

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Workers' Educational Association

October 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 122/95

WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION
GREATER LONDON REGION
Inspected February–May 1995

Summary

The Workers' Educational Association is the largest provider of adult education in the voluntary sector with approximately 100,000 enrolments in 13 districts across England. A particular strength of the association is the commitment of its voluntary members and staff. There is an extensive range of provision in a wide spread of urban and rural settings, including isolated communities, and some very good provision for socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged adults. Teaching is generally effective and there is a high level of student satisfaction. Staff and voluntary members work effectively together and lines of communication are generally good. There is a growing sense of national direction and purpose. There has been a sensitive and generally successful approach to organisational change. In order to improve provision, the association should further develop its strategic planning process and monitor the pattern of provision and recruitment to ensure that all aspects of its mission are met. It should establish a more systematic approach to quality assurance, improve the effectiveness of management information systems and provide additional support for the changing role of district and national secretaries. Some part-time tutors require further training and the measurement of learning outcomes on courses is not yet fully developed. There is no national policy on student guidance and further work is required to establish effective equipment and accommodation strategies.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Creative arts	2	Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3
Social studies	2		
Languages and literature	2	Return to learn	2
Historical studies	2		
Trade union studies	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1 The Workers' Educational Association was inspected in two phases during the period February to May 1995. The first phase, in February, involved inspection of provision in the 13 Workers' Educational Association districts in England. During the second phase, in May, an inspection team visited the Workers' Educational Association national office in London. Thirty-six inspectors spent a total of 154 working days on the inspection.

2 In the first phase, 102 days were spent on inspecting specialist subject areas and 32 days on aspects of cross-district provision. Inspectors visited 224 classes in a wide range of urban and rural settings; they inspected students' work and examined course and district documentation. They held meetings with voluntary members, district secretaries, field staff, part-time tutors, administrative staff and other adult education providers.

3 In the second phase, five inspectors spent four days at the national office inspecting the cross-association aspects of the Workers' Educational Association. They were able to draw on the evidence gathered during the inspections at district level. Meetings were held with members of the national executive committee, including the national officers, the national secretaries, district secretaries, field staff, administrative staff and other providers and partners.

THE ASSOCIATION AND ITS AIMS

4 The Workers' Educational Association is the largest provider of adult education in the voluntary sector. It was founded in 1903 by a conference representing trade unions, the co-operative movement and universities. Initially, university extra mural lectures were the main form of provision but the association soon developed its own local classes. The basic unit of the Workers' Educational Association has always been the local branch, based on groups of students. As the association developed, the branches grouped together into districts covering England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In 1924 the Board of Education established arrangements for direct funding of adult learning in Workers' Educational Association districts.

5 In 1991 an industrial tribunal decided that all staff of the Workers' Educational Association were employed by the national association rather than by each district. The decision was upheld on appeal. Following this ruling, a national conference in the same year decided by a small majority that the Workers' Educational Association should become a single organisation. The three Scottish districts became part of the new national association but the Welsh and Northern Ireland districts decided to remain autonomous. The inspection covered the 13 districts in England, which now comprises 701 branches, and the national office in London.

6 The Workers' Educational Association is primarily a membership organisation and the voluntary membership is engaged at all levels of decision making. The key organisational units are the districts, each of

which has its own committee. The members of the district committees are drawn largely from the branch committees. The Workers' Educational Association is a registered charity and members of the national executive committee act as trustees. The national executive committee consists of representatives of the districts and the Scottish Association, together with honorary officers elected at the biennial national conference and representatives of national organisations affiliated to the Workers' Educational Association. The main forum of the Workers' Educational Association is the biennial conference where the voluntary membership debates issues and determines the association's constitutional arrangements.

7 As one of the designated institutions in the further education sector the Workers' Educational Association is funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) for both schedule 2 and non-schedule 2 provision, as defined in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. In 1993-94 there were 100,282 FEFC-funded enrolments, of which 11,091 were schedule 2 and 89,191 non-schedule 2. In addition, the Workers' Educational Association had 30,000 enrolments on courses funded from other sources; many are on programmes jointly organised with universities. At the time of the inspection, the projected enrolments for 1994-95 were on target. Enrolments by mode of funding are given in figure 1. Enrolments by mode of funding and curriculum area are shown in figure 2.

8 The districts are managed by district secretaries. They have a small team of field staff who have varying responsibilities for aspects of programme management and teaching. The chief executive of the association is the general secretary based in the national office at Bethnal Green in London. He is supported by two other national secretaries; the deputy general secretary and the financial services officer. Each district and the national office have a core of administrative staff. The branches are largely managed by the voluntary membership. The association employs 203 full-time equivalent core staff. Of these, 17 are national and district secretaries, 104 are field staff and 82 are administrative support. A core staff profile, with core staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 3. Most of the teaching is undertaken by part-time tutors. For 1994-95 there are approximately 3,000 part-time tutors, the majority of whom work a maximum of four hours per week.

9 The association's average level of funding per funded unit of activity for 1994-95 is £6.56. The association's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 4 and 5.

10 The aims and objectives of the Workers' Educational Association are set out in its constitution. The overall aim is 'to promote adult education

based on democratic principles in its organisation and practice, through the participation of its voluntary members'. There are four main objectives:

- stimulating and satisfying the demand of adults for liberal education, through direct provision of courses and other activities
- providing in particular for the needs of working class adults and of those who are socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged
- providing educational programmes for appropriate organisations concerned with the collective needs of adults in the community and the workplace
- generally furthering the advancement of education to the end that all children, adolescents and adults may have full opportunities for the education needed for their complete individual and social development.

11 The three-year strategic plan for the period 1995-98 identifies seven strategic objectives; strengthening voluntary participation in governance, improving the quantity and quality of learning opportunities, further developing management systems, reviewing staffing resources, increasing and diversifying funding, developing marketing and promotional strategies and generally promoting public education nationally and locally.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

12 The Workers' Educational Association organises approximately 10,000 courses at over 3,000 venues in England. Its own classification identifies 84 subject areas. For the purposes of the inspection these were grouped into social studies, languages and literature, historical studies, creative arts, trade union studies, courses specifically for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and return to learn programmes. Approximately 70 per cent of this provision is referred to by the association as liberal education, and described as learning which is intellectually enriching, which gives greater understanding of social, cultural and economic issues, and which may equip the learner for participation in community and political life. An increasing proportion of courses is targeted at specific groups, particularly socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged adults and adults in the workplace. While some of these have elements of liberal education many are geared to more specific outcomes.

