

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Hertford Regional College

June 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 61/95

HERTFORD REGIONAL COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected May 1994 and February 1995

Summary

Hertford Regional College offers a wide range of courses which includes extensive provision in many vocational areas and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college has exceeded its growth targets. It has effective links with employers and the Hertfordshire TEC. A strong corporation board provides clear strategic direction. Management structures enable staff to participate effectively in the development of the college. There are effective arrangements for the recruitment and induction of students. The quality assurance framework, covering all aspects of provision and services, identifies performance standards, targets and responsibilities. Good professional development is provided for staff. There are well-organised and well-resourced library services. Most accommodation is suitable for its purpose and properly maintained. More courses at foundation level are required. The college should further develop its arrangements for recruiting and supporting adult students. The college should also: develop its marketing strategies; improve the management of some cross-college provision; establish a strategy to develop management information systems further, including procedures for monitoring the destinations of students; extend the appraisal system for all staff; review procedures for the recruitment of part-time staff; and improve access to and support for information technology resources.

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	1
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	2
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Computing, information technology, mathematics and sciences	2	Health and community care	2
Engineering	3	Beauty therapy and hairdressing	2
Business studies	2	Art and design	2
Hotel and catering	2	Humanities	3
Leisure and tourism	2	Access	2
		Basic education	2

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INTRODUCTION

1 Hertford Regional College was inspected between May 1994 and February 1995. A team of eight inspectors spent a week in the college from 30 January to 3 February 1995. A further 63 days were used to inspect specialist areas of provision. Inspectors visited 237 classes, examined samples of students' work and held discussions with governors, staff and students. They also met representatives of local employers, higher education institutions, schools and the community including the Hertfordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Hertford Regional College was established in 1991 as a result of a merger between the former Ware College and East Herts College. The merger resulted in some rationalisation but no significant loss of provision. The college is located on two major sites at Broxbourne and Ware. It also provides adult education at more than 40 other sites across east Hertfordshire.

3 In each of the last three years the college has increased its student enrolments. The growth in full-time equivalent students for 1993-94 was 8 per cent. Enrolments by age and level of study are given in figures 1 and 2. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. There are 257 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 159 full-time equivalent support staff. A staff profile is shown in figure 4.

4 The college's catchment area embraces two distinct parts of east Hertfordshire. The college centre at Ware is in the rural East Hertfordshire District Council area which stretches from north of Hoddesdon to south of Royston and includes Bishop's Stortford. This area has close links across the Essex border to Harlow and Stansted. The centre at Broxbourne, seven miles away from the Ware centre, is in the Broxbourne Borough Council district and includes the towns of Broxbourne, Cheshunt, Hoddesdon and Waltham Cross. The area has close links with the London Borough of Enfield. East Hertfordshire has a population of 116,000.

5 In east Hertfordshire there are three well-established consortia of 11-19 comprehensive schools. Of the five schools in the Bishops Stortford consortium four are grant-maintained; of the five schools in the Hertford/Ware consortium none are grant-maintained; and of the seven schools in the Lea Valley consortium four are grant-maintained. There is also an upper school in Buntingford serving the north of the surrounding area. All the secondary schools have sixth forms. There are three special schools with pupils of secondary age. There are also 10 independent schools in Hertfordshire. Neighbouring further education colleges are Harlow Tertiary College, Enfield College and the Welwyn Garden City campus of Oaklands College.

6 Although most local industry is small in scale, there are some large national employers, particularly in the fields of pharmaceuticals,

telecommunications and retail distribution. Glaxo Operations (UK) Ltd, based in Ware, employs 1,800 people and the headquarters of Tesco, based at Cheshunt, employs 5,000 people. Other larger employers include Royal Insurance and Mercury Communications in Hertford. The unemployment rate for the east Hertfordshire district is 5.5 per cent and for the Broxbourne district 8.1 per cent (November 1994).

7 In its mission statement the college aims to provide a comprehensive range of education and training services of the highest quality to an increasing range of client groups.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 Managers and staff have responded to the national targets for education and training and incorporated them into the college's strategic plan. The college offers a broad range of vocational courses in art and design; beauty therapy and hairdressing; business, secretarial and professional; catering; computing and media studies; construction; health, social and childcare; leisure and tourism; and manufacturing, electronics and engineering. A large number of courses are offered in most of these vocational areas. For example, the art and design department offers five full-time Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diplomas: in display design, fashion design, graphic design, photography and three-dimensional design.

9 Limited provision at foundation level is a weakness which the college recognises. Of the college's total course provision only 6 per cent is at foundation level. The college intends to offer a wider range of foundation level programmes from September 1995. The range of vocational provision includes National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) from level 1 to level 3 and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Twenty-two GNVQ programmes are offered in 12 vocational areas. The GNVQ programmes are organised to enable students to take additional studies, including some at General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) or General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in English and/or mathematics. They may also take relevant additional vocational qualifications: for example, students taking a GNVQ in leisure and tourism can gain the community sports leader award. NVQ programmes provide some examples of innovative practice, such as the 'Ware Early Years Assessment Centre', set up by the social studies department, which enables adult students working in a wide variety of childcare posts to register for NVQ level 2 or 3. Their assessment is based on portfolios of evidence, workplace assessment, or the accreditation of prior learning. The college also offers in-company provision of NVQs in management.

10 The college offers a sufficient range of subjects at GCE advanced supplementary (AS), GCE A level and GCSE to enable students to choose a suitable programme of study. Nineteen GCE AS/A level and 14 GCSE subjects are available. The diploma of vocational education is offered in

combination with two or three GCSE subjects. This provides a well-structured and suitable programme for those young people who have not yet chosen a specific vocational area and have low GCSE achievements on entry. The GCE A level programme is primarily aimed at 16-19 year olds, but recent changes to the timetabling of the programme have improved access for adult students.

11 There is a good range of 'extended education' courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including moderate, profound and multiple learning difficulties. The modular structure of the programme enables students to choose individual timetables. It also allows part-time students to attend the college as part of the arrangements for care in the community. There are opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to progress within the programme of courses but the small foundation level provision limits their opportunities to move on to vocational courses. Liaison arrangements with local special schools include a joint programme of activities for students in the summer holidays before they join the college to assist their transition from school to college. School link courses have been discontinued following changes in local education authority (LEA) funding arrangements.

12 Some college programmes are designed specifically for adults, including a nursery nursing course and the access programme. Students who take the access programme must first undertake a planning period to consider their career and study possibilities. Although throughout the college adults are welcomed on to vocational programmes, numbers remain moderate. The college has not provided sufficient learning opportunities or support facilities to meet the needs of the potential adult market. Meeting these needs has been identified as a strategic priority.

13 Many adults attend non-vocational adult education courses at the college or at over 30 local centres. The college has a contract with the LEA to provide 238,500 student hours of tuition to adult students. This area of provision is responsive to clients' needs and some courses have been tailored to meet specific requests such as courses for Tesco's Retired Staff Association. Some other courses enable students to progress to vocational courses, for example, in bookkeeping. The adult education department has links with East Herts and Broxbourne District Councils for the provision of leisure programmes.

