

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Hillcroft College

March 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	2
Responsiveness and range of provision	11
Governance and management	20
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	32
Teaching and the promotion of learning	44
Students' achievements	51
Quality assurance	58
Resources	68
Conclusions and issues	80
Figures	

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-95

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 34/96

HILLCROFT COLLEGE
GREATER LONDON REGION
Inspected May-December 1995

Summary

Hillcroft College is the only long-term residential college in Britain solely for women. It provides a purposeful and supportive residential learning environment for women to prepare for entry into higher education. The college is successful in achieving its mission to recruit disadvantaged women and prepare them for higher education. The college's governing council supports the college's mission and ethos. Curriculum delivery is effectively managed in most areas. Courses are well organised and most teaching and learning is highly effective. Students make significant progress and achieve well. Most students go on to study at institutions of higher education. Course reviews are thorough. Staff are suitably qualified or experienced. Learning is supported by a well-stocked library and the accommodation is suitable for the teaching activities and for residence. The college should: extend the range of study opportunities; improve the clarity of management decision-making processes; improve students' achievements in core skills; improve strategies for quality assurance and staff development; review staff responsibilities and personnel arrangements; and improve the inadequate computing equipment.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Computing, mathematics and core studies	4	Social studies and social work	1
Humanities	1	Psychology and counselling	2

INTRODUCTION

1 Hillcroft College was inspected during the period May to December 1995. Eight inspectors spent a total of 38 inspector days at the college. They visited 51 classes and examined students' work and a wide range of documentation. Meetings were held with governors, managers, tutors, support staff and students. In addition, there were meetings with representatives of Kingston Local Education Authority (LEA), local community and voluntary organisations, employers, the local training and enterprise council (TEC), the Open University, Kingston University and the Workers' Educational Association.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Hillcroft College is one of six residential colleges in England designated, under section 28 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*, as eligible to receive financial support from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Hillcroft College is the only women's residential college in Britain. It has exemption under the *Sex Discrimination Act* to recruit women only. The college's main building is a Victorian mansion in 1.4 hectares of grounds. The college is situated in Surbiton, Surrey and is a 20-minute train journey from London.

3 The college was founded in 1920 as a college for working class women. It aimed to 'enlarge the vision of the student, to develop their latent capacities for leadership and service and to stimulate their mental and spiritual growth'. The college's memorandum of association precludes the provision of vocational training. At the time this was to ensure the college focused on academic study rather than training women for domestic or factory work. Hillcroft College's mission now is 'to enable adult women disadvantaged by educational or social factors to progress into higher education, vocational training or employment' and to 'contribute to the national development of women's education'.

4 The college's main educational programme is the certificate of higher education which is a one-year course validated by the Open University. The programme is equivalent to study at first-year degree level or National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 4. Students take eight modules to achieve a total of 120 credits. The modules are organised under 10 academic disciplines, mainly in the FEFC humanities programme area. For the purposes of inspection, four areas were identified: social studies and social work; psychology and counselling; humanities; computing, mathematics and core studies.

5 Students follow the certificate programme through full-time residential study or full-time and part-time day study. The college also runs a range of day and short residential courses for women. Short courses are designed, in part, to help women prepare for entry onto the certificate programme. They include: fresh start, moving on, linked learning, language and learning, wider opportunities for women and planning your learning.

6 In 1994-95 there were 276 enrolments at the college. One hundred and twenty-four students enrolled on the certificate programme of whom 42 were residential students, 43 were full-time day students, nine were full-time students who were taking the certificate through having their prior learning assessed and 30 were part-time students. The remaining 152 enrolments were women on short courses. Ninety-two per cent of students were aged 25 or over. Student numbers by age, by level of study and humanities student numbers by mode of attendance are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

7 The college recruits on a national basis for residential courses and from the region for daytime students. The college recruits women who are disadvantaged and would benefit from the opportunity to study in a residential environment.

8 The college had 25 full-time equivalent staff in 1994-95. Some 13 full-time equivalent staff were part time and 8.5 full-time equivalent staff were tutors. Teaching and learning is managed by tutors in their own subject areas. They report to the vice-principal and subsequently to the principal. At the time of inspection new contracts had been negotiated and agreed for all tutors but tutors had not yet signed the contracts. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

9 In common with other long-term residential colleges, Hillcroft College is not included in the FEFC funding methodology. Funding allocations to date have been based on 'roll forward' formula, adjusted for growth, efficiency and inflation. In 1994-95 the college received an allocation of £489,775 in exchange for 174 residential full-time equivalent students. Although the college increased the number of students enrolled on courses it did not meet its targets for 1994-95. In 1995-96 the FEFC allocation is £499,571 in exchange for 182 residential full-time equivalent students.

10 FEFC recurrent funding accounts for 61 per cent of the college's income. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college generates some income from trading activities, for example, lettings and educational contracts.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

11 The certificate programme offers a good range of humanities subjects. Women's perspectives and experiences are positively valued in courses. There are limited opportunities for students to extend their studies, for example by studying physical sciences or a foreign language. Within the current programme students cannot study mathematics at levels higher than the equivalent of NVQ intermediate level. The college's short courses are mostly in humanities areas and offer open college network accreditation. They focus in part on confidence building and study skills and they prepare students well for studying on the college's certificate programme.

