

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Oxford College of Further Education

February 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

By June 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	59%	29%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	14%	50%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	12%	54%	30%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 10/97

OXFORD COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected March-November 1996

Summary

Oxford College of Further Education offers a wide range of courses. It is responsive to the needs of the local community, and has excellent links with the TEC and local employers. The college has a well-informed and active governing body and procedures for strategic planning are effective. The work of the student services department and of the learning skills centre is of a high standard. The college offers a wide range of opportunities for staff development. Resources are particularly good in engineering and business studies. Variations in the organisation of academic departments lead to inconsistent implementation of college policies and uneven standards. The number of classes graded 1 or 2 was 8 per cent lower than the national average for the further education sector, and there were low levels of student achievement in a number of areas. Issues that the college should address include: improving the library stock; increasing open access to computers for students; poor planning of courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; the inconsistency of tutorial support; increasing the effectiveness of the academic board; the continued development of the quality assurance system; and resolution of the future use of the Blackbird Leys site.

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	4
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	3
accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Health and social care	2
Construction	3	Hair and beauty	3
Engineering	2	Art and design	3
Business and management	2	English and foreign languages	2
Leisure, tourism and hospitality	3	Social sciences	3
		Adult basic education and ESOL	3
		SLDD provision	4

INTRODUCTION

1 Oxford College of Further Education was inspected in three stages. Enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the beginning of the autumn term of 1996. Between March and October 1996, 18 inspectors spent 58 days assessing the quality of teaching and learning in the college's main curriculum areas. They visited 261 classes and examined students' work. In November 1996, eight inspectors spent 32 days assessing aspects of cross-college provision. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, the central and senior management teams, teachers, staff with cross-college responsibilities, support and administrative staff, and students. Inspectors consulted employers, a representative of the Heart of England Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), members of community groups, head teachers and parents of students at the college. They also attended college meetings and examined policy statements, minutes of committees and working papers.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Oxford College of Further Education was established in 1960. It occupies six sites in Oxford. The two major sites are the city centre Opens campus and the Blackbird Leys campus on the southern outskirts. There are four smaller sites elsewhere in the city. The college offers a wide range of academic and vocational courses in nine of the 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. In 1995-96, approximately 30 per cent of the college's funding came from sources other than the FEFC.

3 The college's students mostly come from Oxfordshire. The 1991 census figures for Oxfordshire show a population of 547,584, and for the city of Oxford a population of 110,103 of whom 3 per cent are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Approximately 80 per cent of businesses in the county employ less than 10 people. Only 1 per cent of companies have more than 200 employees, but they account for nearly one-third of the working population. Three-quarters of firms in Oxfordshire are in the service sector. Oxfordshire's unemployment rate is lower than the national average at under 4 per cent. A survey conducted in 1995 by the TEC shows that nearly half the working population is qualified to at least national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 3 or its equivalent, compared with a national average of 40 per cent.

4 The college attracts students from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities. It is a major provider of education for students in engineering and construction, and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In the 1995-96 academic year, the college enrolled a total of 17,219 students (4,762 full-time equivalents), of whom 2,447 were studying full time. Approximately 43 per cent of students were aged 25 or above, and 11.5 per cent of the student population came from a minority ethnic background. During the last three years the college has grown by about 18 per cent. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode

of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

5 The college's mission is to create learning opportunities which enable individuals to achieve their personal, educational and employment goals; to work with employers; and to serve local, national and international needs.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

6 Senior managers are aware of the government's aims for further education. National policies and targets inform the college's strategic plan. The college is responsive to changing employment trends and to the needs of the community and of business. A wide range of programmes is offered, including 128 full-time courses, 365 part-time courses and 62 courses in a community education scheme. There were 1,600 community education students in 1995-96, of whom some were on recreational courses. There are 1,035 students studying through the college's open learning unit. The college runs training courses for industry and provides opportunities for some students with learning difficulties through a separate training unit. In addition, the college offers full-time courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities which include programmes for students with profound physical or intellectual impairment. The college also has a unit which provides support for students with impaired hearing.