14 Hertford Regional College is an associate college of the University of Hertfordshire. Higher education courses include a higher national diploma in business studies and a science degree foundation year. In addition, Middlesex University validates a diploma in design at the college which exempts students from the first two years of their Bachelor of Arts design degree. The college intends to expand this sort of provision but its plans have been adversely affected by changes in higher education funding.

15 Although increased competition means that relationships with schools are becoming more difficult, the college attends schools' careers

meetings, gives talks and attracts many school pupils to its open evenings. All local secondary schools have sixth forms and most are developing GNVQ provision. There are no formal curriculum links with schools. There are no franchised programmes or link courses. There are some co-operative relationships with other further education colleges. For example, the four Hertfordshire further education colleges are making a joint bid to Hertfordshire TEC for funding under the terms of the competitiveness White Paper.

16 There is no overall strategy for liaison with employers. Links with industry vary between departments. Although many are informal they are generally well established and productive. Liaison comes about through NVQ programmes, work experience contacts and extensive youth training provision. Where links are strong, for example in science and engineering, companies have assisted with the purchase of capital equipment and contributed to assignment design and curriculum development.

17 Hertfordshire TEC regards the college as an effective and responsive provider of training of high quality. The college has a youth training contract for 22,500 trainee weeks, which currently involves 548 trainees. Valuable industrial links result from this contract with the TEC. Training liaison officers employed by the college regularly visit over 400 employers and provide feedback to departments and to the college's training organisation manager. There is a training for work contract for 94 adult training places. A pilot 'modern apprenticeship' scheme in engineering has made a good start; placements with employers have been secured for all 14 of the first cohort of apprentices. Other notable contracts include work with unemployed adults on a job plan programme and a job club.

18 Full-cost commercial course activity is currently limited in range and in the amount of income generated. The college training and development services department provides effective assistance to the departments who wish to run such courses. Where full-cost courses have been run they have related closely to mainstream provision. The college has not identified new markets for full-cost courses or consultancy services.

19 The college has a marketing officer who is responsible for press relations, publicity material and liaison with schools. The marketing officer works effectively with the college information service, which deals capably with initial enquiries and undertakes prospectus and leaflet distribution. Marketing at a strategic level is underdeveloped. The marketing plan is brief and there is little market research or use of research data for course planning. There is no formal evaluation of the effectiveness of marketing. Publicity material, and in particular the prospectus for full-time courses, is attractive and informative but course leaflets vary in style and quality.

20 In some departments, the college is beginning to move towards more flexible programmes based on modular delivery. Although most courses

have a fixed point of entry in September, the college does have a limited range of open-learning programmes, including some in subjects at GCE A level and GCSE. About 120 students enrol each year on open-learning programmes.

21 The college has an equal opportunities policy with supporting procedures and standards, for example, on racial and sexual harassment. The responsibilities of key staff and the role of the equal opportunities committee are clear and the college is making good progress on a range of issues. Questionnaires are sent to students following their induction, and midway through the year, to ask about their experience of unfairness in the college. Childcare facilities are not yet provided on either college site.

22 Access to the college by public transport is difficult from some local areas and the college runs a subsidised bus service for students who do not qualify for free LEA transport. There is no bus service between the two college sites.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

23 Care has been taken in establishing and maintaining the composition of the board of the corporation to ensure that members have a wide range of interests and expertise that are of benefit to the college. Nine of the 15 members are from business, industry or commerce and one is a nominee of the local TEC. There are two co-opted members. The principal and two other staff are also members. There are no student members. At the time of the inspection there were vacancies for two members to replace members who had recently resigned. A panel had been established to look for replacement members with expertise in marketing and in estates management to extend the range of special knowledge available.

24 The main board of the corporation is assisted in carrying out its responsibilities by a small number of standing committees and advisory panels. This committee structure forms an efficient and effective way of dealing with the business of the corporation. The number and role of these sub-groups has been carefully designed to keep meetings short, to avoid debating matters several times and to involve as many members as possible in the decision-making process. Standing committees have delegated powers of decision making. Panels have not; they meet as required and make reports or recommendations to the appropriate standing committee or directly to the board itself. Most routine matters referred to the finance and general purposes committee and the planning and personnel committee are resolved by those committees; more important or contentious issues are referred with a recommendation to the full board of the corporation.

25 A distinctive feature of the board's structure has been the establishment of a performance review panel to monitor how effectively the college meets the needs of students and employers. The panel has been particularly effective in monitoring the quality of the college's policies

through detailed examination of the performance of departments and cross-college services.

26 Each member of the corporation is asked to take a particular interest in the work of one of the departments or support services of the college in order that they may develop a more detailed understanding of its work. This initiative is welcomed by college staff.

27 Members of the corporation have a strong commitment to the advancement of the college. They consider very thoroughly the issues placed before them. They have a clear view of their role as seeking to improve the achievements of all students and helping the college to function effectively within the financial constraints. Management of the college is left to the principal and his senior management team. The board has set criteria for monitoring its own performance: for example, a target of 80 per cent attendance at meetings.

28 Members of the corporation have played an active role in the development of the strategic planning process. They, and the director of planning, have been particularly concerned to ensure that staff have been given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the strategic plan. Staff have welcomed this opportunity as a help to developing a corporate ethos within the college community. The second round of strategic plans are of significantly better quality than that of those produced in the first year. The college has an operating statement against which the achievement of objectives is measured. However, the implementation of the strategic plan is not monitored frequently throughout the year.

29 Staff operate within a clear organisational structure which they understand. The principal is supported by four directors who carry responsibilities for planning, curriculum, support services and finance, respectively. They make up the executive management group. Eight heads of department are responsible for curriculum provision and another is responsible for the library and learning resources. The directors of curriculum and planning have responsibility for the management of heads of departments. Departments use a range of organisational structures which are appropriate to their size and character. The personnel manager reports directly to the principal.

30 There is a number of cross-college functions and departments have identified staff who have responsibility for these. For example, departments have nominated quality auditors to assist the development and implementation of the quality framework and senior tutors to support tutorial guidance. However, there is insufficient overall co-ordination and management of some aspects of provision, for example, the GCE A level programme, in learning resources and in the deployment of information technology resources across the college.

31 The principal and senior management provide effective leadership. During a period of rapid change which has included amalgamation and

incorporation, the college has successfully maintained its commitment to provide education and training of a high quality. Staff display a very positive attitude to the challenges facing the college and have welcomed the opportunity to be involved in its further development. Personal targets for the performance of directors are set and regularly reviewed but they are not yet set for departmental managers.

32 The committee structure includes representatives from the teaching staff, support staff and students, and this, together with the way in which business is conducted within it, ensures that staff have every opportunity to express their views and to participate fully in the development of academic policy.

33 Frequent and effective line management meetings at all levels provide for the exchange of information and views. Meetings are generally well minuted, and any action that is required is clearly identified and followed up at subsequent meetings. Communications are assisted by a formal monthly management bulletin edited by a director and a more informal monthly staff newsletter. The principal and the management team are readily accessible to all staff.