13 Courses take place in a wide range of urban and rural locations. In some rural areas the Workers' Educational Association is the sole provider of educational opportunities for adults. Other providers, particularly local education authorities (LEAs) commented that one of the specific strengths of the Workers' Educational Association is its ability to put on classes in isolated places where it is difficult for them to provide a service. Courses are organised at different times and vary in length but typically take place once a week for approximately two hours, normally for one or two terms. They are offered at different levels ranging from basic skills programmes

to provision which is developed jointly with universities. A few distance-learning courses have been developed and these have proved popular with students who cannot attend courses on a regular basis. The national office arranges a small number of specialist programmes including some international work.

14 Liberal education courses form the core of most branch programmes. They are largely developed by voluntary members, with field staff support. They are very effective in attracting adults over 50 years old, many of whom already have substantial experience of study. Liberal education courses ensure widespread continuing learning opportunities for older adults but the nature of the courses and the fact that they attract older clientele can deter younger students and those with less educational experience from joining them. There are fewer young adults attending liberal education courses than there are attending the more specialist provision.

15 The targeted programmes provide good opportunities for socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged adults. Many of them have clearly planned routes for progression so that students can move on to more advanced studies or to employment. In the West Mercia district, for example, 'second chance' courses lead to continued study in further and higher education. In a few districts, targeted provision constitutes half of the district's programme, but in others it is less than 10 per cent. Many districts have been successful in applying for external sources of funding to support courses targeted at particular groups. Currently, there is little provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

16 The association needs to monitor more effectively within and across districts to ensure that it reaches those adults identified in its mission. Course programmes are decided by negotiation between branches and districts. Although field staff give useful advice to branches on ways of developing the range of courses, this does not always lead to changes which may be desirable. Generally, districts keep under review the range of programmes offered, taking into account other educational provision in their area. However, there is a significant difference in the pattern of programmes offered by districts. In some, there is very little targeted provision. The challenge for the organisation is to sustain the participation of the voluntary membership whilst achieving its mission.

17 There is no national marketing strategy although the association is now working to develop one. Few districts have their own marketing strategy. At branch level, procedures for identifying study needs in liberal education are undeveloped. Branches often give priority to the needs and interests of existing students and insufficient attention is given to those of potential students. In many cases, this leads to branches providing for the same student group each year.

18 Procedures for identifying learning needs are better developed for targeted provision. Good use is made of labour market analysis and census

information. Some district staff have responded creatively to needs identified. For example, the South Eastern district received a request for a donation to a residential home for people with mental illness. It was unable to give any money; instead, it organised classes for the residents.

19 The Workers' Educational Association has a strong commitment to curriculum development and innovation. It has often pioneered new areas of adult work such as women's health education. Examples of new programmes developed to meet the needs of particular groups of learners include community language interpreting for Asian students in the Northern district and provision for prisoners at Broadmoor Hospital in the Thames and Solent district. Curriculum development is effectively encouraged through the education development fund which has a budget of £80,000 this year.

20 The Workers' Educational Association has well-developed partnerships with a wide range of other agencies. There are affiliations with 32 organisations at national level and over 1,000 across the districts. There are long-standing and effective partnerships with many universities, trade unions and LEAs which lead to joint provision. Partner organisations value the Workers' Educational Association's clear mission, its expertise in adult learning and its responsiveness.

21 Workers' Educational Association staff are well informed about adult learning issues and developments, and about how the Workers' Educational Association mission relates to further education as a whole. Some branches and voluntary members are less well informed. Staff in the districts are aware of the government's national targets for education and training and districts are contributing to the targets at local level. Staff and voluntary members support the Workers' Educational Association's equal opportunities policy. However, because the monitoring of students' backgrounds is limited the association cannot assess accurately to what extent it is meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

22 Systems for governance and management of the Workers' Educational Association are guided by the fundamental principle that it is a voluntary membership organisation and a registered charity. Voluntary members are key to the running of the organisation. The number of paid staff is small. Achieving a balance between the principles of democracy and national accountability is a key challenge for the association. While there is general agreement about the association's mission, there are different interpretations of the elements within it.

23 The geographical spread of the organisation and its democratic nature have led to a complex management structure. Ultimate responsibility lies with the national executive committee, a large body of 26 members that meets a minimum of four times a year. It operates through three main subcommittees; education, finance and general purposes, and

employment. Additional committees and groups have been formed to allow it to draw on the views and expertise of other voluntary members and the professional staff. An audit committee exists but its composition and role is under review. A national executive committee strategy group has been put in place during the last year, with a particular remit to co-ordinate the work of the three subcommittees.

24 Lines of communication across the committees are generally good, though the structures are still evolving. In particular, there is insufficient clarity about the roles of the national executive committee strategy group and the finance and general purposes committee. There are, on occasions, frustrations about delays in the decision-making process. The national constitutional arrangements mean that considerable responsibility is delegated to the districts, each of which has a district committee responsible for the district's affairs and a district council representative of the branches and members.

25 The effectiveness of management across the country varies between and within districts. In the better examples there are clear aims, and procedures are well documented and linked to the national plan; the district committee is well informed; there is open, consultative management; and branches and district staff work well together. In other instances there is a resistance to change and suspicion regarding new developments. This has sometimes led to disagreement over the long-term development of the district.

26 Roles and responsibilities are clearly allocated in most, but not all districts. There are different perceptions of the changing role of the field staff and some instances of low morale. In a number of districts, their role has been well developed as education managers with responsibility for geographical areas and cross-district activities. In the better examples they have job plans which are linked to the development plan and their work is monitored through regular supervision and reports.

27 Systems set up by districts to monitor enrolments and budgets range from sophisticated and effective to inadequate. Many districts benefit from well-devised computer or manual information systems that were set up prior to the establishment of the association's management information system. These allow regular reporting of progress against targets. In some districts, targets are not set regularly, there is little systematic collection of management information and methods of accountability are underdeveloped.

28 Key factors influencing the agenda of the national executive are the changes in relationships created by the decision to become a single organisation and the need to meet the requirements of the FEFC. There is a strong commitment to the principles of democracy and delegation which are fundamental to the nature of the association but there is also a clear understanding at national level of the need to have greater central monitoring of administration, employment policy and financial control.

This understanding is shared by some, but not all, within the districts and branches. The association recognises that there is still much work to be done, especially at branch level with volunteers and part-time staff, to ensure that there is an understanding of the changes which have taken place, including the systems which are needed to comply with legislative and funding regulations. Nevertheless, it is a tribute to the association that change has been introduced sensitively and successfully across a number of its operations. Policies have been developed for equal opportunities and health and safety, though it is not yet possible to judge their effectiveness.

29 Strategic planning has started to play an important role in the association. It was recognised that early attempts were flawed and that plans were difficult to monitor. The current national plan has been created as a result of widespread consultation. The process has been partially successful in making members feel that the plan is one which they have helped to produce but more work is needed within some districts to ensure that the plan is understood. In addition to the national plan, each district has its own development plan. Further work is required at all levels to develop plans into effective working documents. In particular, there is insufficient clarification of the respective responsibilities of the district and the national committees. The links in the national plan between educational objectives on the one hand, and management and resource issues on the other, are not well developed. Procedures for monitoring the implementation of national and district plans are currently under discussion.

