised learning programmes.

46 Most work programmes have clear aims and objectives. In some curriculum areas the syllabus content is closely defined and progress towards covering it is regularly monitored. In other areas, the schemes of work are less detailed and they are not shared with all students to enable them to plan ahead.

47 Students are encouraged and supported by a highly committed and knowledgeable teaching staff. The relationships between staff and students

are good. Most students are well motivated and keen to take an active part in the teaching and learning. Teaching was usually well planned, had clear aims and objectives and paid attention to the different abilities of students. A variety of teaching and learning methods were used in many classes, including practical sessions. The wide range of flexible teaching methods and sensitive staff manner were eminently suitable for the adults, mainly women, attending access and return to work courses. Good use was made of visual resources; well-produced handouts and learning materials were evident in many classes. There was appropriate use of self-study and learning materials in business studies, where core skills were built into schemes of work.

48 Some exceptionally well planned and interesting teaching was seen in National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) health and social care classes. Staff were aware of the need to check students' learning and understanding. Many teaching sessions were highly interactive. For example, in the first day of a three-day module, students completed a clear and carefully prepared set of tasks, undertook small group exercises and prepared and presented reports to the whole group. They were given opportunities to examine their own reactions and attitudes to situations encountered by social carers. In another health and social care NVQ class students were introduced to the learning difficulties of students with physical disabilities. Realistic simulations, clear explanations and emphasis on key learning points helped students to learn rapidly and with a high level of involvement. Demonstrations and the use of videos added to the effectiveness of this session.

49 The college recruits a substantial number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, for whom there is a broad range of courses. Learning programmes clearly take account of their different needs and lead to an impressive range of national accreditation, including the Black Country Access Federation and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) profile of achievement. Teaching sessions for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were well planned. Students were involved in choosing options and used tutorial time to review their own progress. In some courses, including those in construction, the individual needs of such students are identified and met. In other courses a more formalised system of initial assessment would enable more programmes to be tailored to meet individual needs. Support staff are effective but the college needs to ensure that all teachers involve them in planning teaching sessions, as part of an overall strategy for learning. Well-planned, effective teaching and support for a hearing impaired student was observed in a catering session. The lecturer had provided a written plan for the support worker who met with the student to prepare for the teaching session.

50 In some of the weaker teaching and learning sessions insufficient attention was given to match the teaching and learning to the differing learning needs and abilities of students. This was true of some access and women's return to work sessions and of some classes where there was a

wide range of ability in social care. The lack of a model office and work experience on GNVQ/NVQ business programmes was hindering the collection and assessment of students' portfolio material. The learning environment for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was not always as stimulating as it might be. Teaching staff could make more use of visual aids to present materials, rather than relying on oral explanation and worksheets. In some business studies classes there were high absence rates.

51 In general students are well informed about their progress. Comprehensive records of their achievements are maintained in construction and health and social care. In business studies their progress is monitored through the completion of an individual student action plan. On access courses work is regularly marked and returned. There was a good example of a GNVQ portfolio on one access course which indicated that both staff and students understood the concepts of evidence collection and core skills. However, at the time of the inspection, little work appeared to have been submitted and assessed on the women's return to work course. There was good use of specialised keyboards to keep a log of the activities of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but some of these students would benefit from more comment on their written work. Practical assignments in construction are well planned by programme managers and staff to ensure that they are of an appropriate standard and sufficiently rigorous for the students. In some areas there is a need to establish systems to ensure the prompt return of assessed work and to avoid the bunching of the assignment programme. There is an appeals procedure relating to assessment and students are made aware of this.

52 The learning centres were effective in supporting students' learning. Students made active use of information technology in their studies, mainly for word processing, spreadsheets and databases in assignments. Some of the networked information technology software is very new and students were usually investigating the package rather than actively pursuing a task. The college is beginning to develop learning materials which will be integrated into the curriculum to enable students to exploit the full potential of the wide range of software available.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

53 Traditional programmes of study and examination routes are not seen as appropriate to the college's mission, and the number of students taking General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and GCE A level courses and examinations is small. The degree of success that the college achieves with its alternative programmes cannot be fully evaluated because the college's present systems for monitoring its programme outcomes are poorly developed and fail to measure the complexities of its students' successes and achievements with any consistency. This is an issue that the college should tackle with urgency.