7 There are 16 full-time general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses available to students at the college. Programmes for full-time and part-time students in accounting, beauty therapy, catering and hospitality, construction trades, electrical installation, hairdressing, and travel services lead to NVQs at levels 1 to 3, and up to level 5 in some subjects. Eighteen general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects are available to part-time students, whilst mathematics, English and information technology are available to full-time students. There are 15 subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) for both full-time and part-time students. GNVQ advanced students are able to take an additional GCE A level subject; GCE A level students may take some GNVQ units but few do so.

8 The college works in a consortium with Oxford city schools to provide GCE A level courses and GNVQ programmes at foundation and intermediate level. Consortium members have a common prospectus and timetable. Two hundred school pupils are taught part of their GCE A level or GNVQ courses at the college. The college is responsible for assessment and internal verification of GNVQ awards. The Oxford school head teachers meet the college principal and the district education officer regularly. In general, the college makes a strong contribution to education in the city.

9 The college is regarded as active and open in its dealings with employers. There are advisory committees in nine curriculum areas, although not in art and the performing arts which have other links with employers through the personal contacts of staff and the use of practitioners as part-time staff. Attendance at meetings and other involvement by companies vary. The advisory committees are being modified to make them more effective. The college has close connections with large firms such as Rover. Short courses designed to meet the requirements of companies are provided both on company premises and in the college.

10 The college has strong community links. There is good liaison with the health and social services authorities, particularly for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college works with appropriate bodies in the city and the county to provide literacy and numeracy classes and English as a second language. It has expanded these programmes to meet increasing demand and has established a learning centre for basic skills at the Blackbird Leys site. Courses for women returning to study include subjects such as science.

11 There is a close relationship between the college and the Heart of England TEC. The college has been consistently successful in its bids for funding from the TEC, the single regeneration budget and the government's competitiveness and development funds. The principal is a member of the national forum for national targets for education and training. Other joint work schemes with the TEC include: a 'telematics' project which has led to the installation of advanced computer equipment to serve a group of colleges; two education business partnerships; the local learning partnership; the Cowley training centre; the college nursery and creche, which improve access for mature students; and support for industrial placements.

12 European activities are a significant feature of the college. Some are supported with European Union funding. Links with 13 countries include student and teacher exchanges, visits by lecturers, work placements, and joint activities in the performing arts and media studies. In 1994, the college received a European curriculum award for its work. The college has provided company language training for industry, including courses for Unipart and classes in Japanese for staff at a local restaurant with a considerable reputation. GNVQ units in languages are now offered across the curriculum, although few students choose to take them.

13 A partnership with Oxford Brookes University enables the college to offer higher national diplomas in engineering, construction and science. A higher national certificate in business information technology is franchised from Coventry University, and a diploma in management studies from Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education. An international study programme which gives access to higher education has been established jointly with Westminster College and Ruskin College,

Oxford. There are 60 students enrolled on this course, of whom 12 are from outside the European Union.

14 The college promotes itself through widespread advertising in libraries, at careers conventions and school parents' evenings, in the local press, at the cinema and on radio. Some of its literature is written in minority languages, mainly those of the Indian subcontinent. The college has a stand in a local shopping centre. The college has appropriate plans for marketing its services. The scope of marketing is fully understood by senior managers but in the college is often seen as being restricted to promotional activities. Some staff are unclear whether the centralised services or the course teams are responsible for marketing. Research into student and employer satisfaction has been commissioned from the responsive college unit. The findings have been analysed but some departments do not understand how to translate this information into action to improve student recruitment. At present, the college tends to market and to promote a range of products rather than to present a coherent image of the institution which accurately reflects its mission statement and values.