30 National monitoring of any aspect of the association's work is hampered by the lack of a reliable management information system. A new, and comprehensive, computer-based system is currently being introduced in all districts but it is still at an early stage of development. It remains a major issue in the 1994-95 academic year that the association is not able to demonstrate the existence of a comprehensive national system for reporting on financial and educational matters.

31 The ways in which resources are allocated are not always clear to staff and members, partly due to changes in the way the association is funded nationally. Districts are allocated budgets largely on historical criteria, last revised four years ago. The association is introducing a model of funding against enrolment targets. However, it regards this as a necessarily gradual process, which has to take account of the different types of programmes on offer and the other sources of income available.

32 An important issue for the association is the increasing amount of work for paid staff and voluntary members. District secretaries have requested additional help with finance and human resource management. The dual responsibility of the district secretaries to the national association and to the district is considered vital by the association in the effective delivery of its mission. The national executive committee has recognised

the need for increased support for both national and district secretaries and some interim measures are in place. It is important that a prompt decision is made to improve the situation.

33 Overall, the association has a good understanding of where change needs to be made to make its governance and management more effective. It has started to put in place the necessary frameworks and systems whilst maintaining and reinforcing its status as a voluntary organisation. However, there is considerable work to be done to ensure it can effectively demonstrate to itself and to outside bodies that it is achieving all the targets it has set itself in its mission and strategic plan.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

34 A wide range of methods is used to provide students with course information. On liberal education programmes, recruitment is organised substantially through the branches. Most branches use mailing lists of contacts and previous students to assist in distributing information and they produce additional publicity for courses designed for particular target groups. A 1990 survey of recruitment trends in one district indicated that only about a third of the students on liberal education programmes were new to the Workers' Educational Association each year.

35 Recruitment arrangements for targeted programmes include the use of advertisements, distribution of leaflets to community venues and contacts with agencies such as social services and the probation service. Recruitment is also by word of mouth from previous students. On targeted programmes, these methods are generally successful in attracting the learners identified as priority groups within the association's mission statement. For work-based programmes recruitment is mainly through trade unions, employers or voluntary organisations.

36 In general, promotional literature is easy to understand and explains clearly the content of courses. However, the quality of some of the literature is poor. Some leaflets contain insufficient information to prepare students adequately for their courses. Others fail to indicate the possibilities for moving on to further courses of study. The association's learning outcomes initiative, which requires that tutors outline course content and course outcomes, is beginning to have an influence. A national design handbook, recently produced, also provides useful guidance to staff on marketing, on disseminating course leaflets and on the presentation of publicity materials.

37 Students are helped to make informed choices about courses through events such as open evenings, taster courses and initial attendance at classes without having to decide whether to enrol.

38 On some programmes, careful consideration has been given to assessing and accrediting students' prior learning, but this is not general practice. Students who require additional support in developing basic skills sometimes have their needs met, but there are generally few opportunities for assessing students' learning support needs.

39 The working relationships between tutors and students are good. The philosophy of the association provides an ethos and atmosphere much valued by students. All students automatically become members of the Workers' Educational Association and are encouraged to use their democratic rights of membership. Tutors are enthusiastic and committed and are very supportive of their students. Levels of attendance at classes are high.

40 There is no formal policy for guidance and tutorial support at national level and practice varies considerably across districts and programmes. The association is aware of this and the matter is addressed in the new strategic plan. In some districts, strategies are already being developed. On the targeted provision designed to attract those students who traditionally do not enrol in further education much of the guidance is effective. On return to learn programmes initial guidance is offered in a variety of ways, for example, at pre-course meetings and by telephone. Most of these courses include some individual time for students when support and guidance is given. All return to learn courses include specific sessions on the possibilities for progress, sometimes involving outside speakers.

41 On liberal education programmes, guidance is not so well developed. While some tutors and voluntary members are helpful in assisting students to think through their learning needs there is rarely explicit guidance on further study at the end of the course. On workplace programmes where courses are designed to meet students' particular work-related learning needs guidance and support are an integral part of the programme.

42 The informal guidance offered by tutors is in many instances limited by the absence of a developed network of support. The extent to which districts provide opportunities for students to be referred for external specialist advice or for specialist counselling is inconsistent.

43 Some programmes include practical support such as creche facilities and assistance with transport. There is effective support for those returning to education after a long break; teachers help them to catch up with their studies and to develop self-confidence. There is some support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Examples of other support include the use of former students, trained to provide learner support, to help people with disabilities, to give additional assistance in the classroom or to provide a babysitting service. The fee remission policy of some districts does not target potential students on the lowest incomes.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

44 Strengths outweighed weaknesses in 74 per cent of the sessions inspected, 21 per cent had a balance of strengths and weaknesses and only 5 per cent had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. There were many examples of good teaching across all subjects. The grades awarded for the teaching sessions inspected are given in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Sessions inspected	60	105	48	10	1	224

45 Teaching and learning in the Workers' Educational Association reflect three key influences; a long tradition of liberal education, democratic principles which inform all aspects of the organisation and a commitment to addressing disadvantage. Examples of these influences are the negotiated content on many liberal education programmes and an increasing emphasis on accredited provision for adult returners.

46 Thirty-four per cent of the sessions inspected were identified by the association as schedule 2 provision and 66 per cent were non-schedule 2. While the standard of teaching is broadly consistent across both, they each have a number of distinctive features. Schedule 2 courses are characterised by a greater emphasis on the recording and monitoring of students' progress, identification of learning outcomes and both individual and group work. Non-schedule 2 provision is characterised by an emphasis on knowledge and content, negotiation of course programmes and class teaching.

47 Tutors generally had a sound knowledge of their subjects, and showed a good understanding of the needs of adult learners. Many had extensive relevant experience. Their preparation for classes was generally thorough. Carefully-devised teaching materials prepared in advance were a feature of many sessions. Most tutors had outline schemes of work but these varied in quality and detail and many comprised little more than lists of activities. Generally, but not always, tutors produced clear session plans.

48 A minority of sessions had weaknesses which included a lack of variety in teaching styles, insufficient challenge for students, the lack of clearly-stated learning objectives, and the failure by tutors to check students' understanding or to ensure that all students had an opportunity to speak. On many programmes, there was inadequate attention to the development of core skills.

49 Return to learn programmes cover a wide range of courses for adults who have little or no recent educational experience. The courses inspected included new opportunities for women, making your experience count, new directions for Asian women, English for speakers of other languages, distance learning and access to higher education. Many of them were provided in partnership with external agencies. The standard of teaching was generally high. Students experienced appropriate methods of working including individual work and group activities. There were also opportunities for action planning, which involved students in setting their own learning objectives. Sessions were well planned and had clear aims and objectives. In many lessons, activities were supported by workbooks and carefully-prepared learning materials. On access to higher education courses, students produced good written assignments and there was helpful feedback from tutors.