54 Students clearly enjoy their work. The standards achieved by some students is high and many spoke positively about their experiences. They

displayed appropriate levels of understanding across a range of subject areas. In several subjects where students are actively encouraged to work in groups they co-operate well. Students develop core study skills in construction, access to higher education, business studies, and women's return to work courses. Several programmes have high non-completion rates, and of particular concern was the substantial absenteeism in a large number of classes visited.

55 Pass rates on vocational courses vary. The college has achieved high success rates with students on BTEC courses and recorded a 100 per cent pass rate for 315 entries for BTEC awards in 1993. Good success rates were also achieved in a broad range of other certificated courses: 100 per cent in the National Examination Board for Supervisory Management examinations; 89 per cent in Nursery Nursing examinations; and 84 per cent in the Institute of Welfare Officers examinations. Less successful rates ranging from 40 per cent to 64 per cent were attained in Pitman, London Chamber of Commerce and Industry language courses, and Royal Institute of Public Health examinations.

56 The large number of registrations for the Black Country Access Federation programmes reflects the significant enrolment of adult students without GCSE qualifications. These programmes which are affiliated to the open college network have a specific compact arrangement with the University of Wolverhampton and general university recognition as part of the open-college-accreditation system. In 1993, a total of 246 students registered in the scheme and gained 2,383 credits out of an available 3,642. Many students are able to enter higher education with these credits even though they do not obtain sufficient credits for an access certificate. The college may wish to seek information on the progress of these students on their new courses.

57 The college provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities results in many individual achievements. In 1993, the college issued 60 certificates to students who successfully completed full-time programmes of self development. Adult students, who were not ready to be registered for Black Country Access Federation programmes at the end of part-time programmes, also received college certificates providing that they had demonstrated achievement. During the 1992-93 session 450 part-time students received a college certificate. Students with learning difficulties were also entered for a total of 207 units across 15 subjects in the Black Country Access Federation programme and were successful in receiving 205 individual credit awards. Specific programmes managed by specialist staff were successful in enabling 69 students with learning difficulties to achieve credits in NVQ, Royal Society of Arts, Pitman, and Associated Examining Board certificated awards.

58 Women's return-to-work courses are a notable example of the college's equal opportunities policy. Progression routes have been established to higher education access courses and, from a women's new technology course, to a women's BTEC national computing programme.

Women on these courses often went on to employment or to higher or further education.

59 The range of available awards reflects the breadth of provision. Large numbers of students are successful in accredited core skills courses such as the City and Guilds of London Institute communication skills (wordpower) and numeracy (numberpower) programmes. Bilston Community College certificates are issued to students completing skills acquisition courses in a range of topics, including literacy, numeracy, work related studies, basic electronics, cookery, self advocacy, and art and crafts. At the end of this academic year a total of 91 students have gained a basic skills or English for Speakers of Other Languages college certificate.

60 The number of students entering full-time and part-time employment in 1993 is recorded as 741 and 97, respectively, and 2,108 students are recorded as continuing in full-time or part-time further education. Students entering full-time and part-time higher education courses in 1993 numbered 113 and 37, respectively. The number of students applying to higher education from Bilston Community College in 1994 was 163. This included 89 females and 74 males of whom 51 were from Asian ethnic backgrounds and 37 were black students.

61 The number of subjects offered at GCSE level over the last three years has averaged 24. The number taking the examination has fallen by approximately 10 per cent from the 1991 figure of 497. The percentage of students gaining grades A-C has fallen from 61 per cent to 42 per cent in the same period. Significant numbers who enter for the examination fail to take it; on average 20-25 per cent over the last three years. Over the same period the number of GCE A level subjects offered has declined from 31 to 25, and the number of entrants in the same period has fallen from 163 to 121. Twenty students in the 16-18 age group gained two or more GCE A levels with an average points score of 5.6 (where A=10, E=2). This resulted in the college being ranked 345 out of 388 in the points score league table.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

62 Staff are aware of the commitments in the Charter for Further Education through the staff newsletter, staff handbook and charter awareness sessions. A draft college charter for students is at an advanced consultation stage and the college is preparing a separate charter for employers, both of which will be completed by July 1994.

63 There is a policy on quality and its assurance and control, which staff are aware of, understand and generally support. Senior management are intent on improving the quality of provision and have worked hard to develop quality assurance systems. The college is making good progress towards the implementation of total quality management and greater benefits will be obtained as further coherence develops between the various initiatives.