15 Policies promoting equal opportunities and freedom from harassment have been reviewed recently by the governors. Staff are aware of their main elements but the extent to which they are applied to the curriculum varies significantly between departments and courses.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

16 The governing body has a membership of 14, which it plans to raise to 16. There was one vacancy at the time of inspection. There are seven independent members, a representative of the TEC, two co-opted members, the principal, two members of college staff and a student. Governors bring a wide range of experience to their work. Standing orders for the board, which were revised in November 1996, require that there should be members with expertise in estates, law, personnel, finance, and marketing, and that governors should additionally have interests or experience in any of the 11 curriculum and curriculum support areas at the college. When two vacancies occurred earlier in the year, the board reviewed the skills of its remaining members and was able to complement them when appointing two new members through public advertisements.

17 Committees of the board deal with audit, constitutional matters, employment policy, remuneration, finance, and curriculum evaluation. The membership and terms of reference of all committees were reviewed in October 1996. The rigour of the board's procedures has been improved significantly since the appointment of a new clerk to the governors in 1996. The standard of agendas, minutes and supporting papers is good. Governors are required to comply with a stringent code of conduct and have registered their interests. The board is considering the adoption of a formal self-evaluation procedure. Governors take an active part in the

college's affairs. They attend meetings of the board and its committees regularly. There was an average attendance of 80 per cent at full board meetings in 1995-96. Governors also take part in social events that are organised by the college.

18 Members of the board are familiar with national issues in education. Governors assess courses in the college through the work of the evaluation committee. About 10 courses are assessed each year, each one by a governor who may have professional experience in the subject. These evaluations are useful in making governors aware of curriculum issues at a level of detail, and in demonstrating their interest in the college to staff and students. Nevertheless, the recorded outcomes of this process vary in focus and quality. There is a risk of involving governors in staff issues which might be better dealt with through managers. The board is aware of the danger of a confusion of role between governance and management and has debated the matter. As a result of issues arising from the activities of the evaluation committee, guidelines have been drafted to help governors in their dealings with staff, students and members of the public. The governing body should ensure that the detailed work of the evaluation committee does not distract it from taking a broad overview of the curriculum and academic standards in the college.

19 The principal and the chairman of governors meet at least once a week. They have a close working relationship. The board sets annual targets for the principal. The financial targets are quantifiable. Some other targets are imprecise; difficulties may arise when there is a need to determine whether or not targets have been met. The principal is appraised by the chairman and vice-chairman of governors.

20 The governors determine the main aims for the college every third year at the beginning of the strategic planning cycle. These aims form the context for annual revisions of the college's plan and those of its departments and sections. The sections set out their proposals and, after debate, they are incorporated into departmental business plans. Heads of department present their plans to the central management team comprising the principal and three vice-principals. Each plan is considered in detail; its financial implications are assessed; and a formal agreement defines the level of provision that each department will make. The strategic plan is then revised and presented to the board for its approval. The progress of the plan is monitored every three months. Matters such as students' recruitment and retention are regarded as financial issues. They are monitored carefully by the governors.

21 The college is in the process of resolving several complex matters which significantly affect its character and efficiency. The governing body has been considering the most effective use of its site at Blackbird Leys for some considerable time. It was not until the beginning of 1996 that governors finally committed themselves to retaining and developing the site. They have now to decide which subjects should be taught there, and

to evaluate the implications for the college's accommodation strategy. This work will follow the outcome of a college-wide curriculum review that has just been initiated. Moreover, the academic board has been widely regarded as ineffective for a long time. A review of its constitution, operations and relationship to the college's management structure was initiated at the suggestion of staff members in March 1996. Recommendations are to be submitted to the governors by the end of the year. It is anticipated that the reconstituted board should be able to provide reliable and representative advice to the principal for the first time for some years.

22 The central management team meets fortnightly. The three vice-principals are, respectively, responsible for curriculum and quality, planning and resources, and personnel and communications. Their roles and responsibilities are clear. The heads of the seven teaching departments and the two student support departments join the central management team to form the senior management team which meets every two weeks to deal with detailed operational matters.