50 A feature of return to learn programmes is the attention given to individual students and the emphasis on personal development. In one session, the tutor created a positive learning atmosphere by acknowledging students' achievements, including their levels of oracy, while rigorously tackling their writing weaknesses. The students could see that they were making progress. One described the course as 'learning free from shame'. On some programmes, sessions are pre-planned to such an extent that individuals' needs are not sufficiently met. On occasions, teachers need to show greater flexibility, within the overall objectives for the lesson. More attention should be given to the development of students' study skills.

51 In sessions for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities the positive tutor/student relationships clearly enhance learning. In one music session, the enthusiasm and energy of the teacher enabled a class of students, some with severe learning difficulties, to achieve great success with their instruments, playing individually, in small groups and in an ensemble. Teachers make effective use of everyday situations in the lessons. There are good links with external agencies and support workers regularly work alongside tutors, helping students. Tutors have a good general understanding of students' abilities but there is no systematic assessment of learning needs. More attention should be given to the initial assessment of students and subsequently to the monitoring of their progress. There were some sessions in which teachers had low expectations of students and work was not demanding enough.

52 The languages and literature classes inspected included modern languages, literature, theatre and creative writing. The general standard of teaching was good. There was some particularly effective work in the Eastern district; teachers used a wide range of teaching methods and demonstrated some high-quality presentational skills in literature classes. In modern languages lessons, the extent to which tutors used the language being taught varied. In one Spanish class for beginners a high level of understanding was achieved using direct questioning and role-play in Spanish. Despite the fast pace of the work, students were able to understand and were eager to respond. The extent to which students undertook structured exercises and written work varied widely. In the minority of classes, work was set and marked on a regular basis. In many, assessment was more informal; exercises to check students' understanding were included as part of the teaching. There were some good examples of peer assessment. In the small minority of weak lessons observed during the inspection there was insufficient structure, too few opportunities for students to work in pairs or small groups, inadequate monitoring of students' progress, or a failure by teachers to make use of audio-visual aids where these would have been helpful.

53 In creative arts there were many examples of good teaching. In a patchwork and quilt-making class the standard of work, the resources supplied by the tutor and the tutor's technique and skill in responding to

students with different levels of ability were exceptional. Teaching and learning aids were used effectively both to reinforce learning and to introduce new topics. Most courses have clear schemes of work and some include reading lists. Tutors arrange educational visits, for example, to theatres, museums, art galleries, and antique furniture sales rooms which enable students to apply their knowledge and understanding. The traditional 10-week programme is inappropriate for some creative arts courses, such as painting, and some courses are therefore being extended. Tasks were set and assessments carried out largely on an informal basis. Teachers' comments on students' work and achievement were usually given orally. More attention should be given to assessing students' progress against learning objectives. In a minority of creative arts classes, the teaching lacked structure, the work was not challenging enough or opportunities were missed for students to discuss matters in groups.

54 Historical studies courses are well researched and many tutors have expert knowledge of their specific subjects. Good use is made of primary sources, for example documents, exhibits and photographs. Site visits and trips are a positive feature of many courses. Teaching and learning aids, including handouts, are of high quality and used effectively. In some of the weaker sessions, the learning objectives were unclear and there was a greater focus on teaching than learning, or a tendency for teachers to become anecdotal. Sometimes, a few individuals were allowed to control activities; for example, in one class the tutor failed to manage four students who were dominating the discussion and effectively excluding most of the group. Teachers give appropriate attention to some historical study skills but students have insufficient opportunity to develop their analytical and writing skills particularly in relation to the interpretation of data. The Workers' Educational Association curriculum development unit for historical studies is working to ensure the consistent development of historical studies across schedule 2 and non-schedule 2 programmes. Well-produced distance-learning packs carrying accreditation by the Open College Network have been devised in the West Mercia district. These include clear assessment levels and associated criteria.

55 Social studies provision includes the social sciences, politics, world affairs, counselling and media studies. Many courses have a detailed statement of aims, objectives and learning outcomes and the standard of teaching was generally high. On non-schedule 2 courses students are much involved in planning the programme of study. This places considerable demands on tutors who often have to research subjects at short notice. They respond well, providing good source material which generates lively and effective learning. Teachers employ a wide variety of teaching methods, particularly on schedule 2 courses. Inspectors observed some good techniques for involving students in discussion. There were also examples of well-managed assessment on schedule 2 courses. On some non-schedule 2 courses there is an over reliance on the tutor lecturing the whole class. While many of the older students on these courses are

happy with this approach, they would benefit from more groupwork and discussion and from more regular checking of their understanding and progress. There is also a need for tutors to make clearer distinction between anecdote, opinion and fact in their teaching.

56 In trade union studies, the emphasis is on learning the skills and acquiring the knowledge essential to be an effective trade union representative. All courses have schemes of work and tutors seek students' comments on these. Students all receive well-designed workbooks. Sessions are generally well planned. Teaching is well organised and thorough and tutors take good account of students' differing levels of ability. Students experience various methods of working. Tutors encourage them to talk and discuss in order to build their self-confidence. In one session, students were divided into groups according to their workplace for an exercise on grievance procedures. The exercise was both relevant and challenging. The reports from each group led to well-informed discussion revealing many of the problems arising from different grievance procedures. In a minority of sessions, the work was not demanding enough and students received little feedback from tutors. More attention should be given to assessing the learning needs of students at the start of courses in order to provide the support which individuals require. Most students require more support in developing their writing skills. Programmes, generally, should provide a greater understanding of the overall social and political context in which unions operate.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

57 The tradition of the Workers' Educational Association is that much of its provision is not assessed in any formal way; other outcomes such as enjoyment, pleasure and personal development are celebrated as valid reasons for learning. Students interviewed during the inspection confirmed this message. A small percentage of the work leads to nationally-recognised accreditation. Formal measures of students' achievements are a relatively new concept and a difficult one for some Workers' Educational Association members to accept.

58 The learning outcomes project was set up to identify means by which the Workers' Educational Association could demonstrate that worthwhile learning is taking place on its courses. The aim is to describe the learning that takes place on a course not to assess the performance of students. At the end of a course, students are asked to measure their individual learning against explicit outcomes described at the start of the course. An evaluation of the early stages of the pilot work has taken place. In a survey of just under 2,000 students, 66 per cent indicated that they had achieved more than half the learning outcomes, and 22 per cent less than half. The evaluation concludes there is much work to be done in implementing the project and demonstrating its purpose to students and tutors. There is confusion between the concepts of accreditation and measuring achievement in a number of branches. Inspectors found that the majority

of students are satisfied with the classes they attend. Nevertheless, the learning outcomes work is an important first step to enable the Workers' Educational Association to demonstrate the progress which students make. At present, the extent to which learning is recorded varies substantially across the different curriculum areas.