12 The college's provision is reviewed on a regular basis. Some course developments have been introduced to meet students' interests and changing higher education and labour market requirements and to provide a more comprehensive offer. For example, the college has recently introduced a human biology module on the certificate programme and is planning to offer courses in information systems. Staff recognise the need for further curriculum developments, including widening the cultural and international dimensions of courses. There is scope for developing open and distance learning to extend ways of studying and to help increase the range of subjects offered. Valuable opportunities for social activities are provided by the students' union. The college offers few sporting, recreational and cultural activities.

13 Staff are aware of the government's policies for further education and the national targets for education and training. The college contributes to the targets' aims and the lifetime learning targets by enabling women to develop a range of core personal and social skills and to achieve qualifications at NVQ level 4.

14 The college is successful in achieving its mission to recruit women who have been disadvantaged by educational or social factors. In 1994-95 some 15 per cent of women enrolled on the certificate programme had no previous qualifications, 9 per cent had qualifications at NVQ level 1 and 71 per cent had qualifications at NVQ level 2. Strategies developed by the college to recruit more students from minority ethnic backgrounds have been successful. The number of Black African and Caribbean and Asian students recruited has increased significantly in the last few years. In 1994-95 some 25 per cent of students on the certificate programme were from minority ethnic backgrounds compared with 16 per cent in 1993-94. In 1994-95, 10 per cent of students had disabilities; 5 per cent were registered disabled. Many students are recovering from major personal difficulties, for example, domestic violence or imprisonment.

15 The college has beneficial links with a range of local, national and international women's organisations, for example, Women in Prison and local women's projects. A number of effective collaborative educational initiatives have been set up. Collaborative work with Kingston LEA's community education service has led to some evening short courses for women being run at the college.

16 Good relations have been established with the local TEC, AZTEC, although funding to support women returning to study has not been a TEC priority in recent years. Links with employers are limited; the 15 work placements arranged for students on the social work course are with voluntary organisations and public sector services.

17 There are well-established links with colleges of further education and institutions of higher education both locally and nationally. Admissions tutors in higher education hold the work of the college in high

esteem. They have confidence in the ability of students from Hillcroft College to cope with the demands of study in higher education. In particular, there are strong links with the Open University, Kingston University and Roehampton Institute. The college is actively involved with a number of national adult learning organisations and with other adult residential colleges.

18 Until recently the college's marketing has not been systematic. A thorough review of marketing activities has been carried out over the last two years leading to the formulation of a college marketing plan and a significant increase in the marketing budget. Positive steps are being taken to implement the plan. Publicity and promotional literature are sent to over 1,200 outlets, including community organisations and a wide range of women's organisations. The college recognises it needs to explore further both national and local market opportunities.

19 The college has a strong commitment to promote students' equal opportunities. The equal opportunities policy and the policy for students with disabilities are not comprehensive; they do not cover the college as an employer or business partner. Practice relating to recruitment and selection, staff and student relationships and the treatment of students is not monitored. Recruitment data are systematically analysed to assess how successful the college is in recruiting disadvantaged women. Steps are taken to make improvements. The college has been accepted by the European Union Iris network as a recognised training centre for equality training in Europe.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 Hillcroft College has been self-governing since 1924. The current memorandum of association was adopted in 1985. Hillcroft College was originally registered as 'a college' of 100 members who were subscribing members, nominated members and ex-officio members. Currently most members of 'college' are women; the majority have been members for many years. Members are drawn from a wide range of backgrounds. The business of Hillcroft College is managed by the 'council' which is the college's governing body. Council members, the governors, are formally elected by 'the college' at an annual general meeting chaired by the president. New council members are nominated by existing council members or by any three members of 'the college'.

21 The council includes staff, students, ex-students and others committed to women's education. The council currently has 16 members, 15 of whom are women. There is one vacancy at present which is for a member of staff. Council members are strongly committed to the mission and distinctive ethos of Hillcroft College and to the maintenance of its traditions. Council members have a range of relevant expertise. The council seeks to extend this range when vacancies occur. At present the council does not have a search committee. New members are provided with a comprehensive induction pack.

22 The council has three subcommittees: finance and general purposes, personnel and audit. All members of the council are members of at least one subcommittee. The chair is an ex-officio member of all subcommittees except audit. Subcommittees have clear terms of reference and report regularly to the council. There is no formal remuneration subcommittee. The audit committee recently started to meet on a regular basis. The council has acted promptly to address perceived failures in the college's audit arrangements. This is now chaired by an experienced and qualified accountant. The council has recently discussed the need for a written code of conduct and register of members' interests. It has asked the principal to prepare a draft for members' consideration. A training programme for members is in place. Training, to date, has been limited.

23 A range of policies has been adopted by the council but these are not systematically implemented and monitored. Responsibility for some aspects of the health and safety policy and for environmental matters has not been clearly allocated. The council has not yet fulfilled its obligations under the *Student Union Reform Act, 1994*. The college is not sufficiently informed of legal requirements relating to employment contracts. Professional advice, for example on legal and personnel matters, is sought when the council or senior management consider this is appropriate.

24 A regular and effective reporting system is in place for governors to receive financial information. The council receives regular summary reports covering a range of matters. Some reports are limited in scope. The principal prepares these reports and other staff do not usually contribute to them. The principal is the chairman's main adviser and source of information. The council has chosen not to receive minutes of key staff committees and meetings. It regards all operational and day-to-day management matters as strictly the domain of the principal and senior management team. Members of council are involved in the appointment of all permanent academic and senior administrative staff. There is no formal appraisal of the principal or other senior post holders.