23 The organisation and management structures of teaching departments have been allowed to develop independently. They vary widely. Some departments comprise groups of subjects which do not relate to one another. This can lead to difficulties in securing collaboration, mutual support, and effective leadership in curriculum development and delivery. Some departments divide into several sections. Each deals with a single subject such as English or mathematics. Other departments, for example engineering, have assistant heads to carry out general management tasks. In business studies, there is another arrangement which is based on programme area co-ordinators. In some departments section heads manage large budgets, whilst in others they have no financial responsibility beyond handling a small sum for class materials. Differences of approach to departmental management create unequal workloads for section heads. Their job descriptions are only partly generic, and the level of authority which they are required to exercise over the curriculum is sometimes unclear. These differences in arrangements of structure and management impede the consistent or rapid translation of college policy into practice and they contribute to significant variations both within and between departments in the quality of student support, teaching, examination results, quality assurance and marketing.

24 Considerable efforts have been made in the last 18 months to improve communication in the college. Briefings are given by the principal to the senior management team, and these are circulated through departments and sections. More complex matters, such as the FEFC funding methodology, are clearly explained in printed 'Inter-coms'. Less formal aspects of the college's life are covered in a newsletter. Electronic mail is being used increasingly for rapid internal communication. Some senior managers and governors make a point of visiting the college's many buildings.

25 General policies are applied to financial projections, limiting pay costs to 70 per cent of total expenditure and income from FEFC to 70 per cent of the college's total revenue. Decisions on the allocation of money to departments are taken, during consideration of their business plans, on the basis of a core of expenditure which reflects continuing commitments, and an additional element which supports new ventures and growth. College overheads are distributed to departments according to the funding units which they earn, to their staffing costs, and to accommodation which they occupy. Income and expenditure are monitored carefully, and accounts are produced monthly for budget holders and governors. The college had an average level of funding of £16.82 per unit in 1995-96, compared with a median for general further education and tertiary colleges of £18.13 per unit. In each of the last three years the college has failed to achieve the targets for student recruitment agreed with the FEFC. This has led to substantial repayments to the FEFC for the two years 1993-95. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

26 There is an active management team with responsibility for information systems. The team has access to good equipment and produces data on finance, students' enrolments, attendance and retention rates. The college makes satisfactory returns that are, for example, able to meet external requirements such as the FEFC's individualised student record. The team is also working to improve the analysis of students' achievements and destinations, and those aspects of staff records which have resulted from the introduction of more flexible contracts of employment.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

27 Many aspects of students' recruitment, guidance and support are the responsibility of the department for student services. Its work is organised in four sections, three of which are led by assistant heads of department. One is responsible for reception, guidance, and examinations; another for counselling, healthcare, and accommodation; the third for childcare, refectory services, and advice to the student association. The head of department leads the fourth section which has responsibility for the senior tutor network, enrolment, and the student handbook. The department is well managed and staff work together to meet the department's mission and goals. They evaluate their work in the department rigorously and have adopted some indicators to measure the quality of their performance. Relations with other departments are good, especially with the department for learning services. The department for student services establishes frameworks and guidelines for the support and guidance of students at every phase of their contact with the college. The delivery of much of this work is the responsibility of academic departments. The department does not have the authority to intervene to ensure that its guidelines are followed.

28 Enrolment is conducted efficiently. The college organises a wide range of events such as open days and 'taster' days, which ensure that potential students and their parents are aware of the courses that are available. Partnership with the local schools helps to give school-leavers clear choices. Many staff, when they conduct interviews, are sensitive to the non-academic factors that affect a student's will to succeed with a programme of study. However, not all staff take account of the broader aspirations of applicants. This year, the college provided special sessions for students who are receiving the new job seekers' allowance. Records of achievement are not used at enrolment, nor are students encouraged to update them during their time at college as a preparation for making applications for employment or further study.

29 There is a common framework for induction, but it is not consistently used either in dealings between or within departments. The most successful inductions give students a sense of security and excitement about the programme of study. Other inductions left many gaps in the day and over-emphasised administration. Despite receiving an introduction to the college charter as part of the induction programme, many students remain unaware of its contents and, therefore, of their rights and responsibilities.