64 The chief executive sets the priorities for quality and the executive management team review the system regularly. There is a fortnightly meeting of specially trained quality managers from directorates and departments who review progress and plan and carry out further action. The college has set the objective of meeting a number of externally awarded quality criteria, and has recently been awarded the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) quality award. In May 1994 the college gained BS5750 accreditation for the comprehensive quality assurance procedures in place for accredited courses. The quality managers committee played a significant part in the achievement of this.

65 Setting quality standards and targets within the college is largely carried out by the heads of the directorates. Information on attendance, retention rates, change of course and student destinations were in some cases incomplete and consequently some performance indicators could not be reviewed adequately. There was little systematic use of indicators to establish internal quality benchmarks, or to carry out effective year by year comparisons. The college is aware of the inadequacies in some of their data and is currently developing a new student tracking form to improve this.

66 There is a well established system of course review. Course teams meet regularly to review programmes and, where available, reports from assessors, employers and other external agencies. The views of employers are not formally sought by most course teams. The college monitors students' views on the quality of courses and facilities through questionnaires. Their views are added to those collected in other ways. Course reports contribute to directorate reports and reports on the quality of all aspects of the programmes, using the same headings as the FEFC's inspection reports, are provided to the management team. In some cases, however, these reports were descriptive rather than analytical.

67 There is a detailed policy for staff-development, and the college is committed to achieving the Investors in People award by December 1994. All full-time staff undertake a comprehensive 10-week induction programme which includes an analysis of staff-development needs. The success of this induction programme has led to longer-serving staff being offered the opportunity to take a 'know your organisation' refresher course. There is no induction for part-time teaching staff but they do receive a comprehensive staff handbook.

68 Most full-time teaching staff are appraised and support staff are offered a professional development interview. A needs analysis is drawn up and related to college and directorate plans. In 1993-94, following this analysis, 18 sessions were organised to help staff learn how to use information technology. Opportunities are available for all staff to discuss their particular needs with their line manager. The staff-development budget is £133,000, which is approximately 1 per cent of the college budget. This does not include the cost of staff engaged in organising staff

development. Staff undertaking significant developmental activities are required to submit an evaluation form on completion of the training. Each directorate is required to show what impact the activity has had on the work of the department.

RESOURCES

Staffing

69 Staff expertise is suitably matched to their teaching responsibilities. Staff are generally well qualified. Most have a teaching qualification. Academic staffing was adequate and well deployed at the time of the inspection. Support staff are also well qualified and appropriately deployed.

70 There is a good gender balance amongst the staff as a whole and in the executive management group, which includes four women. The college has consistently taken action to recruit staff from ethnic minority groups, the equal opportunities programme is thoroughly integrated with its recruitment procedures and all posts are advertised as potential job shares. The application form contains information in five languages and local ethnic community groups receive details of all advertisements. The college provides a three day course on equal opportunities for those involved in appointing staff and a representative from the quality and equality directorate is a member of every selection panel.

71 A job marketing group is reviewing all appointment procedures and their review includes research into the reasons why some posts do not attract applications from ethnic minority groups. Arrangements are being developed with universities to provide work experience for women teaching in curriculum areas in which they are under represented.

Equipment/learning resources

72 The provision of equipment and materials to support teaching and learning is adequate in quality and quantity. The construction and the modern languages area laboratories are well resourced with specialist equipment. There is a good range of teaching and learning aids in science. The college budget for equipment is rising each year and this year the allocation has increased by 36 per cent. There is no college-wide policy for maintenance or replacement of equipment and no effective system for evaluating equipment to meet future curriculum demands. The college does not complete an annual inventory of equipment.

73 The main library and the 16 learning centres are amongst the best accommodation in the college. The main library is pleasant and clean and has good wall displays. Reference and study areas are available for both groups and individuals but more study areas are required to meet the growing demand for independent learning. Access to the library for students with restricted mobility is limited to the ground floor. The library caters for children and their books are displayed on low-level shelves. The

range of learning support materials which includes books, audio-visual aids, journals and newspapers is good. The library has increased its total stock by 10 per cent this year. There are, however, some out-of-date textbooks. The level of funding to the library is low. The computerised library management system requires upgrading if it is to meet the demands of providing an improved service. Students receive a thorough induction to the library and its services. Staffing and library opening times are satisfactory and include a weekend service. Better collaboration between library and teaching staff would improve the standard of learning support for students.