25 The college's strategic planning processes are not yet well developed. There are few links between strategic planning, available resources and budget preparation. There is no business plan or detailed operational plans. There is a lack of agreement between the college's current aims and practice and the college's mission as stated in the memorandum of association, which excludes the provision of vocational education. The need to review the memorandum of association is recognised, but has not been seen as a priority.

26 The college is small and prides itself on operating informally rather than relying on systems and procedures. The management style combines informal approaches with more formal mechanisms. The combination of formal and informal approaches is not effective. All college staff and student committees have terms of reference and reporting lines. In some cases these are not adhered to; for example, neither the joint staff

committee nor the academic committee reports systematically to council. Working groups give staff the opportunity to be involved in development work on policy and procedures. It is not clear to staff how development work is taken forward within the college.

27 Management decision-making processes are not clear to staff. Communication of management decisions is not systematic. The frequent use of informal processes to convey information contributes to this lack of clarity.

28 The senior management team, which comprises the principal, vice-principal and the registrar, undertake the entire range of college management functions. The senior management team meets regularly and meetings are now minuted. Two of the three senior postholders also teach and provide personal or counselling support for students. The senior management team has not considered possible conflicts of interest that could arise from managers providing both personal support and formal counselling and also acting as the arbiters for student disciplinary or grievance procedures. The college management group, which also meets regularly, includes most operational managers. One of a small number of budget holders is not a member of the formal management group.

29 There is effective management of curriculum delivery in most subject areas. The co-ordination of some cross-college aspects of the programme, for example, the core skills programme, is still being developed. All tutors contributed to a useful curriculum development plan. However, it does not include details of the resource implications for planned course developments.

30 There is close monitoring of financial matters by the council's finance and general purposes committee and by the senior management team. Budget allocations are made largely on a historic basis. Little systematic analysis is carried out of costs and unit costs are not available. Tutors have little awareness of financial management. Hillcroft College has had very limited access to funding for growth from the FEFC. All staff are aware of the need for financial constraints. Through efficiency savings, the college achieved a small operating surplus in 1994-95.

31 There is limited management information available for decision-making and planning purposes. The college recognises the need to generate and use a wider range of management information for strategic planning and other aspects of management. A recent detailed analysis of student cohort data is being used to inform the marketing strategy. Retention rates and student destinations are closely monitored and analysed. Where there are areas with lower retention or achievement action is taken.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

32 Women are given the necessary encouragement and support by staff to enable them to feel confident enough to apply to study at the college.

Most students have experienced failure in their earlier education and lack confidence in themselves as learners. The college provides a purposeful, supportive and friendly learning environment.

33 Students make informed choices about their studies. On initial enquiry, they are sent comprehensive information about college courses and the college aims and ethos. The pre-course information and guidelines about application procedures are well presented and easy to understand. Student enquiry sessions, and attendance at short courses such as linked learning, help women to decide if they want to study at the college and to choose their course. Recruitment and selection policies and procedures are clearly set out and are effective. Admissions interviews are sensitive and thorough. Application forms and interview procedures and criteria are regularly reviewed and improvements made as needed.

34 Prior to induction, students are sent further useful information including the student handbook and information about grants and more course details. They receive insufficient information at this stage about the different modules on the certificate programme.

35 The college provides applicants and students with high levels of support to try to minimise the level of withdrawals. The number of students withdrawing before the course started or during the course increased last year. Through careful monitoring, the college identified the main reasons for withdrawals as financial difficulties and serious medical and personal problems.

36 The induction week was effective and met the objectives set by the college. Students benefited from the opportunity to sample modules through taster sessions before choosing which modules to study. However, students needed more time to consider which module taster sessions they would like to attend. Induction sessions which were particularly appreciated by students included the informative library induction, the introduction to critical thinking and an up-to-date and accurate presentation about possible career progression in social work related areas. New students gained in confidence as they heard from former students now studying in higher education. Students choose which modules to study on the certificate programme in consultation with their personal tutors. Generally students were able to make an informed choice about their programme of study. They would have benefited from access to a qualified careers adviser during induction. Suitable arrangements for students to transfer to other modules are in place. Students are well informed of their rights and responsibilities through the student handbook, the charter and the learning agreement.

37 The residential environment provides the opportunity for both residential and day students to receive high levels of learning support. Students, many of whom have previously not been successful in their attempts to return to study as an adult, succeed at Hillcroft College because of the high levels of support and encouragement given by staff and other

students. Students' confidence and motivation increases as a result of the support they receive. They appreciate being part of a 'learning community'. Students also find the flexible day and night access to the library and computing facilities an important supportive feature of learning in a residential college.

38 Good individual and small group tutorial support, including telephone tutorials for part-time students, is provided for all students. Students spoke positively about the value of the tutorial support given. There is scope for developing the use of tutorials to monitor systematically students' academic progress. Opportunities are provided for students to build up an appropriate record of their achievements. In some cases, records of achievement are marred by poor-quality presentation. There are no facilities at present for students to develop records of achievement using a computerised system and no records of achievement are wordprocessed.

39 Of particular value for some women is the opportunity to have their prior learning assessed and accredited as an accelerated route to gaining part of the certificate. Good support is given to students to compile evidence for assessment through workshops during the week and at weekends and through individual tutorial sessions. This scheme started in 1993; 12 students enrolled in the first year, nine in 1994-95 and 12 in 1995-96.

40 Students benefit from the professional counselling service. The level of this service is appropriate for the number and the nature of the college student group. The college does not provide childcare support during term times and the lack of childcare deters some women from enrolling at Hillcroft College. The childcare facilities provided during school half-terms are valued by students, particularly the day students.