30 All full-time students who entered the college this year took tests for numeracy and literacy which were devised by the learning services department. This department has been awarded the national Basic Skills Agency kitemark for its work. Tests take account of vocational aspects of the courses on which students have enrolled. The department is now helping three times as many students as it did at the same time last year. Students are receiving help earlier in their studies. Support is provided to students both individually and in groups and, where appropriate, to all students on a course. About 80 per cent of students who received additional help last year completed their courses successfully. Assessment of need is thorough and the support provided for these students is both appropriate and effective.

31 Each teaching department has a senior tutor. Students are allocated to a personal tutor by the senior tutor in their department. Tutorials are timetabled for all full-time students. The senior tutor network, led by the head of the department of student services, is responsible for developing standards for personal tutoring. Departments and course teams have the freedom to evolve different approaches. Several times in the year teaching is suspended across the college to allow time to evaluate students and to plan the future direction of their work. Many students report that the tutorial system helps them to fulfil their potential. Relations between students and tutors are generally good at a personal level, but there is a range of tutorial practices which, at worst, falls well below the standard set out in the college charter. Some students reported that they had no tutorials, and others that it was up to them whether or not they met their tutor. The tutorial support available for part-time students is equally

varied. The college is reviewing the tutorial system and intends to set guidelines for good practice. The introduction of the senior tutor network is a useful, but recent innovation, and the role and authority of senior tutors are unclear in some departments. The senior tutor does not appear at all in some departmental organisational charts. Firmer guidance is required if effective tutorials are to be provided consistently throughout the college.

32 Some of the services offered by student services are very good indeed, in particular, counselling and the work of the health care and guidance centres. Without them some students would have enrolled on inappropriate courses, or would not have completed their studies. The student services department has close links with external agencies so that staff may consult specialists. Welfare and financial advice are readily accessible and increasing numbers of students use these services. The nursery helps a significant number of students who would be unable to participate in further education without childcare. Nursery staff offer both support to parents and provide an appropriate educational experience for the children. Staff working in student services have increased their work at the Blackbird Leys site, but are available to give help and advice for a significantly shorter time than at Oxpens.

33 Guidance is thorough for students who plan to progress to higher or additional further education. Advice for students seeking employment is acknowledged by the college to be in need of improvement. The college is late in collecting data about students' destinations, and the level of response from students is much lower than in many other colleges. The college has negotiated an increase in the time available for its students from the Thames Careers Guidance Service.

34 Many students criticised the lack of extra-curricular activities. The college recently reviewed its liberal studies programme and subsequently abandoned it. It has been recommended that a new post of activities co-ordinator be created, but no action has yet been taken. Consistent support for extra-curricular work is urgently needed. The students who are trying to reinvigorate the student association are working hard, but their commitment has not always been supported by the academic departments.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

35 Of the 261 sessions inspected, 51 per cent had strengths which outweighed their weaknesses, 37 per cent had a balance of strengths and weaknesses and 12 per cent had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. This profile is poorer than the average for the further education sector identified in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report for 1995-96*. Teaching on courses leading to qualifications at foundation or intermediate level is generally worse than that on advanced programmes. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		4	24	15	3	0	46
GCSE		0	3	4	2	0	9
GNVQ		4	13	23	3	1	44
NVQ		10	25	16	5	0	56
Other*		13	38	38	17	0	106
Total		31	103	96	30	1	261

**other includes access to higher education, teacher training, basic numeracy and literacy and courses for students with learning difficulties.*

36 Most schemes of work comprised lists of topics or activities that were to be covered during courses. There was a lack of comment on the methods and resources to be used, the most appropriate means of assessment and the expected learning outcomes. There was little evidence that most teaching teams had considered either course content or teaching methods in any detail. This often led to unco-ordinated teaching and a poor educational experience for students. For example, the aims of many of the courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were too general to provide an adequate basis for preparing individual learning programmes. On the other hand, notable exceptions included the well-designed modular international study programme, and the further and adult education teaching certificate course. Practical courses, such as motor vehicle engineering, electrical installation, fabrication and welding, and the practical components of the hospitality and catering programmes, were well organised. Teaching teams on the childcare courses devised programmes carefully to integrate work in college and on placement.