74 The information technology equipment in the college is unsatisfactory. At present the ratio of students to computers is 25:1 and the college has a long way to go to achieve its planned ratio of 10:1 by 1995, and 6:1 by 1997. There is a comprehensive range of software, databases and CD-ROM available for student use both in house and on the system which it shares with other colleges. This enables students on all sites to receive uniform access to a wide range of facilities. The equipment used by students with learning difficulties has a limited life and consideration should be given to its replacement in due course.

Accommodation

75 The college is located on six main sites within a five-mile radius of the main campus. There are outreach courses at a number of small sites which include local schools. The range and mixture of building types varies from a late nineteenth century art and science building, located in a conservation area, to a concrete framed building with brick cladding built in the 1970s. Two of the sites are leasehold. Most of the college sites are located in areas with good access to local transport.

76 The external fabric of the buildings varies from good to poor. The Victorian Monmore Green complex is extremely dilapidated. In some areas the accommodation is good, for example, student services, the learning centres and the construction area. However, on a number of sites the internal fabric is poor, particularly where surfaces have been damaged by rainwater penetration or by lack of adequate maintenance. Decoration in the college is dull. Refectories need upgrading in the food preparation and public accommodation areas. The entrance foyers to most sites could provide a more welcoming environment. Driveways, car parks and signposting throughout the sites need improvement. In general, the standard of cleanliness and the maintenance of landscaped areas is satisfactory.

77 Over £3 million is being spent during the next three years on repairing and refurbishing the college to an acceptable standard. The accommodation strategy being introduced by the estate managers has many good features. There is a need to develop further an effective method which ensures efficient use of space. In general, the classrooms and specialist areas are of adequate size and suitable for the courses on offer.

The college is open 50 weeks a year, including weekends. The college has shown initiative and enterprise in the leasing of the Devonshire House site which has the potential to offer good accommodation for a variety of uses.

78 Access for students with restricted mobility is inadequate on all sites. Better access in the multi-storey blocks could be achieved by the installation of a lift to all floors. The standard of sanitary accommodation at two sites is poor and there are low numbers of toilet facilities for the disabled throughout the college.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

79 The strengths of the college are:

- responsiveness to people with little or no previous access to post-school education and training
- close partnerships with the community and other relevant organisations
- comprehensive and widely-implemented equal opportunities policies
- effective strategic planning
- well-organised support for students at all stages of their programmes
- highly flexible methods of curriculum delivery arranged in ways and at times that are convenient for students
- good-quality teaching and learning
- good learning resources for all programmes
- high pass rates on some vocational courses
- recent achievement of quality assurance kitemarks
- well-planned staff development.

80 If the college is to succeed in achieving its aims it has to address the following:

- production of more accurate and reliable management information on students' attendance, completion of programmes of study, achievements and destinations
- unit costing to inform decisions on resource use
- poor retention and results on some courses
- poor state of buildings and lack of maintenance and replacement policy
- limited access for people with restricted mobility.

FIGURES

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- 1 Enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)