34 Management of the provision within departments is generally effective. Departmental plans are comprehensive. Programme organiser files are used to bring together the information needed to manage course delivery. The wide range of performance indicators in use includes student views of courses, retention and drop-out figures and destination data.

35 The college has made good progress in the development and use of information systems. The central computerised management information system supports a wide range of college operations and is accessible to departmental heads and cross-college support sections. The college is a pilot centre for the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) individualised student record and this is proving a useful source of student data. The computerised management information system also supports personnel and financial management. The payroll function is now wholly provided by the college, with a significant saving in cost.

36 There is growing confidence in the effectiveness of the computerised management information system but a strategy is needed to guide future development. There has been no systematic analysis of the information needs of the college. The present system produces a number of standard reports which do not always meet the present information requirements of management. Although the staffing of the system is heavily stretched, it is at present providing no support for a number of activities, including timetabling, register generation, examinations entry, outcome recording, GNVQ tracking and logging and monitoring of guidance interviews. A number of separate databases are not fully integrated into the central management information system. The college is in the process of establishing an information strategy steering group and appointing an information officer to develop recording systems.

37 Comprehensive management accounts are produced monthly. The college builds up its budget from information provided by the departments. The executive group reviews the proposals and determines priorities for financial allocations for the coming year. The governing body approve the final budget. The budgets for pay of part-time staff and course materials are delegated to departments and may be further delegated to section and course level. Capital budget allocations are based on departmental bids which are considered by the executive management group in relation to college priorities. The budget allocations are clear, open, and understood. The departments and other budget holders are closely supported through monthly stewardship meetings with the finance team. The college's average level of funding is £17.26 per unit. The median for all colleges in the further education sector is £18.17 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

38 Systems have been developed to introduce cost and income accounting at departmental level to improve resource planning across the college. It is intended that all income and expenditure including overheads will be budgeted and reported on by departmental and cross-college cost centres.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

39 Two units provide services for students. The information and guidance service provides advice on careers, and the student services unit is responsible for tutorial support, counselling and financial advice to students. Though they are under the management of the directors of planning and of curriculum, respectively, they work effectively together to provide students with an integrated service. Questionnaires are used to obtain views from students and departments on the performance of student services, but the arrangements for evaluation do not yet enable any comprehensive judgement to be made about their effectiveness.

40 Improvements in guidance and students services are being introduced in a systematic and staged way within a well-planned framework. New procedures have been brought into operation for the first stages of admission, enrolment and induction, and records of achievement. The documentation which clearly specifies the standards of guidance and support which are to be met is easy for tutors to use. A scheme to co-ordinate guidance has been successfully piloted under the leadership of a senior tutor in the business and information technology department. There have been improvements in communication and in the monitoring of tutorial and guidance issues across the department.

41 Personal tutors provide support to individual full-time students. Students express great confidence in their tutors' willingness to listen and to help them resolve difficulties. They have regular individual tutorials and can also approach tutors at other times if they need to do so. Arrangements for part-time students are less comprehensive but all have access to tutorial support from course tutors.

42 The tutor handbook defines responsibilities and provides useful information. However, the delivery of the tutorial programme across the college varies in effectiveness. The careers guidance element of the tutorial programme does not develop sufficiently students' skills in decision making and information handling to help them make best use of more specialist careers guidance. There are plans to revise the handbook and the tutorial programme and to provide training on its use.

43 Student services staff, who are qualified counsellors, provide effective guidance to tutors, and are able to draw on external support agencies as necessary. Their counselling role is valued by tutors and students and the service they provide is being fully used. Their expertise on money matters is increasingly in demand as the number of students experiencing financial difficulty rises.

44 Recruitment and enrolment procedures are well documented and efficient. The college contributes to careers meetings and school liaison events. It offers open days and information evenings to help students decide which course they should undertake. All student enquiries are logged and quickly referred to the appropriate department. Students who are unsure of the course they want are offered further assistance from the guidance officers. In the summer, prospective students are invited to the college to learn more about their intended course and college life.

45 An effective induction programme has been developed for all students. There is a useful handbook on induction for tutors which encourages them to adapt the common programme to meet the needs of the course and the requirements of part-time students. Procedures for course transfer are clear. Students who are uncertain about their course are given the opportunity to discuss it with their tutor and with guidance staff.

46 The college has a clear commitment to providing effective support for learning. In September 1994, all first-year full-time students and some part-time students on intermediate level courses were tested to assess their basic skills, using the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit diagnostic tests. The college meets the needs identified by offering timetabled support in communications and numeracy for small groups in open-access workshops. The testing is to be extended to all full-time students in September 1995.

47 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. There are effective links with local schools and with social services. Communication between staff at the college is good and lecturers are well informed about the needs of students.

48 Individual national records of achievement are reviewed as part of the tutorial programme. Action planning, which is an essential part of the recording process, is discussed by tutors and students at induction and throughout the year. Records are carefully completed but students' ability to analyse their progress and define targets is limited. There are

procedures for writing references and for regular reporting to parents or employers. Practice differs on contact with parents. Some departments hold parents' evenings to discuss students' progress whilst others contact individual parents as necessary. The college is developing a more uniform policy on this.

49 The information and guidance service is committed to the principle of impartiality and has a clear sense of purpose and direction. All three guidance staff, one of whom is part time, are well qualified and very experienced. Careers guidance is available to all students on an individual basis through the college guidance staff and the careers service. Workshops and drop-in sessions are provided on both sites. Guidance to adult students is a particular strength and resources for guidance are good. The county careers service has, however, considerably reduced the time it can allocate to the college. These cuts, and the college's commitment to enhancing the careers programme for students between the ages of 16 and 19, are stretching the capacity of the college service to its limit.

50 The collection, recording and analysis of students' destinations is not consistent or systematic. Information on students who leave during their courses is incomplete. This lack of reliable information on students' destinations hampers the ability of the guidance officers to offer the best possible advice. The college should address this.

51 The students union is well supported by the student services unit but lacks a clear role. Many college students are unaware of its activities. It gives financial support to sporting and other activities, such as visits abroad. The union is represented on the academic board but student officers have not found their representation on the board a satisfactory way of making their views known or of contributing to college developments.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

52 Of the 237 teaching sessions inspected, 63 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. In only 5 per cent of sessions were the strengths outweighed by the weaknesses. The following table summarises the assessment grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		2	11	5	1	0	19
GCSE		0	2	2	0	0	4
GNVQ		5	17	10	3	1	36
NVQ		3	18	16	0	0	37
Higher education		0	5	2	0	0	7
Access		5	5	4	0	0	14
Basic education		5	3	3	2	0	13
Other vocational		20	33	26	2	0	81
Other		2	14	6	4	0	26
Total		42	108	74	12	1	237

53 Programmes of study were effectively co-ordinated. In lessons where the strengths outweighed the weaknesses, schemes of work were sufficiently detailed to show a variety of teaching and learning approaches. The aims and objectives for courses and lessons were generally shared with students. Most teachers kept good records of their students' work. Students were kept informed about their progress. Lessons were well planned and managed. The best teaching was well paced, pitched at the right level and provided a variety of interesting and lively activities for students. In some areas teachers showed a high level of subject knowledge. Work experience placements and visiting speakers from the workplace enhanced students' knowledge and understanding on vocational courses.