41 Students develop core skills through specifically-designed modules of study, through individual tutorials and through subject modules. The individual help given by personal tutors to help students develop core skills is particularly effective. There is a limited range of learning materials to help students develop their core skills through independent study. There are few up-to-date and flexible learning materials. Students are offered assessments for identifying dyslexia and specialist support is given. English language support is also available for students who are speakers of other languages. There are suitable arrangements to support students with disabilities, for example, the assistance provided for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

42 The college librarian gives valuable learning support to students and assistance in the use of the computerised careers information and guidance. Criticisms about the lack of adequate careers education were made by some students last year. The college has responded by increasing the amount of careers help offered, including specific careers education sessions for preparing applications for university. Students make appointments with a qualified careers adviser employed by the college. Careers advice is not available at some times in the year. Former Hillcroft

College students give useful presentations at recruitment and induction events to encourage women to consider a range of higher education and career options.

43 Guidelines for monitoring student attendance have been developed recently. Absences are recorded and followed up appropriately.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

44 Of the sessions inspected 69 per cent had strengths which outweighed the weaknesses. Fourteen per cent of sessions were judged to have more weaknesses than strengths. In the sessions inspected the average attendance level was 81 per cent. The distribution of inspection grades is shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Higher education and access to higher education		19	16	9	7	0	51

45 The effectiveness of teaching and learning varied widely across subjects. There were examples of good teaching in most subject areas. In these sessions, lessons were carefully prepared with clear aims and learning objectives and students received appropriate individual attention and support. Tutors had a thorough understanding of their subject area and they were particularly sensitive to the needs of women who previously had not achieved well in education. Tutors took account of the diversity of students' experience and learning needs and regular checks were made on students' progress. Appropriate assignments were set on a regular basis. They were carefully marked and teachers gave clear and constructive feedback to students.

46 In the weaker teaching sessions, the teaching methods used did not enhance students' learning. Course plans and materials were not up to date and schemes of work and lesson planning lacked rigour. Evidence gained through initial assessment of students' learning support needs was not used in a systematic manner to inform the teaching. Students' progress was not regularly monitored.

47 In social care, social studies and social work teaching was of a high standard. Teaching was well planned, well organised and supported by good documentation. Tutors used a variety of teaching methods and were confident in using appropriate teaching aids. Tasks were clearly set and explained and key concepts were introduced at appropriate times and fully explained and discussed. The content of sessions was appropriately challenging for students preparing to study at higher education level. Tutors encouraged students to consider a number of views, perspectives and ideas. Beneficial work placements are an integral part of the programmes. The level and range of study support given to students was

impressive. In a few sessions, teachers' expositions were too long and slow paced and students' understanding was not checked.

48 In humanities, which included sociology of education, history, visual arts, literature and development issues, tutors were highly skilled in managing the learning process. Tutors are expert in their subject areas. Teaching was effective and of high quality and there was a clear emphasis on the promotion of learning. Students' development of study skills was carefully reinforced in sessions. Learning programmes were well planned and a good range of teaching and learning approaches and assessment techniques was used. Programmes provided intellectual challenge and stimulus.

49 In psychology and counselling, courses were appropriately designed for study at higher education level. Lessons were well structured and organised. A variety of teaching methods which engaged students' interest was used. Teaching encouraged students to develop skills of critical analysis in the subject discipline, although there was too little emphasis placed on students critically reflecting on their experience of learning. Students' contributions were valued and students were encouraged to overcome their own fears of inability and incompetence. Tutors sometimes were not sufficiently aware of the difficulty students had in coping with the written materials used and more focus on assisting students to develop their study skills was needed.

50 In many computing, mathematics and core studies sessions the teaching was not effective. Some sessions were poorly planned and students' progress was not monitored. Too little account was taken of students' different abilities and a narrow range of teaching approaches was used. Most teaching sessions gave little opportunity for students to participate in discussion, undertake learning activities or practise appropriate skills. With a few exceptions, there was too much emphasis on theory and too little focus on skills development.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

51 Students make significant progress during their studies and achieve well. In 1994-95 some 99 per cent of the full-time students completing the certificate in higher education passed, 77 per cent progressed to higher education and a further 16 per cent to employment. Ninety-five per cent of these students had few or no qualifications when they enrolled on the course. The pass rate for the full-time students completing the certificate of higher education is consistently high. In 1993-94, 86 per cent of students who completed the course passed and in 1992-93, 97 per cent passed. In 1993-94 and in 1994-95 all students taking the accreditation of prior learning route for half of the credits towards the certificate in higher education passed the full certificate. A good, but variable, proportion of students progress into higher education; 69 per cent of students gaining the certificate went on to study in higher education in 1993-94 and 83 per cent in 1992-93. Although the certificate is equivalent to the first year of

degree level study most students enter the first year, rather than the second year, of a degree course.

52 The college has recently identified that the levels of achievement of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is slightly lower than that for other students. Currently staff are considering ways of improving the examination results for students from minority ethnic groups.

53 Studying in a residential college which is specifically for women contributes positively to the students' achievements. Students value the opportunity residential education gives them to identify and pursue scholarly interests and immerse themselves in study.