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

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

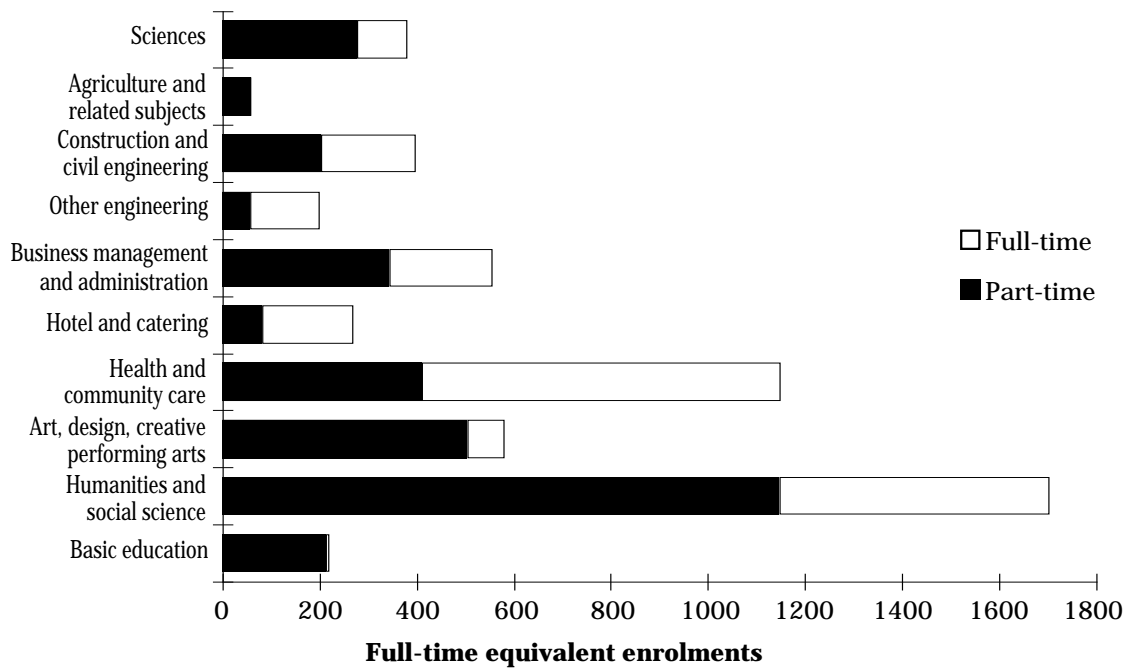
 - 5 Estimated income (1993-94)

 - 6 Estimated expenditure (1993-94)

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

Figure 1

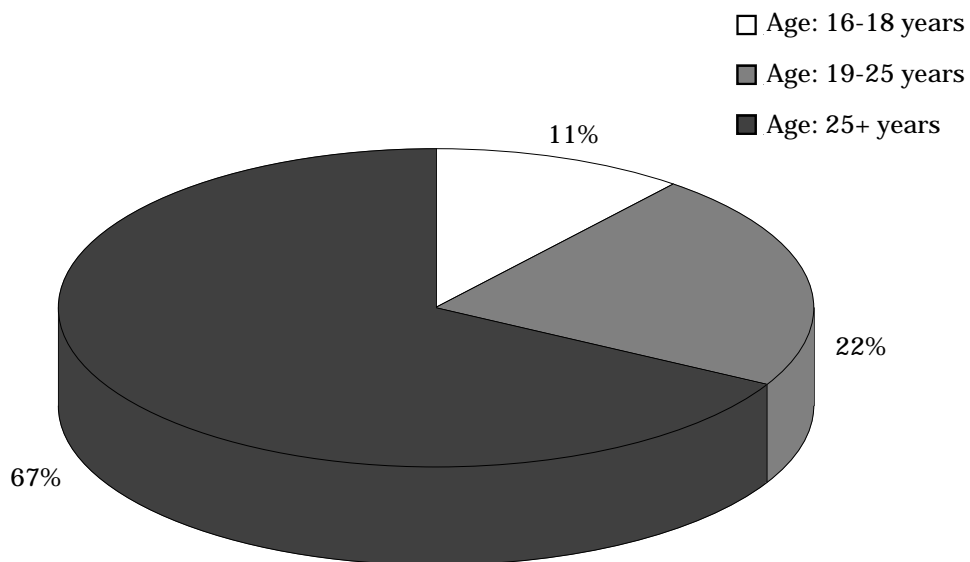
Bilston Community College: enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)