54 In a minority of classes, teaching was poorly planned and managed and students experienced a limited range of learning activities. Poor lessons were often teacher-dominated with little student participation. In some classes little account was taken of the different needs of students. Students were not always given the opportunity or help to develop the skills required to become independent learners. Some teachers failed to keep a check on the progress of students' understanding.

55 Assignments were generally of an appropriate standard to test students' achievements. In most cases, students' work was marked conscientiously and teachers' comments were usually informative. However, spelling mistakes and grammatical errors were not corrected, for example, in the portfolios of students on beauty and hairdressing courses.

56 In science the teaching was good. Students' interest was maintained by frequent reference to the application and context of the subject. Practical work was carried out safely and carefully and reinforced learning. Many assignments were based on practical investigations. In a physics class, where students took part in a variety of activities, individual assistance

was given to students with special learning difficulties. In some classes, however, teachers provided too few opportunities for students' involvement.

57 Lessons in mathematics and computing were well managed. Students were given clear explanations of mathematical concepts and opportunities were provided for them to participate effectively in class. In some mathematics lessons, however, materials had not been developed to enable students to work on their own. Little use was made of information technology to support work in mathematics teaching. In computing, assignments and exercises were well presented and, where possible, real-life data were used. There was poor attendance on some specialist computing courses.

58 The teaching of practical work in engineering was generally good. Teachers had a sound knowledge and understanding of their subject. Good use was made of the relevant work experience of day-release students. However, students in some practical classes did not fully understand the context for their activities. There is a need to ensure that new students follow safety regulations. All staff did not keep to assessment schedules. There was no standard format for test papers or for the marking of students' project reports. The marking of project work was not sufficiently informative for students to understand what was needed to improve their work. Little use was made of visual aids. Students were not developing the skills required for independent learning.

59 Business studies teachers were skilled in classroom management. Most students were well motivated and positive about their college experience. Classes were well planned and had clear objectives. The content was closely related to assessment requirements. Assignments were clearly presented and in some cases supported by notes of guidance on preparation. Good contacts are maintained with industry through the work experience programme, industrial visits and visiting speakers. The introduction at NVQ level 4 of management training on employers premises is a positive development. In a minority of classes little learning took place and students' needs were not met.

60 In leisure and tourism staff had a high level of specialist subject knowledge. Part-time staff in leisure and tourism were able to give students valuable insights into workplace practice. Students benefited from residential visits. In catering, most classes were well planned and structured. GNVQ intermediate and advanced level students worked together and sampled a range of activities before making a final choice about the best programme for them. Realistic work environments enabled the assessment of vocational competencies. Feedback to students at the end of sessions was detailed, constructive and positive. Individual programmes were available, particularly for adult students and those with learning difficulties. However, in some classes the pace of work was too slow and students became bored. In others, students were not always

sure of the level of performance required. Development of core skills was not included in NVQ or GNVQ catering programmes.

61 Health and social care classes were well organised and managed. There were some carefully-devised group activities and effective evaluation arrangements which included student feedback and self-assessment. Intellectual rigour was introduced into lessons in relevant and challenging ways related to students' experience. Questioning techniques were skilfully used. In some lessons the pace of work was too fast; in others there was little participation by students. Written comment on some assignment work was insufficient and grammatical errors were not corrected. In beauty and hairdressing classes, teachers used a limited range of teaching methods although imaginative handouts were used in one session. There was no group work and students' previous knowledge was not used as a resource.

62 In art and design teachers used flexible and innovative teaching strategies to provide a lively learning atmosphere. Assessment schemes, assignment briefs and systems to record students' progress were clear and effective. Students understood clearly how their work would be assessed. There were examples of students and teachers working together to prepare coursework exhibitions for parents and employers.

63 Most humanities classes were well planned and teachers used a variety of teaching methods to sustain students' interest, including paired and small-group working. Students contributed actively in access to higher education classes. Questioning was used effectively by teachers to check students' understanding. Although comments on most students' work were encouraging and constructive, some students received insufficient feedback. In GCE A level classes there were some good examples of teachers using a variety of methods. In one geography class, for example, the teacher used a range of methods to stimulate students. She gave clear explanations, made good use of audio-visual aids and handouts and involved students in paired, individual and group tasks. By contrast, some lessons were led and dominated by teachers who did little to encourage debate and stimulate discussion and students were not motivated.

64 There was some teaching of particularly good quality in basic education classes and classes for those students with the most severe learning difficulties. Lessons were well prepared and course documentation was good. In one class, for example, students with severe learning difficulties worked on a television programme about themselves. Each gathered information about fellow students and presented it to the group. The presentations were recorded on video. In a small number of classes an insufficient variety of teaching methods was used and the content had little relevance. In a few cases teachers allowed their attention to be monopolised by the more demanding students.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

65 Students enjoy and are enthusiastic about their studies. They are generally successful on the vocational courses which form the bulk of the college's work. In the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education, 83 per cent of students in their final year of study on vocational courses achieved their qualification. This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. In 1993-94 on all courses, 859 students, whose destinations were known, gained awards. Of these, 22 per cent progressed to higher education, 26 per cent continued in further education, 35 per cent entered employment and the destinations of the remaining 17 per cent are unknown.

66 GCE AS/A level courses account for about 8 per cent of the college's course provision. In 1993-94 the overall pass rate in GCE A level examinations for students of all ages was 65 per cent. This was just below the provisional national average for general further education colleges of 68 per cent. Students aged 16-18 entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1993-94 scored on average 2.9 points per entry. This places the college among the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. Analysis suggests that some students do not perform as well at GCE A level as might be predicted by their achievement at GCSE.

67 GCE AS/A level examination results are uneven. In most cases students over 19 years of age are more successful in examinations than students aged 16-18. Results in science are better and closer to national norms than those in mathematics. Results in media studies and psychology are good. There were some poor results in humanities subjects.

68 On open-learning programmes drop-out rates are high at about 35 per cent, but the pass rate of students who complete the programmes is good. For example, in 1993-94 all students taking GCSE subjects by open learning achieved grades A-C.

69 In science, practical work was carried out safely and competently but information technology skills are underdeveloped. In engineering, examination results are satisfactory on most courses but there are some poor results. Only four out of 10 students successfully completed the higher national certificate in mechanical engineering. Practical work in engineering was carried out competently. Students on specialist information technology and computing courses were enthusiastic and produced work of good quality.

70 In business studies, rates for retention and successful completion of courses varied between programmes and between the two separate business studies departments. In 1993-94, over 75 per cent of full-time students on business and finance courses were successful in gaining a

qualification. There were low completion rates on the higher national certificate, supervisory management and the first diploma in business and finance courses. Students participated effectively in group work. Assignment work was of a high standard. Students were involved in successful action planning where they discussed their work with tutors and set appropriate targets.