54 Students enjoy their studies and speak enthusiastically about the confidence, skills and knowledge they gain. Students' written work shows evidence of independent study and research appropriate for the level of study. Some students' written work is of a particularly high standard; it is well structured, analytical and carefully referenced. Students are well motivated and most actively contribute to teaching sessions. Students work effectively in groups. For example, in many teaching sessions students had lively and focused discussions in pairs and small groups. The standard of students' oral contributions in a few cases is outstanding. Students develop a good range of study skills. They speak positively about the significant personal development they achieve as a result of studying at the college.

55 Students' achievements in a few curriculum areas are limited. Some students develop poor levels of mathematics, computing and other core skills. In some taught sessions devoted to core skills development, students learned very little. Several students do not develop the skills to participate in discussions in larger groups and a few students are not able to make effective presentations or to engage in academic debate at the levels required for the course. Students' development of skills in information technology is mostly limited to basic wordprocessing. The college is planning to extend the opportunities for students to develop a broader range of information technology skills.

56 Students taking short courses do not gain formal recognition for their achievements. Although students can gain open college network accreditation no students take this up, mainly because they cannot afford the level of fees charged. Currently core skills are not separately accredited on the certificate programme. Some students would like to gain formal accreditation in information technology. The college is planning to revalidate the certificate in higher education programme so that students can gain credits for core skills modules, including information technology. A few students pass the Associated Examination Board proficiency examination in arithmetic each year.

57 In 1994-95 the retention rate on the certificate programme for full-time students was 84 per cent and on short courses the retention rate was 86 per cent. The college is concerned that the retention rates for the

full-time certificate course and short courses have fallen from 97 per cent in 1992-93. Conversely the retention rates for part-time students on the certificate programme have increased from 80 per cent in 1992-93 to 93 per cent in 1994-95. There has been almost 100 per cent retention for the accreditation of prior learning programme over the last two years.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

58 The college carries out thorough reviews of courses. Tutor and student reviews of modules in the certificate programme are carried out four times a year. The findings are used effectively to identify improvements needed. Appropriate action points are recorded in course review documentation and improvements are made to provision. The quality of reviews varies slightly. In some modules, reviews are insufficiently rigorous and critical. Reviews would benefit from a clearer definition of targets for improvements. Course review procedures have been improved through the development of more formal and systematic approaches. A review report for the certificate programme is submitted to governors on an annual basis. The social work course achieved the quality standard from the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work as a recognised centre for good practice in social work placements and has used this as an additional way of assuring the quality of its provision.

59 Course review procedures are adequate but less comprehensive for short courses. An annual review report is produced covering each short course.

60 The college's formal quality assurance systems have been developed during the last two years. Considerable progress has been made but the quality assurance systems are not yet comprehensive. Staff are involved in developing quality assurance systems and are committed to working to improve the quality of the college's provision. The college has a quality assurance policy which has been approved by governors. A quality committee, reporting to the academic board, has recently been set up. Ways of evaluating the effectiveness of the college's quality assurance approaches have yet to be determined. The findings from reviews and evaluations gathered from across the college currently are not analysed sufficiently to prioritise the improvements to be made or to inform strategic planning. Too little use is made of the range of data collected by the college, for example, data on students' achievements, for quality assurance purposes.

61 A strong emphasis is placed on student evaluations of provision. Student perception surveys are carried out on a regular basis. The scope of these has been extended recently to cover most aspects of college provision. Equal opportunities issues are not addressed sufficiently by student perception surveys. Data from the student surveys are analysed and used effectively for planning and development. In a few cases, issues identified by students have not been acted upon. For example, there have

been many complaints about the college food, particularly its lack of ethnic diversity, but few steps have been taken to make meals more varied.

62 Some clear standards with targets for completion have been identified in administrative services, residential services and learning resources services. For example, targets have been set for response times for student inquiries and for notifying students on the outcome of their admissions interviews. Achievement against targets is monitored on a regular basis. The housekeeping team actively seeks the views of students and generally responds to concerns expressed.

63 A comprehensive student charter was developed with staff and students in 1994 and revised in 1995. Copies of the charter are widely available and students are well informed about the charter. Staff are committed to ensuring that the charter standards are met. Some standards set in the charter for example, targets for response times to emergency calls and standards for marking students' work, are clear and appropriate. Some parts of the charter set out broad aims and objectives rather than measurable standards and clear targets. Useful information is given on the facilities and procedures that students should expect and the student complaints procedure. The college has not yet received any formal complaints from students. Generally, staff expect students' concerns to be addressed informally. The college has not yet set up a procedure for the recording and monitoring of complaints.

64 In accordance with the requirements of the inspection process the college produced a self-assessment report. It used headings from Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Most staff contributed to the self-assessment and they found the process a useful start for reviewing aspects of their work. The assessment contains insufficient critical analysis and significant sections of the report are descriptive rather than evaluative. Few weaknesses are identified in some areas. The document is being used effectively by the college to monitor its quality assurance arrangements and for planning. Some of the college's judgements accorded with the findings of inspection.

65 The college is developing a staff-appraisal policy and procedures. Staff are keen to move forward with appraisal which will provide systematic review of job roles linked to staff-development needs. The proposed staff-appraisal scheme is not yet in operation. There are still some issues to be addressed before agreement is reached on its implementation. Arrangements for evaluating staff practice are limited and are not consistent. There has been some observation of classroom practice. So far this has yielded few benefits for staff.

66 There is no stated staff-development policy. There are no explicit priorities for staff development linked to strategic objectives. Some tutors have been supported to attend conferences and seminars related to their subject areas. A programme of in-house professional development for tutors is useful and some work has begun to assist tutors to identify their

own training needs. There is some valuable sharing of skills among tutors, support staff and residential staff. Involvement in professional networks helps some staff to update their skills and knowledge.