59 Return to learn courses focus on the achievement of personal development and skills. High pass rates are recorded where formal accreditation is available, for example in wordprocessing. The majority of students taking courses leading to open college credits achieve the qualification; on one programme in the Thames and Solent district 49 out of 63 students opted for accreditation and 44 were successful. Most courses use a variety of techniques to help students monitor progress, including logbooks, assignments and formal presentations. Oral confidence is being developed in all return to learn classes, with emphasis on the ability to listen to the views of others and to put forward reasoned arguments. Appropriate written skills are being developed by many, but not all, students. Writing often focuses on practical tasks which are relevant to students' lives, such as letters to housing departments and employers, and the compiling of curriculum vitae. Weaknesses in this curriculum area include insufficient written work and the lack of record keeping on a minority of courses.

60 In the work with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities few targets are set. Students' achievements are rarely accredited and often not recorded. Records of classes focus on the topics covered, not on individual students' achievements. However, there are examples of positive outcomes. External agencies dealing with the effects of homelessness or drug rehabilitation speak of the benefits of courses for their clients and students with previous experience of mental illness in their background talk about the positive contribution the class is making to their lives. Appropriate emphasis is given to students being able to communicate with each other. Students with learning difficulties on joint Workers' Educational Association/Mencap courses are learning and practising self-advocacy skills. They are developing knowledge and understanding and can transfer these skills to real life situations. On some courses, there is evidence of progress in basic skills such as numeracy and information technology. In one practical session, the items being produced were of a high standard. In some lessons, progress was limited by the inappropriate use of textbooks.

61 Students taking beginners level courses in foreign languages demonstrate high levels of attainment. In classroom exercises they performed well across a range of tasks, including comprehension tests and grammatical exercises. Standards are more variable in second-year groups; some classes require a more intensive approach. Standards of written work achieved by some students on English language, literature and writers' courses compare favourably with General Certificate of

Education advanced level (GCE A level) or first degree work. Students are encouraged to write in a range of styles and thus extend their experience and creative ability. In the Yorkshire districts, students' work from most of the teaching groups has been published. There is almost no formal accreditation on these programmes and evidence of progression is anecdotal.

62 The primary motive of creative arts students is to attend classes for pleasure and personal development rather than for formal achievement. All students spoke enthusiastically about their programmes. In practical classes there is evidence that appropriate skills have been acquired. The best work occurs in mixed skills sessions where students are working with paints, embroidery and crafts. Students can explain methods and techniques and talk about how they have solved problems. There is a lack of experimentation in some painting classes. Some courses are too short for students to make significant progress in developing their skills. In contrast, some re-enrolled students have reached a standard where they need to move on to a different learning experience in order to progress. Written work is infrequent in creative arts classes but students' essays that were inspected displayed good understanding of individual artists.

63 Historical studies students are often retired and attend the courses to enrich their lives and widen social horizons; a very small number of students acquire a qualification and go on to higher education. Many groups are involved in sharing knowledge and understanding, for example in local history sessions. There is little formal assessment but some students choose to produce written work or keep records of classes or of their own research. There are examples of well-written booklets and guides that have been produced by groups. In classes where tutors lecture for most of the available time, students have little opportunity to develop the core skills of communication, problem solving or working independently.

64 Social science courses offer a mixture of accredited and non-accredited provision. Students' achievements are also valued in other ways, for example, by effective participation in local community activities. Classes are generally lively. Students present their ideas and opinions and can apply previous learning to new topics. Skills are being developed in literacy, numeracy and research. A minority of classes had no written notes and learning outcomes had not been shared or agreed by the students. On a few occasions, the discussion was controlled by one or two students at the expense of others, or teachers failed to make students distinguish between fact and opinion. Assessment is rigorous on accredited courses, but on others the recording of students' achievements is not common.

65 Students' achievements on trade union studies courses are not yet formally accredited, though progress is being made towards that goal. Standards being achieved vary between classes. Some shop stewards are

gaining confidence in written, oral and research skills. In some sessions, there is little attention to writing skills and discussions are unfocused. There is also a problem of attendance in some classes; this is attributed in some instances to the fact that the workplace must take priority over the course if urgent matters arise.

66 Across all the Workers' Educational Association provision, less than 10 per cent of students are on courses leading to nationally-recognised qualifications. The main form of accreditation is through open college networks, though there are examples of others such as RSA Examinations Board (RSA), General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and specific qualifications for counselling, sign language and interpreters. Overall statistics are difficult to gain as the new management information system is not yet fully operational. In one district, a total of 287 out of approximately 4,500 students gained accreditation in 1993-94. In another district, 324 students enrolled on accredited courses, 225 of these registered to take the qualification and 198 were successful. Districts are increasing the amount of accredited work they offer but they lack a comprehensive strategy or specific targets. There is scope to widen the types of accreditation on offer.

67 There are examples of students progressing both within the organisation and to other forms of education and training. Student evaluation sheets used on the return to learn courses show increased aspirations at the end of courses. Progression routes include further education, higher education and employment. However, there is no Workers' Educational Association requirement for districts systematically to collect and analyse statistics on progression and destinations.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

68 The Workers' Educational Association demonstrates a commitment to quality assurance in much of its existing practice and in a growing number of its national initiatives. The development of its role as a national employer with its constituent districts has required significant changes to systems and infrastructure. As a membership organisation which has traditionally been district led, the emphasis in quality assurance has been on the establishment of national policies that build on good practice and work towards consistency. This approach has been effective in bringing about desirable change, although formal aspects of quality assurance are at an early stage of development.

69 The national executive committee has overall responsibility for quality assurance. The association produced a quality statement in January 1994 and published its own charter in July 1994. Both were produced after consultation with district staff and district committees. The quality statement is a brief outline of principles and intentions. The charter gives general information about the Workers' Educational Association, explains the responsibilities of different parts of the organisation and indicates

where further information can be obtained. Awareness and understanding of these documents in the districts varies considerably but they have been positively used as reference points for many quality initiatives and have been incorporated into some district tutors' handbooks.

70 The 13 Workers' Educational Association districts, which were largely autonomous until recently, have developed a variety of approaches to quality assurance. A few districts have developed their own quality assurance statements and monitor their activities against targets. All districts publish annual reports, and produce development plans, some of which include performance indicators. Annual reports are generally attractively produced giving a clear picture of the district's programme although information on student achievement is limited. In all districts there are procedures for regular reporting to district and branch committees; most work well and some are particularly effective. Arrangements for students' course evaluation and for tutors' course reports also operate in all districts. Some are efficiently collected, analysed and used to inform planning, but in a minority of districts the percentage returns are low and the process is incomplete.