71 In leisure and tourism students enjoyed their studies and were confident that they would achieve their qualification. In 1993-94 over 90 per cent of students on national diploma courses in leisure and tourism successfully completed their studies. Students used communication and information technology skills effectively in presenting their assignments. However, some core skills were underdeveloped on GNVQ and NVQ programmes in leisure and tourism and in catering. In 1993-94, 85 per cent of full-time students on hotel and catering courses gained employment. All GNVQ intermediate students progressed onto an advanced course. Students made good progress in developing competencies in vocational areas. However, insufficient emphasis was sometimes given to developing students' understanding of the principles underlying their practical work. Individual action planning was good on GNVQ programmes but limited on NVQ programmes. Core skills in numeracy were underdeveloped on GNVQ programmes in leisure and tourism.

72 There were some good results on health and social care courses in 1993-94. All students on the diploma in childcare and education course were successful in gaining the qualification. Ninety-six per cent of national diploma students in nursery nursing completed their course and 86 per cent were successful. Students' presentations of their work were of high quality and their contributions to group work activities effective. In beauty and hairdressing, students enjoyed their studies. Student action planning was well developed and portfolios of students' work were well maintained. However, there are no opportunities for students to gain accreditation for the core skills they acquire. In beauty therapy 92 per cent of the students entered relevant employment. In hairdressing only 30 per cent of the students went on to employment while 64 per cent continued in further education.

73 Students on some art and design courses were very successful. All students on the five national diplomas in art and design successfully completed their courses. Students' work was of good quality and based on a thorough grounding in theory. Work in three-dimensional design was of a high standard. Some students went on to secure places at highly-selective higher education institutions.

74 Students' work on access courses was of a good standard. Progression to higher education from the daytime access to higher education course was over 80 per cent. At the Broxbourne site over 60 per cent of the students who originally started the access course entered higher education. However, withdrawal rates from access courses are high, with students

leaving mainly for domestic and family reasons. The standard of most students' written work was satisfactory but some students lacked confidence and fluency in oral work.

75 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enjoyed their studies. There are opportunities for accreditation for students on some of these courses, for example, in basic skills and in English for speakers of other languages. Progression routes for English for speakers of other languages students are good. The level of progression to vocational provision for students on courses in the learning support section is less than satisfactory.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

76 The college mission statement affirms its commitment to improving quality and the strategic plan explains how this will be achieved. The college is building on its existing practice of monitoring students' perceptions of their experiences. Continuous improvement is established through the development of performance standards relating to all areas of the college's provision and through an internal auditing system.

77 Responsibility for implementing the quality initiative rests with a quality manager who reports to the director of curriculum. The quality manager operates through a quality committee which includes representatives from every department and cross-college section. Its brief is to oversee all the quality assurance systems and to recommend improvements. The quality committee receives reports from departmental and section quality committees, and reports to the academic board and the performance review panel of the corporation. Representatives from every department and cross-college area have been designated as quality auditors to form an internal audit team, although as yet they have not been trained in this role. They are responsible for explaining and implementing the quality control systems within their areas, for ensuring consistency of approach and for monitoring action plans produced by the programme teams. The object is to involve staff in issues of quality as widely as possible throughout the college.

78 A comprehensive quality framework was developed in consultation with all staff in the college and is being implemented in draft form from September 1994. Quality criteria and standards of service, which are designed to meet the demands of examining and validating bodies, are clearly stated for seven areas of the college, including physical resources and curriculum delivery. Standards are not included for the college's more general service to the community. The strategic and operational planning processes of the college are integrated with the quality initiatives. For example, there are quality criteria for producing and communicating the strategic plan, and standards have been set for the quality assurance system itself. However, decisions have not yet been reached on how the effectiveness of the framework will be monitored and evaluated.

79 Programmes are reviewed thoroughly. A strength of the quality system is that all programme areas are set common targets relating to departmental enrolment numbers, student retention rates and students' achievements in examinations and obtaining course awards. The achievement of students in relation to their expected performance on entry is analysed but the system is an internal college one that does not enable national comparisons to be made. Areas are also encouraged to establish their own specific targets, for example, for the proportion of adult students to be recruited to a programme. Teams also make use of comments from moderators' and verifiers' reports in reviewing their programmes.

80 An integral aspect of the framework is the use of information obtained from surveys of students' perceptions. These are gathered by questionnaires issued at three stages in the college year: when students enter college, during their programme of study and before they leave. All full-time and part-time vocational students receive these questionnaires. The quality manager collates and monitors the results of the surveys. Every programme manager is sent an analysis of their students' responses. Reports based on aggregated data are produced at department and college level. The standards of the student surveys and the expected levels of response to these are set centrally. Any programme which does not achieve the standards is required to complete an action plan which explains what the team will do to reach the standard in future. The quality auditors monitor the plans which are also discussed at the college quality committee. Discussion also takes place between the programme leader, their head of department, quality auditor and the director of curriculum. An attempt to survey employers' perceptions of the college using questionnaires was not successful.

81 Staff are able to give examples of improvements which have taken place as a result of the quality assurance systems. For example, the percentage of students who received a helpful induction into the college has risen steadily and now exceeds the college target of 95 per cent. The science department has amended and improved its tutorial programme and the department of art and design has established information technology workshops to support students. Some departments are currently, piloting outside the appraisal process, a voluntary programme of classroom observation which is improving classroom practice.

82 College staff feel positively committed to the new quality control systems. A key feature is that the programme reviews and action plans remain confidential to each department, so that staff do not feel threatened. Staff are encouraged to comment on and contribute freely to the development of quality procedures. Staff suggestions, for example, led to changes to the wording of the questionnaires. Special questionnaires have been produced for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Support staff, in particular, value their increasing involvement in all college quality assurance processes.

83 Staff-development records are well maintained and records of attendance are kept on a database. The allocation of 1 per cent of the total college budget to staff development reflects the commitment of the college to developing the skills of all its staff. Staff development activity increased significantly in the last year, when 95 per cent of full-time teaching staff and 70 per cent of support staff took part. An average of 10 days activity for each full-time member of staff was achieved. A particular priority has been given to ensure that staff gain assessor and verifier awards to support NVQ and GNVQ work. Over half the staff, including the principal, hold Training and Development Lead Body awards. Newly-recruited teaching staff are encouraged to gain the certificate in education.

84 There is a staff development co-ordinator who has half of his time allocated to this area of work. There is no forum for cross-college discussion of staff development and the quality assurance framework is not formally linked to the identification of staff-development needs. However, needs identified through section and programme team meetings are generally met. For example, staff in the learning support section received training on learning difficulties and in the teaching of information technology. Staff in some other areas, however, have received only a minimal amount of industrial and technical updating.