67 Some positive steps have been taken to develop a staff-induction policy with procedures. A helpful code of practice for professional relationships between staff and students has been prepared by staff. The code includes procedures for monitoring infringements. Senior management has not yet agreed to adopt this code or decided on ways it could be implemented.

RESOURCES

Staffing

68 Staff are committed to the college and to women's residential education. There is a small and stable college staff. Tutors, support and residential staff work effectively together in teams. Staff are flexible in their approach to work and this enables the small team to carry out the range of the college's work. Some staff carry too many responsibilities and this has led to a few important tasks not being carried out. Morale is low amongst some staff. Staff workloads have been analysed and some beneficial adjustments have been made to job descriptions and staffing levels.

69 Tutors are well qualified in their subject areas and some are highly qualified. Most tutors have teaching qualifications but few have expertise teaching aspects of literacy and numeracy skills. Tutors have substantial teaching experience and a few tutors have research experience and publish in their subject area. The small size of the tutor team has limited the development of some new curriculum initiatives. A few part-time tutors have been appointed recently with new areas of curriculum expertise.

70 Two members of staff who provide formal counselling for students are qualified counsellors. Many staff provide regular informal counselling support to students and some have in-depth counselling discussions with students on complex personal as well as academic issues. They have no counselling qualifications, although some have undertaken introductory courses in counselling. There are inadequate arrangements to support them in their counselling roles.

71 Most residential and support staff have suitable qualifications or experience. Managers generally have a range of relevant experience but they do not hold qualifications in management, finance, estates management or personnel. The college has employed specialist consultants in some areas where it lacks expertise, for example, estates management and building works, computer maintenance and personnel. In a few cases the consultants selected do not have the appropriate specialist expertise to meet the needs of the college.

72 Some personnel policies and procedures are in place. A few important personnel functions are not carried out. For example, there are inadequate formal procedures for probation, regrading and performance review. A significant proportion of the staff do not have contracts of employment and have not been issued them since their appointment several years ago. A few of these staff have approached management, both informally and formally, to request contracts but they have not yet received a contract of employment.

Equipment/learning resources

73 Most learning is adequately supported by teaching aids such as whiteboards, flipcharts and overhead projectors and screens. Television and video facilities are readily available on request. Teaching materials such as handouts for students are usually of good quality. There is some equipment to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and equipment is purchased or loaned to meet individual students' needs.

74 Students speak highly of the college library which is well stocked with books and periodicals. The library has some compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database facilities which are well used. There is an extensive range of publications on women's issues. There are also some collections of rare history books. Publications in a few areas are limited in scope, for example in core skills. The library is efficiently managed and there are positive links with subject tutors which ensure purchases match curriculum needs. The library is accessible to students 24 hours a day. The number of study spaces is adequate for the number of students in a residential setting.

75 Computing equipment for teaching and for students' use for private study is out of date and inadequate. There are too few computers for the size of student groups in teaching sessions. In addition, the incompatibility of computers has an adverse effect on the quality of teaching. Computers are not suitable for running industrial standard software. There is a narrow range of computer software and printers are unreliable and of poor quality. Arrangements for the maintenance of computing equipment are not effective. Students have access to the computing facilities for 24 hours a day. The college has been aware of the need to update and improve computing equipment for some time and has some plans to address this issue.

76 There are regular reviews of equipment needs and priorities are made from within the small budget.

Accommodation

77 The college is based in an attractive grade II listed Victorian mansion with pleasant grounds. In the early 1970s a residential block was built. In total there are six teaching rooms, most of which are comfortable and adequately suited for the teaching sessions. Occasionally teaching rooms are too small for the size of the student groups.

78 The college has a welcoming reception area, a large library and 46 study bedrooms. Facilities in the main building for students include small student kitchens, a common room and a dining room. The range of meals provided does not cater sufficiently for the ethnic diversity of the students. There are inadequate student common room facilities in the residential block. Signposting throughout the building is limited. There are some impressive wall displays about the history of Hillcroft College but there are few displays of students' work or of opportunities for women when they leave the college. The college accommodation is in good decorative order and is clean and comfortable. It provides a supportive learning environment. Students enjoy living in the college and they value its friendly and homely ethos.

79 The residential facilities, housekeeping services and the college accommodation are well managed. Adaptations to the building and maintenance works are carried out regularly, guided by an accommodation strategy and a detailed conditions survey. An effective system operates for students and staff to identify minor repairs needed and all work is carried out promptly. The difficulties of making structural changes to a listed building limit the scope for building alterations or extensions. Improvements made to the buildings and room usage meet the needs of students, staff and the current and planned curriculum. Building works are carefully planned to meet health and safety requirements, to ensure security and student safety, and to make the building more accessible for students with restricted mobility. Parts of the building are accessible for people who use wheelchairs including four teaching rooms, the library and some study bedrooms. A few improvements are needed to the fabric of the building and plans have been made to do this.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

80 Hillcroft College is successfully achieving its mission to enable adult women, disadvantaged by educational or social factors, to progress into higher education, vocational training or employment. Its main strengths are:

- the recruitment of women not usually present in higher education
- the effective management of curriculum delivery in most areas
- the good support for students
- the high quality of teaching in most areas
- the significant progress made by most students and their high levels of achievement
- the thoroughness of course reviews
- the match of the qualifications and experience of staff to the courses
- the well-stocked library
- the supportive learning environment achieved through well-maintained and comfortable accommodation.