71 Class visiting is generally used as a key method of evaluating performance. In the best examples of this, class visitors, who may be staff or voluntary members of the association, receive training and guidance, visit the classes of all new tutors and regularly visit a sample of other tutors' classes. In many districts, such procedures are less well organised. In a number of districts tutors have been grouped into subject teams in order to provide mutual support, share good practice and develop the curriculum. Most districts have tutors' handbooks and some of these are very effective.

72 In the last three years there have been a number of national initiatives and these are beginning to have a positive impact on quality assurance. The learning outcomes project is a significant development which has been carefully introduced through pilots and is well supported by guidance and training. It is already demonstrating its potential for systematic evaluation of standards and will gradually be extended to cover all programmes. Two years ago the national association set up an education development fund to encourage programme development and the dissemination of good practice. Districts bid for funding against priorities set annually by the national education committee. Also, in the last two years, a women's education committee has been formed and curriculum development units, composed of district field staff, have been established for trade union studies, cultural and literary studies, historical studies and return to learn courses. Although only operating for nine months, the units have already made good progress in developing new accredited courses and in general curriculum development.

73 The process of bringing together the district quality assurance arrangements to create a national framework is at an early stage. The

association is starting to take action on this through the revised strategic planning process which is seen as a key mechanism for developing quality assurance.

74 There are many examples of effective training, provided by the districts, for full-time staff, part-time tutors and voluntary members. These include training on new Workers' Educational Association initiatives and support for staff to undertake professional and technical updating. In one district, a system of tutor mentoring has been developed with experienced tutors acting as mentors to support other tutors. Where there is joint provision with other adult education providers and agencies, for example universities and trade unions, staff benefit from the training provided by the partner bodies and the application of their quality assurance procedures. There is a need for greater consistency in the staff development provided for full-time and part-time tutors across the organisation. For example, in some districts there is provision for paid study leave for full-time staff; in others there is a set number of staff-development days a year, or more informal arrangements.

75 A national training committee has been established and there has been a detailed analysis of training needs in which jobs have been related to functional responsibilities. This provides a useful baseline for planning staff development. Training events are organised nationally and districts can apply for funding for specific events. Evaluation reports are produced for activities funded from the national budget. The national training committee does not formally receive reports on district training programmes and is not yet able to monitor the extent and quality of training across the association. A national training strategy document was produced in February 1994. This contains a statement of broad principles which is used for guidance in organising staff development. More work is required to establish a full staff-development strategy.

76 The national executive committee has held several two-day meetings over the last two years which have included training for its members. These have provided a good opportunity for voluntary members to consider their role and have been extended to include voluntary officers on district committees.

77 A national appraisal scheme, currently in draft form, is being developed. When implemented it will provide an annual cycle of appraisal, review and the setting of targets linked to strategic objectives and staff-development needs. A few districts have developed their own appraisal schemes but many are waiting for the implementation of the national scheme. In some districts, arrangements for assessing the performance of staff and identifying their staff-development needs are informal.

78 In accordance with the requirements of the inspection framework, the Workers' Educational Association produced a self-assessment report. The report follows the headings in the inspection framework set out in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. It provides a useful

summary of the association's operations but is largely descriptive. Future reports would benefit from a more rigorous assessment of strengths and weaknesses. All Workers' Educational Association districts produced their own self-assessment reports as part of the inspection process and these were helpful during the district phase of the inspection. The reports vary in depth and quality. Some contain clear identification of weaknesses as well as strengths.

RESOURCES

Staffing

79 A fundamental feature and strength of the Workers' Educational Association is the way in which the paid staff, full time and part time, and the voluntary membership work together to manage the organisation. This combination of committed individuals and groups is a significant resource for the association.

80 The teaching staff, mostly part-time tutors paid by the session, have a good knowledge of their subjects and many have extensive experience of teaching adult learners. New tutors are given useful support packs, usually comprising general information and some advice on teaching and the promotion of learning. Most undertake induction training. The need to provide continued training on teaching methods and guidance skills is acknowledged by the association.

81 The work of the 3,000 part-time tutors employed at any one time is managed and supported by the district secretaries and field staff in partnership with voluntary members. Staff roles and responsibilities have changed considerably during and after the restructuring of the organisation, as well as in response to changing curriculum demands. Staff have generally met these challenges with resourcefulness and energy, although the overload on some individuals is a cause of concern within the association. The demands on the clerical and administrative staff across the association have also increased, especially as a consequence of the development and implementation of management information systems. As demands on staff increase, voluntary members have also undertaken more responsibilities. They have ultimate responsibility for decision making and the appointment of staff, as well as for the smooth operation of the branches.

82 Appointments of staff are conducted in line with the Workers' Educational Association's equal opportunities policy and guidelines, and the recruitment of full-time staff is through national advertisements. However, there has been little evaluation of the success or otherwise of staff-recruitment procedures, especially as they affect part-time tutors. There is a need to broaden the range of background and experience of those on the tutors' panel from which tutors are selected.

83 There are significant variations between districts in the terms and conditions accorded to part-time tutors. A national contract for all part-time tutors is being developed in response to recent legislative changes and this will address the major differences. The association should ensure that practice and entitlements are consistent across all districts. All staff should have job descriptions which match their current roles and responsibilities.

Equipment/learning resources

84 Learning resources are made available in various ways. Where educational buildings are used there is normally access to basic equipment such as whiteboards, flip charts and sometimes audio-visual equipment. Districts and branches generally keep a pool of materials and equipment held centrally and loan collections are sometimes offered by local libraries or universities. However, the association is very dependent on learning materials made or brought in by tutors themselves, which are frequently of a high standard.

85 In most of the sessions inspected, the equipment available to support teaching and learning was adequate. Handouts were generally relevant and appropriate. In some specialist buildings, the resources available were excellent. In a minority of cases, not even the most basic resources, such as a whiteboard or blackboard, were available and, in others, equipment such as video recorders or audio-tape recorders, which would have enhanced teaching and learning, were absent. There were also instances where a range of equipment was available on site but the tutor failed to use it or used it ineffectively.

86 Difficulties of access to particular resources also affect the responsiveness and range of the curriculum. This occurs in creative arts, but is particularly significant where information technology is being used, either as a tool to support learning or in providing information technology education. However, there are examples of good information technology resources, especially where portable computers are used. The labour telematics centre in Manchester, a Workers' Educational Association national project, is a centre of excellence available to the association, providing opportunities for work-based students to learn about developments such as electronic mail.

87 The association does not have an equipment strategy which would establish minimum standards and enable it to evaluate the impact the availability of equipment has on teaching and learning. This should be addressed.