85 All staff have received training in appraisal, though the appraisal programme has not been implemented at head of department or below senior lecturer level. The focus of the appraisal policy and procedures on staff development is intended to enable individual needs to be systematically identified and the training to be evaluated. Appraisal offers the opportunity for the observation of teaching. A development review procedure for support staff is nearing agreement. Staff new to the college are invited to attend induction events held at both sites. The process is not fully developed and only 54 per cent of those staff attending the September 1994 induction found it helpful. The college has made a firm commitment to securing Investors in People status by September 1995.

86 A clearly-written internal quality assessment report was prepared for the inspection. This report provided a useful summary of the college's perceptions of its strengths and weaknesses under the headings contained in the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Some references were made in the report to evidence which supported the college's judgements. The judgements of the college coincided with those of the inspectorate in most areas.

87 The college has made a positive response to the requirements of the Charter for Further Education although the college's own charter is limited to its relationship with students and does not specifically address the needs of employers and the local community. The charter commitments, which have been endorsed by the corporation and the academic board, are embodied in a series of charter leaflets and the students' handbook. A summary of the results of the termly survey of students' perceptions is

published on college noticeboards for the benefit of students. Little awareness is shown by students of the details and implications of the charter.

RESOURCES

Staffing

88 Procedures are in place to ensure the efficient use of resources. Full-time teaching staff hours and revenue funds are allocated to departments by the use of a formula based on full-time equivalent student numbers. The student to staff ratio has risen steadily over the past three years, indicating greater efficiency in the use of staff time.

89 Most teachers are appropriately qualified and suitably experienced for the subjects they teach. Seventy-one per cent have higher education qualifications and 87 per cent have a teaching qualification. All full-time teaching staff are expected to have a teaching qualification or to be working towards one. The experience and qualifications of a small number of staff are not fully matched to the needs of the curriculum. Departments are responsible for the recruitment of part-time staff. In a few cases the part-time teachers appointed have lacked appropriate experience and/or qualifications. The high number of part-time staff involved in basic education and the teaching of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has hampered curriculum development in these areas.

90 The work of departments is generally well supported by technical and administrative staff. There are 106 full-time support staff and about the same number of part-time staff. Staff are well qualified and have access to the college's staff-development programme. About 40 per cent of the support staff work in direct contact with students. Support staff attached to departments are managed by the head of department. There is not always sufficient co-operation between departments to make the best use of technician time, although the level of support staff is good in most areas. There are insufficient staff to support the use of information technology equipment.

Equipment/learning resources

91 The work of students and staff is well supported by a good range of up-to-date equipment and materials in most areas. Business studies has well-equipped training offices with adequate computer facilities. Engineering has some good up-to-date equipment, particularly in electronics, but there is also some outdated equipment in some areas. The hairdressing salons are well equipped but there are some limitations in the facilities for beauty therapy. In some areas of the catering provision there is a shortage of small equipment and a lack of other equipment to reflect the needs of the industry. On courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities some of the equipment used is in poor repair and unsuitable.

92 The library provision is good. The libraries on both sites have well-stocked collections of books, periodicals, video tapes and a growing number of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases. There are 45,000 books which are distributed to support the subjects taught on each site, with some unavoidable duplication. The ratio of books to students is 15:1, which is above the median of 10:1 for college libraries and approaching the Library Association's standard of 17 books per student. The library is well staffed, with a ratio of library staff to full-time equivalent students of 1:300, better than the Library Association's standard ratio of 1:311. College librarians work closely with staff to ensure that resources are appropriate to the needs of departments. The college is a party to the Hertfordshire College Libraries Agreement which facilitates access to any college library in Hertfordshire. All book resources are catalogued on computer. There is a separate video catalogue. There are 170 study spaces in the libraries and the learning workshops for communications and mathematics.

93 The department of learning resources provides services in design and desktop publishing, information technology, library, media and reprographics. There is a well-equipped video studio and facilities for outside recording. The reprographic section has good-quality photocopying and offset-litho printing facilities. All the sections of the department work closely together. Teachers and students are provided with a comprehensive service which produces audio-visual and paper-based learning materials, course literature and booklets of high quality.

94 The college has about 560 computers ranging from a number of first generation machines to modern personal computers equipped to run multi-media CD-ROMs. In some rooms computers are networked. Overall there is one computer to every seven students. This is a higher proportion than is found in many colleges of further education. However, many of the machines are within departments and are heavily timetabled. Students find it difficult to obtain access to an appropriate computer for private study. Only 33 machines are listed as being available for students to use in private study time and, at times, some of these computers are used for class teaching. There is no detailed strategy for information technology across the whole college or a costed programme for the replacement of computing equipment. An outside consultant is helping the college to develop an information technology policy. The computing provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is poor. Many of the computers which these students use are unreliable first generation machines.

Accommodation

95 The college occupies two main sites at Broxbourne and Ware, seven miles apart, both close to the A10 trunk road. The Ware centre is close to the railway station and the town centre. There is little room for expansion

on this small and hilly site where there are 11 separate blocks. One of these is Amwell House, a Grade II listed building of which only part is fit for educational use. In contrast, the Broxbourne centre is on a level site with extensive playing fields. There are seven separate blocks and, in addition, eight huts provide a small part of the teaching accommodation. On both sites there is limited access to rooms above the ground floor for wheelchair users.

96 Most rooms are suitable for their purpose and well decorated and maintained. Science laboratories have recently been upgraded with assistance from industry. Hairdressing classrooms are spacious and provide a realistic environment for teaching. Rooms for health and social care have been extensively refurbished and provide accommodation of a good standard. Some temporary accommodation is drab, poorly decorated and uninspiring. In catering, the kitchen is not large enough and some student groups have to work in crowded conditions. Amwell House, which is used by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is not up to the standard of other accommodation on the Ware site. It has small rooms and access is difficult.

97 The accommodation occupied by the two student services units on the Ware site is well located and attractive, though small. Accommodation for these services at Broxbourne is unsatisfactory. The information and guidance service is located in a hut which is too small for its needs some distance away from reception and difficult to find. It is particularly unsuitable for counselling as it lacks privacy. The student services organisation has a small office between two noisy student common rooms. Since the two services are situated at opposite corners of the site communications between them are difficult.

98 The college's strategic plan includes a strategy for accommodation. The premises manager is a qualified surveyor. Funds are set aside to meet likely maintenance needs, particularly of the flat roofs. Maintenance is carried out effectively by college staff who have also undertaken many adaptations, including for example, the suite of computer rooms at Ware and the multi-media suite in engineering at Broxbourne. There are plans to replace the huts at Broxbourne with a new building. Newly-furnished reception areas give a good impression and the use of corporate colours in decorations is bringing a sense of unity to the two college centres. The cafeteria at Broxbourne has been refurbished to provide a pleasant environment but at Ware the cafeteria has yet to be developed. At both centres there is a lack of social spaces for students. Guidance and student services are not appropriately housed at Broxbourne. The use of rooms is carefully monitored. Many have a high usage rate, particularly some computer rooms.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

99 The college is making good progress towards its mission. Its strengths are:

- a broad range of courses including extensive provision in many vocational areas, courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and recreational courses for adults
- its success in meeting the growth target of 8 per cent
- the links with the TEC, resulting in substantial contracts for training and good liaison with industry
- committed corporation members providing strategic direction and monitoring of performance
- effective senior management and sound management structures enabling participation by all staff
- the effective management of departments and courses including the efficient deployment of resources
- a comprehensive and well-documented framework for student recruitment, guidance, and induction
- a comprehensive quality assurance framework identifying performance standards for all aspects of the college
- a well-established system of monitoring and evaluating courses
- appropriately-qualified and committed staff
- the high levels of staff development and comprehensive support for the professional development of all staff
- the high ratio of computers to students
- well-organised, resourced and good-quality library services
- well-organised teaching and effective support by all staff for the curriculum and its delivery
- well-maintained accommodation.