81 In order to improve the quality of its provision the college should address the following:

- the limited range of subjects offered
- the lack of clarity in management decision-making processes
- the low level of students' achievements in some curriculum areas and amongst some student groups
- the poor development of core skills for some students
- the lack of a comprehensive quality assurance system
- the lack of staff-development priorities linked to strategic objectives
- the impact of the number and range of responsibilities held by some staff
- the lack of some basic personnel arrangements
- the inadequate computing equipment.

FIGURES

-
- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)

 - 3 Percentage humanities student numbers by mode of attendance (as at November 1995)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)

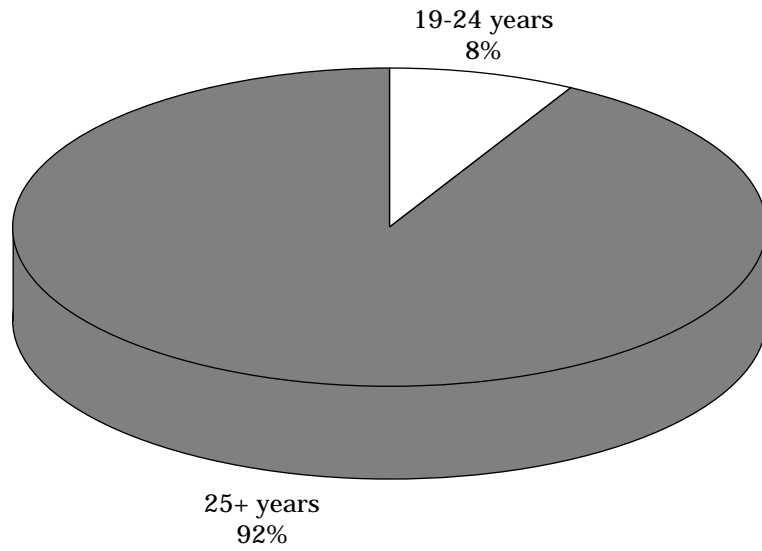
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

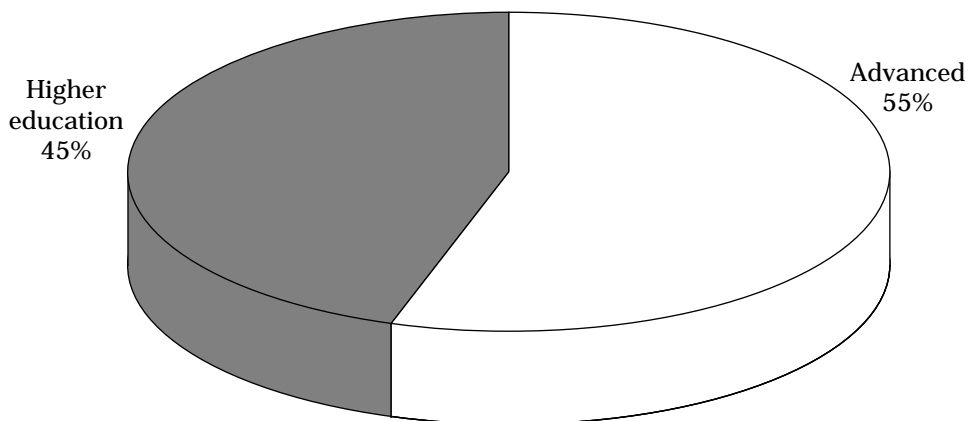
Hillcroft College: student numbers by age (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 276

Figure 2

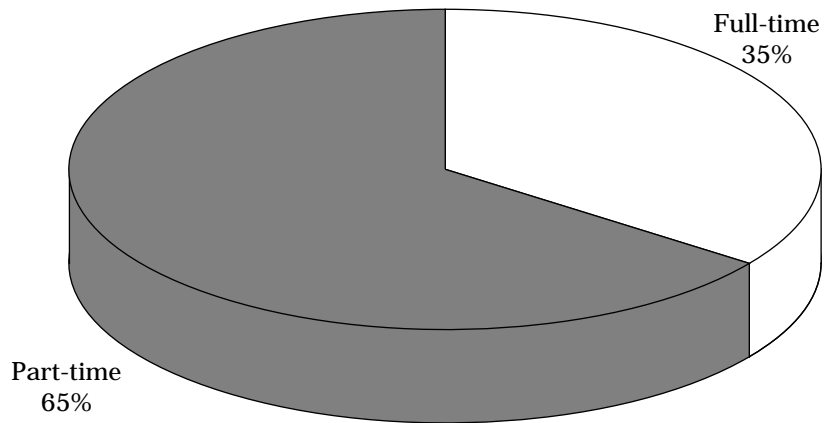
Hillcroft College: student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 276