88 Equipment to support administrative and clerical staff has recently been upgraded to take into account changed patterns of work following the introduction of the new management information system.

Accommodation

89 In fulfilling its aim to provide adult learning opportunities as near to people's homes as possible, the Workers' Educational Association used over 3,000 venues in 1993-94. The association itself owns only six buildings. Almost all the teaching takes place in accommodation that is lent or hired from other organisations. In 1993-94, 44 per cent of the sessions were run in LEA accommodation, 37 per cent in community centres, 6 per cent in further education colleges, 2 per cent in universities and 11 per cent in other venues. The increasing pressure on LEAs and other providers to charge economic rents is having a significant effect on the association's resources as much of this accommodation had previously been either free or inexpensive. There are wide variations in accommodation costs across the country. The increase in charges affects the London district in particular. A small number of sessions are offered in members' homes.

90 The quality of the accommodation for teaching varies widely, from high-quality, purpose-specific centres to a small minority of poor-quality buildings which are shabby, inappropriately furnished and sometimes raise health and safety issues. The association is sensitive to accommodation matters and is putting in place a national strategy, first to conduct an audit across all districts and then to establish minimum standards covering health and safety and fitness for purpose. Current vetting arrangements in the districts are not always adhered to systematically.

91 In the majority of sessions observed during the inspection the accommodation was adequate. Buildings were accessible to local people, though access for those with disabilities was available only in a minority of cases. Classrooms were generally appropriate in size, though a few were too small for the number of students attending. Furniture was generally adequate. Some exceptions to this included adults having to sit on chairs designed for infants. Access to libraries is possible only on some main education sites. Canteen facilities and creches are available only on a small number of sites. A general weakness relating to the use of shared accommodation is the difficulty of providing a stimulating learning environment through the effective use of good display, including the display of students' work.

92 Accommodation to support the management and administrative functions of the association is often too small for the number of staff involved and makes it difficult for required tasks to be carried out effectively.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

93 Strengths of the association include:

- the extensive range of provision in a wide spread of urban and rural settings including isolated communities
- some very good provision for socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged adults
- the growing sense of national direction and purpose
- the sensitive and generally successful approach to organisational change
- committed staff and voluntary members working effectively together
- much effective teaching
- experienced and knowledgeable tutors committed to their students
- high levels of student satisfaction
- generally good lines of communication.

94 To improve its provision further, the association should:

- monitor the pattern of provision to ensure that all aspects of its mission are met
- further develop the strategic planning process to achieve an effective cycle of planning which incorporates the districts and the national association
- establish a more systematic approach to quality assurance
- improve the effectiveness of management information systems
- provide additional support for the changing role of district and national secretaries
- establish a student guidance policy
- provide part-time tutors with further training on methods of teaching and learning
- continue to develop the measurement of learning outcomes on all courses
- develop effective equipment and accommodation strategies.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by mode of funding (1993-94)

 - 2 Enrolments by mode of funding and curriculum area (1993-94)

 - 3 Core staff profile - core staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

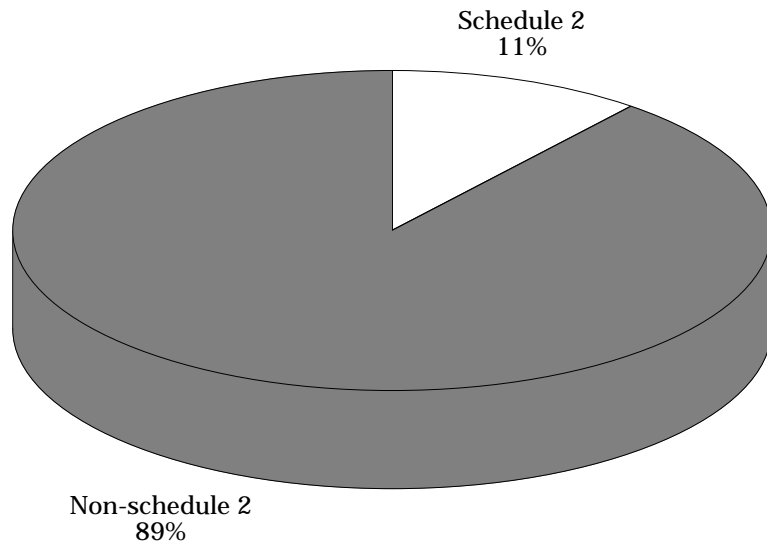
 - 4 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 5 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

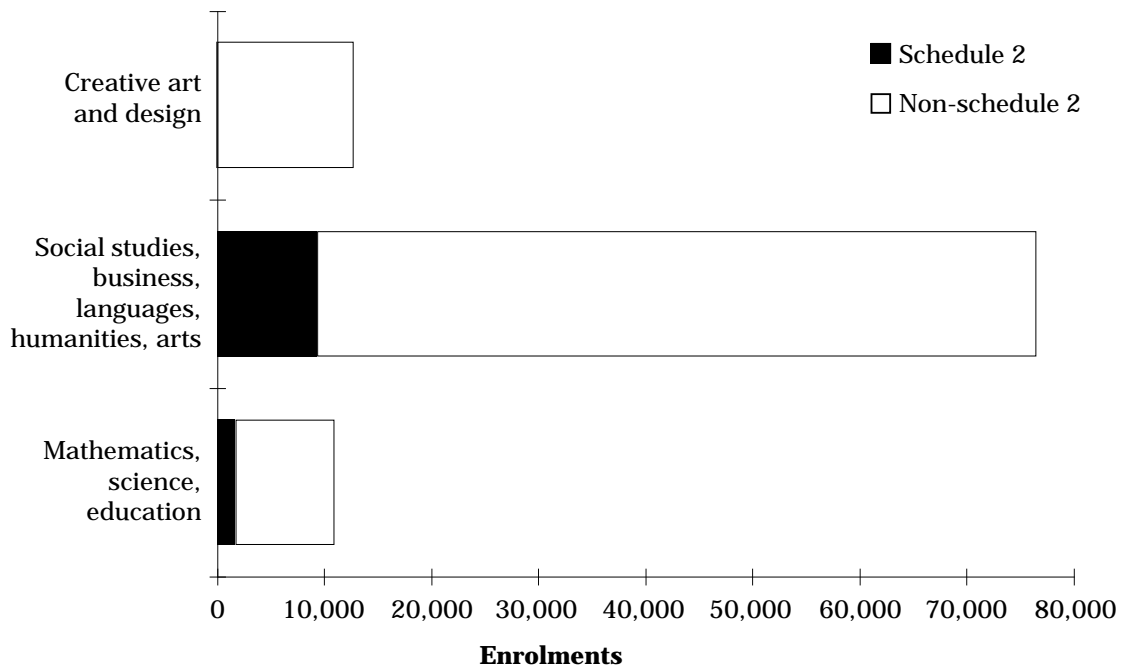
Workers' Educational Association: percentage enrolments by mode of funding (1993-94)