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

- increase the range of foundation level courses and the provision for adults
- develop its marketing strategies
- improve the co-ordination and management of some aspects of cross-college provision
- establish an information strategy to develop further its management information systems
- further develop the effectiveness of the tutorial programme
- implement an appraisal system for all staff

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- further develop the procedures for recruitment and support of part-time staff
 - improve students' access to information technology resources
 - establish effective procedures to record and monitor the destinations of students.

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)

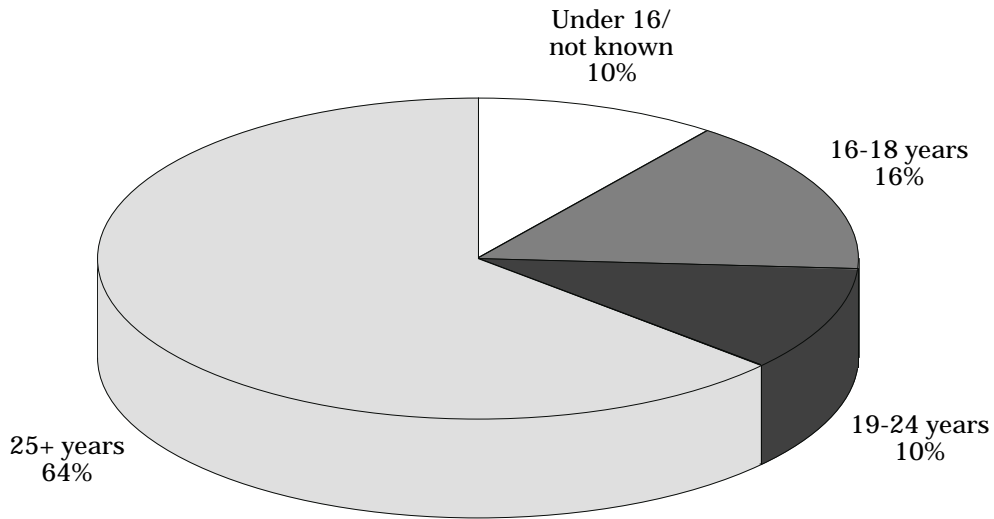
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

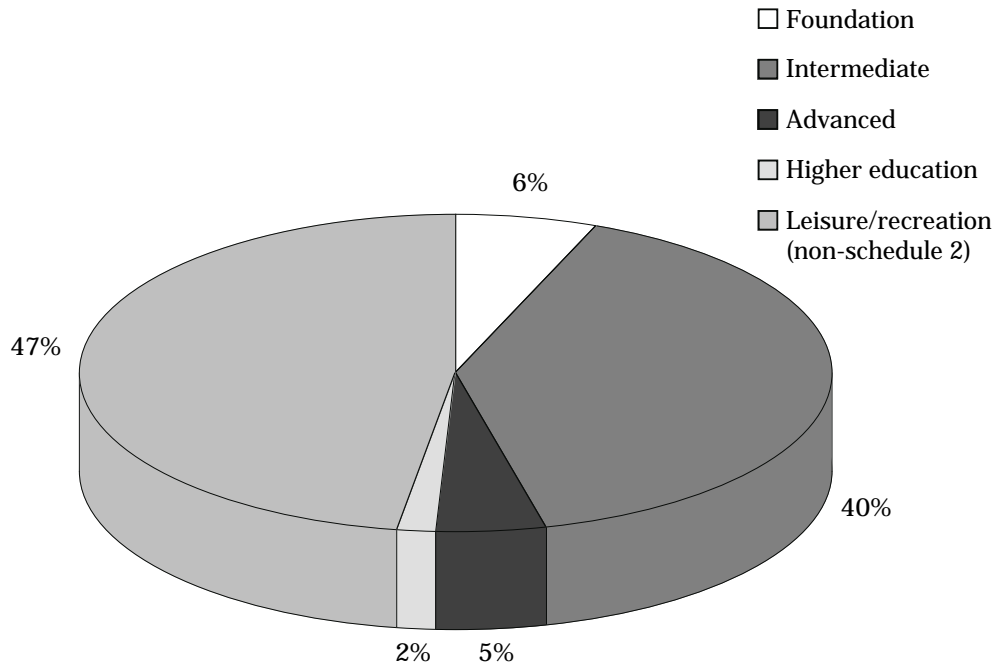
Hertford Regional College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 21,518

Figure 2

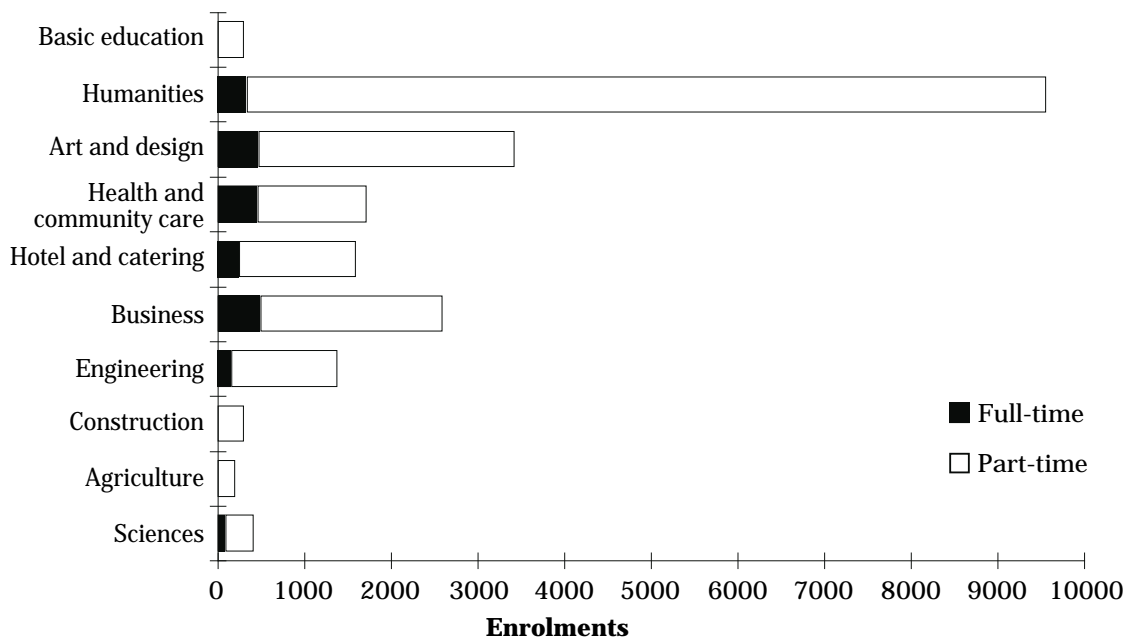
Hertford Regional College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 21,518