Full-time equivalent enrolments: 5,523

Figure 2

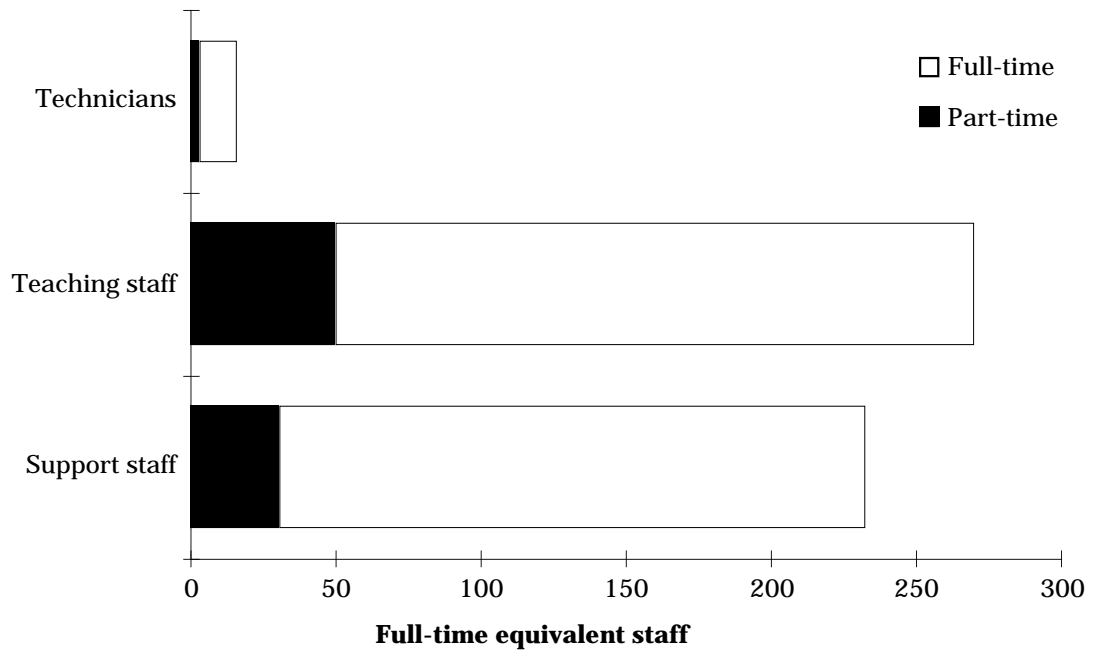
Bilston Community College: percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)



Enrolments: 24,133

Figure 3

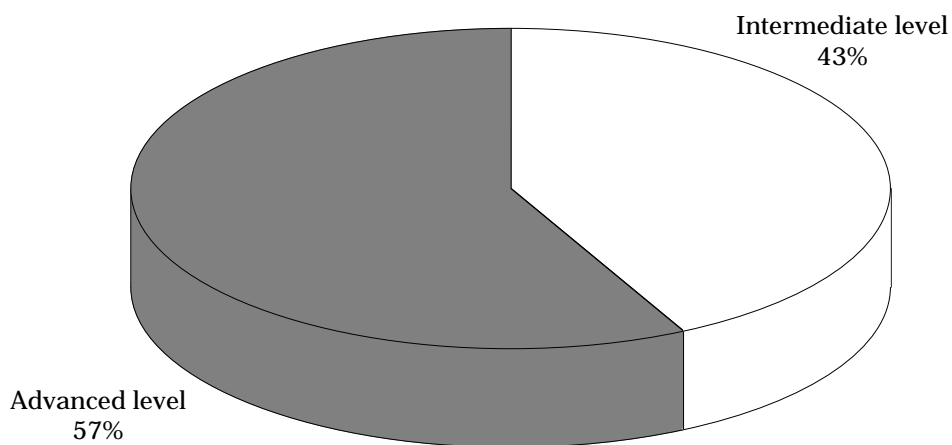
Bilston Community College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)



Full-time equivalent staff: 519

Figure 4

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



Enrolments: 24,133

Figure 5

Bilston Community College: estimated income (1993-94)