Enrolments: 100,282

Figure 2

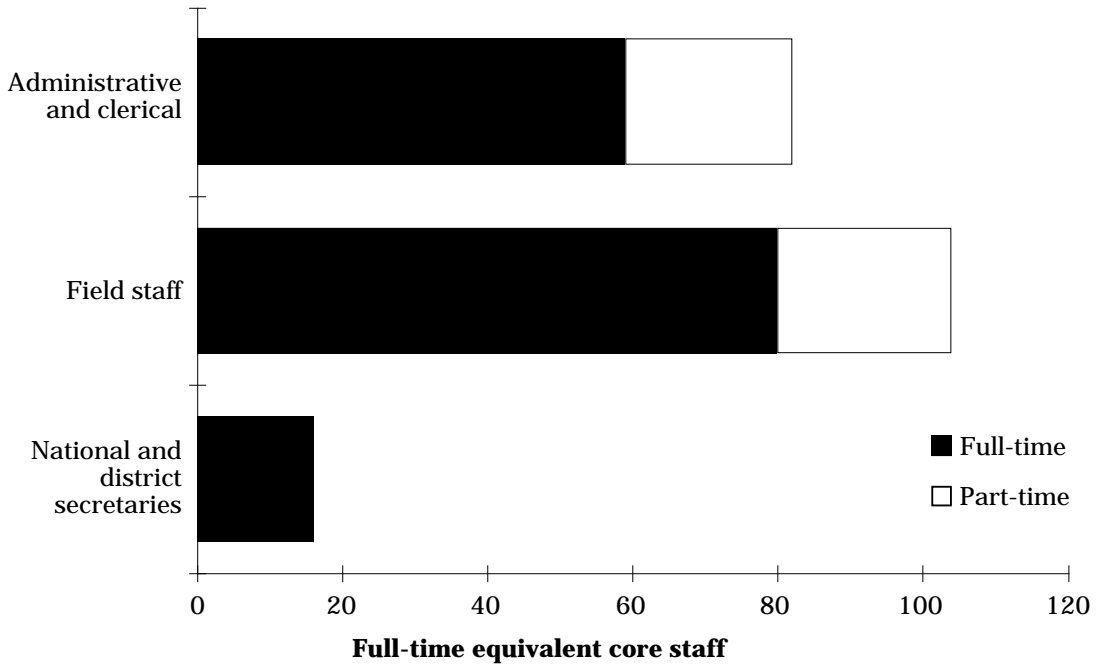
Workers' Educational Association: enrolments by mode of funding and curriculum area (1993-94)



Enrolments: 100,282

Figure 3

Workers' Educational Association: core staff profile - core staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

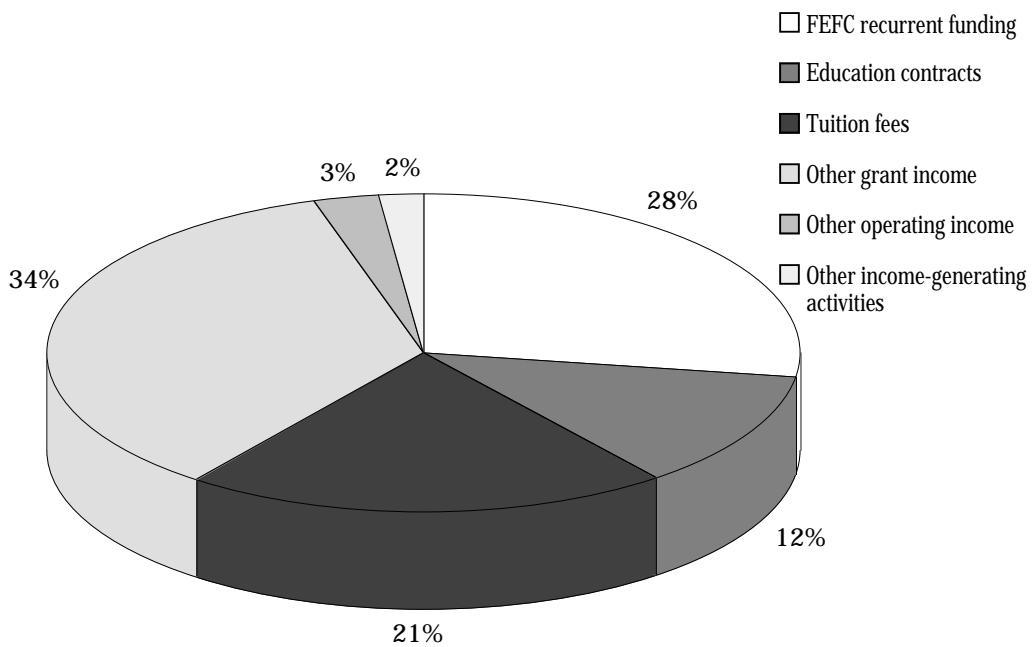


Full-time equivalent core staff: 202

Note: this excludes approximately 3,000 part-time tutors (significant majority work maximum four hours per week).

Figure 4

Workers' Educational Association: income (for 16 months to July 1994)

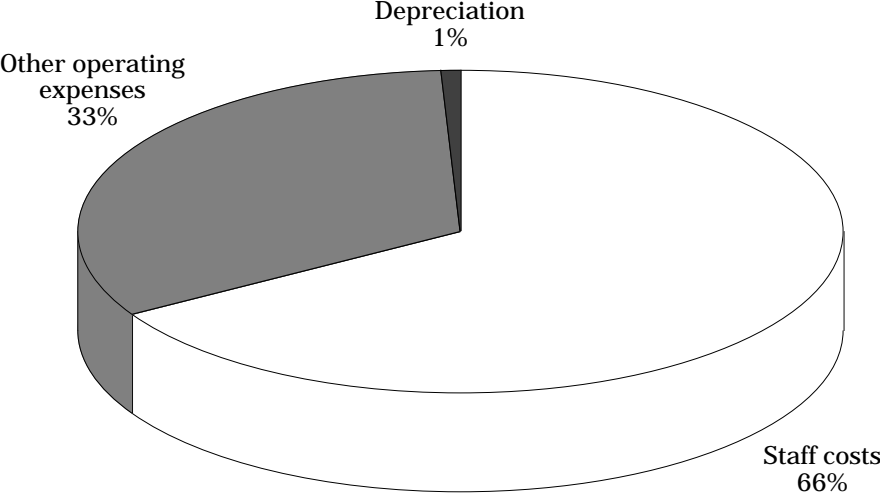


Income: £12,815,711

Note: this chart excludes £15,520 capital grants.

Figure 5

Workers' Educational Association: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £12,456,227

Note: this chart excludes £32,537 interest payable.

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