Figure 3

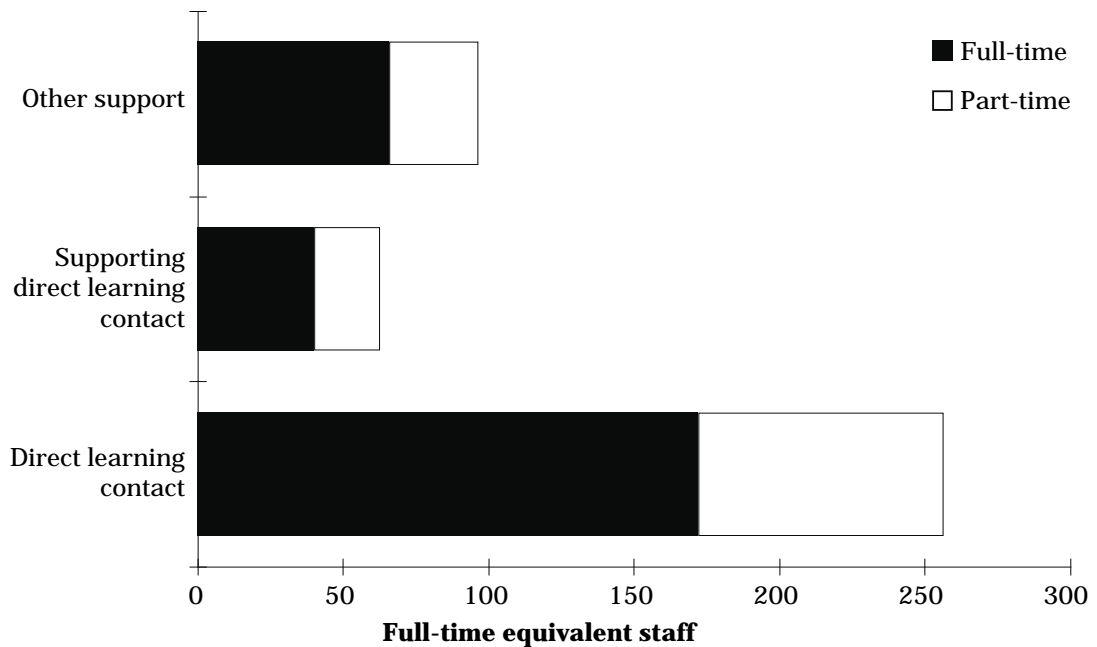
Hertford Regional College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 21,518

Figure 4

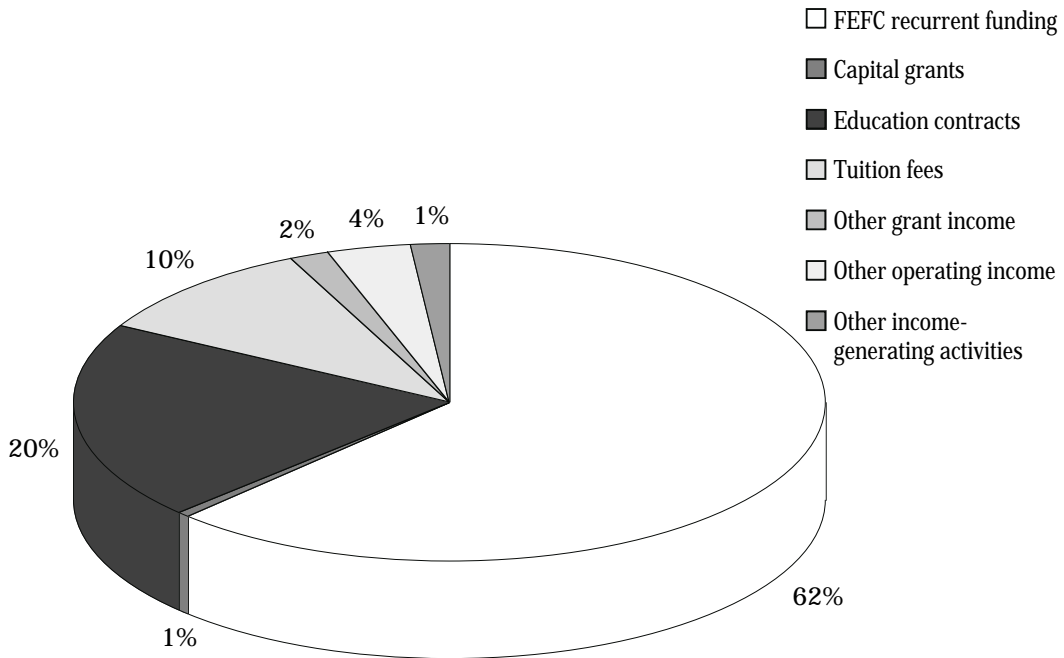
Hertford Regional College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 416

Figure 5

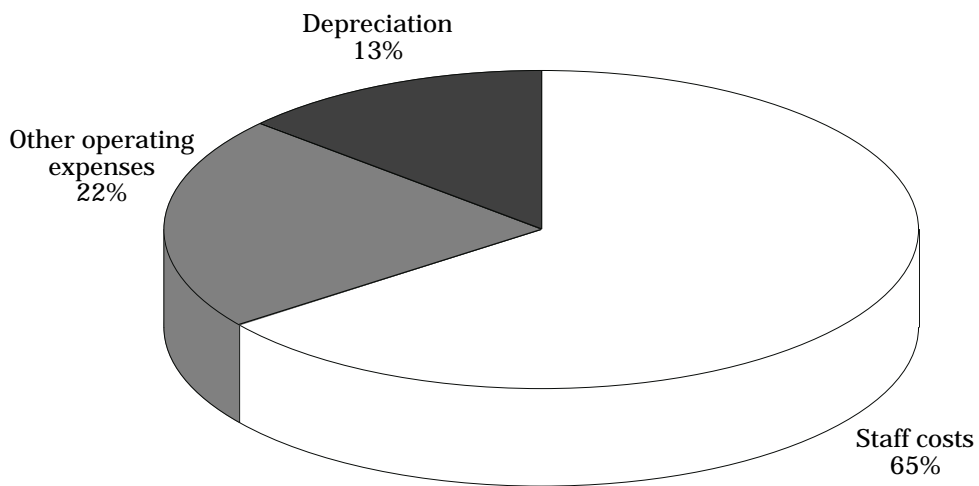
Hertford Regional College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £15,415,000

Figure 6

Hertford Regional College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £16,949,000

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