Figure 3

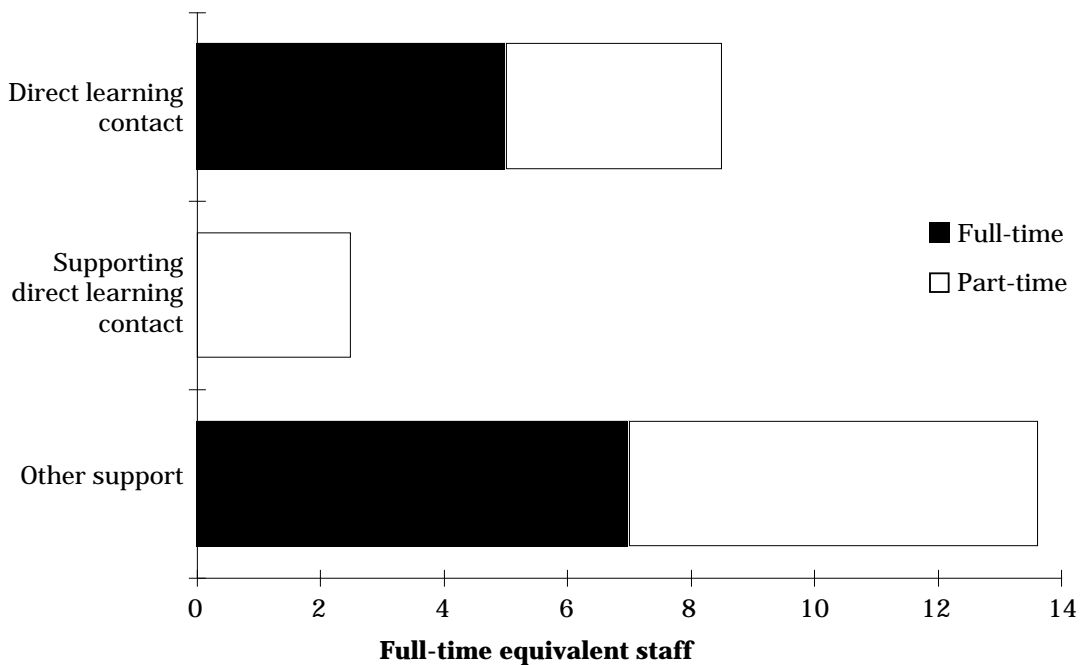
Hillcroft College: humanities student numbers by mode of attendance (as at November 1995)



Students numbers: 276

Figure 4

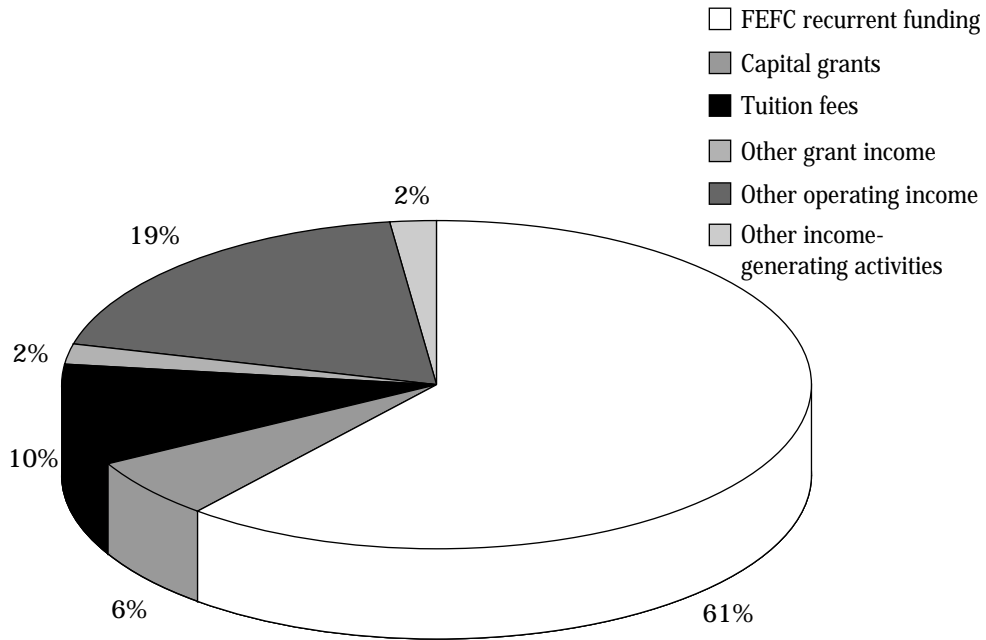
Hillcroft College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 25

Figure 5

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

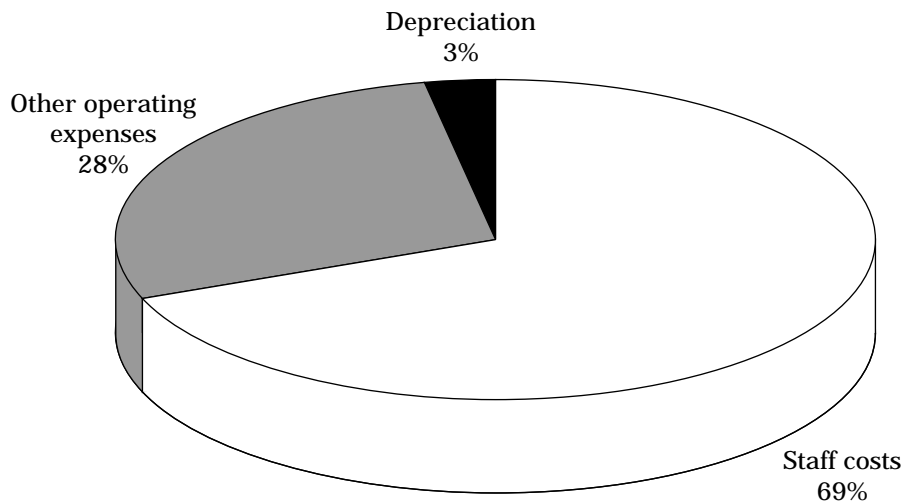


Income: £816,892

Note: this chart excludes £1,001 education contracts.

Figure 6

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



Expenditure: £772,054

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
March 1996