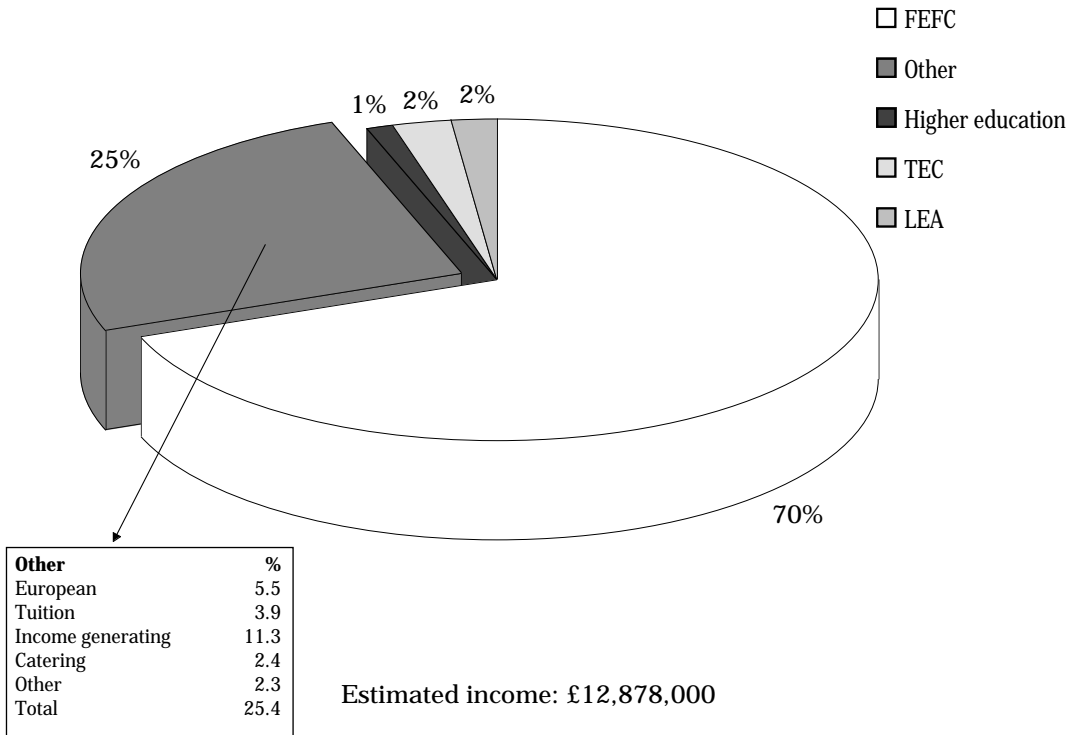
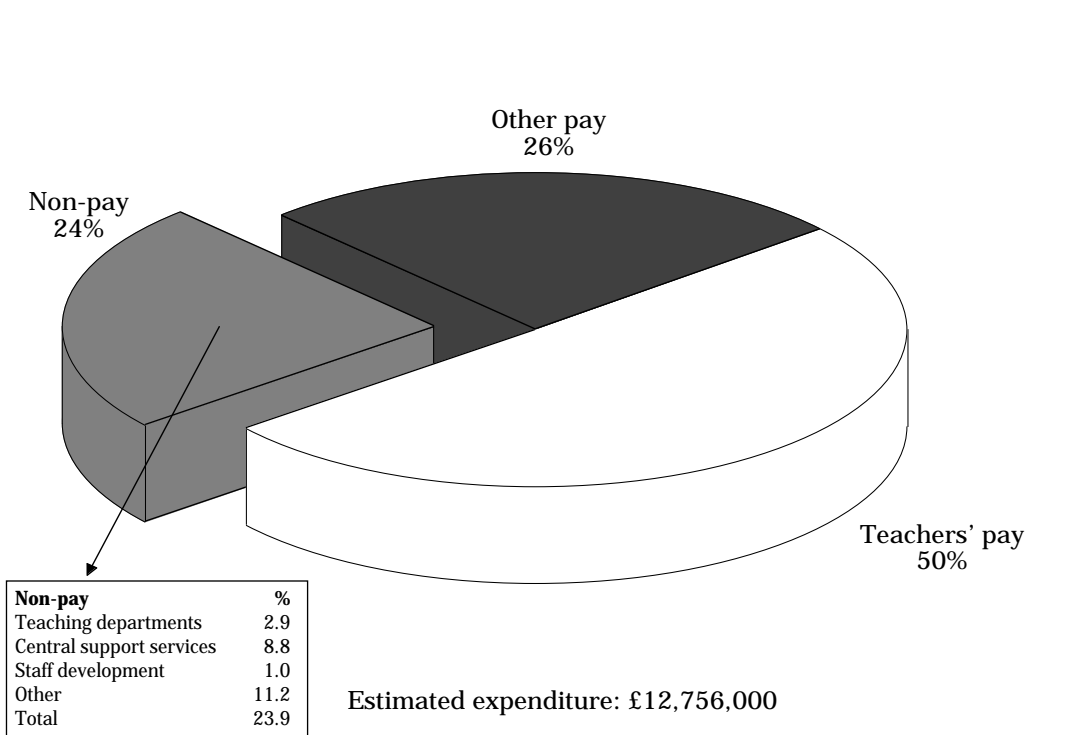


Figure 6

Bilston Community College: estimated expenditure (1993-94)



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