37 Despite the weaknesses in course planning most teachers prepared conscientiously for individual lessons although apart from a few courses, lesson plans were not used except during inspection. In the better lessons, aims and objectives were stated clearly at the start and students were aware that the class was part of a whole programme. Reference was made to previous work; students' knowledge and understanding were checked; and precise directions were given for future work. In an English as a foreign language class, the teacher began with a 'brainstorming' exercise on synonyms and then drew students into a discussion about words that had the same or similar meanings. Working in pairs, students had to produce an advertisement making use of dictionary definitions. This was a difficult exercise. Nevertheless, most students succeeded in using some sophisticated vocabulary in an appropriate way.

38 In the better lessons, teachers were imaginative in finding ways to maintain their students' interest. They used techniques such as group work, paired work, brainstorming and discussion in plenary sessions. Students with learning difficulties on the new 'opportunities for work' course worked well together learning teamwork skills. A teacher

demonstrated movements to dance students, giving vivid descriptions to help them understand. The group was asked to imagine that one sinuous movement was like warm olive oil running down their backs. The topic for a GCE A level language lesson was revision of a point of grammar that students found difficult. The teacher had prepared a variety of activities, including games and small group exercises, and used learning resources such as flashcards. The pace was lively; the whole lesson was conducted in the foreign language; and the group came together at the end to share what they had learned.

39 In the weaker classes planning was poor and activities were unco-ordinated. The planning of some GCE A level social science lessons took no account of the teaching strategies which would be most appropriate to the student group, nor of the resources which would be needed. A media studies brief required students to work in teams to devise a theme, write a script, plan characterisation, select locations, and complete the costing for a short video for Channel 4. Staff had made no attempt to guide students towards planning out their work in stages. Students were unable to conduct themselves with the maturity that the brief required. It was unlikely that they would complete a major portion of the work by the deadline. In a session for students with profound learning difficulties, the activities on offer had scant connection with one another and little learning was taking place. Music played non-stop. One student was doing the same two puzzles repeatedly, while another banged a tambourine at will.

40 In a significant number of lessons there was too little variety in the learning activities and resources that were used. Teachers failed to stimulate students and to build-up their ability to learn independently. With a little more thought and attention to detail, most of these sessions could have been successful. In one lesson, the teacher lectured for 90 minutes, pausing only to allow students to copy notes from the whiteboard. Questions were sometimes asked, but then always answered by the teacher. One student used the lesson to copy notes on another subject from a friend's file. In some classes, no allowance was made for differing levels of ability. Students completed tasks at different times, but those who finished first had nothing to do while others were finishing their work.

41 In most curriculum areas, assignments were set regularly and marked promptly. The more effective teachers gave detailed guidance on how students could improve their work. Most teachers kept records of students' achievements and informed them regularly of their progress. The assessment of practical skills was generally good. However, some courses had no consistent approach to setting and marking work, and the quality of marking was uneven. Some teachers provided few, if any, written comments, and those that were made were terse and sometimes dismissive. Grammatical and spelling errors were not always corrected.

42 Practical work was well organised and, in most areas, proper attention was paid to health and safety. New students on welding courses

were taken through health and safety precautions before starting any practical work. In one session, evening class students were learning welding; a skill necessary for their jobs. They were under constant supervision and the teacher brought them together from time to time to demonstrate correct technique. The quality of practical teaching in construction was good. Staff helped students by giving effective demonstrations and providing them with well-prepared guidance notes and instructions.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

43 Students aged 16 to 18 taking GCE AS/A level examinations in 1996 scored, on average, 4.2 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This places the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector, based on the data published by the Department for Education and Employment. Fifty-six per cent of 16 to 19 year old students in their final year of their intermediate vocational qualifications, and 73 per cent of those taking advanced vocational qualifications, gained their awards in 1996. These performance measures again place the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector. Neither of these measures include the achievements of older students, who form the majority of the college population.

44 The analysis of students' achievement that follows is based mainly on data about students who completed their courses in 1996. The college was unable to present complete information for earlier years in the format requested by the inspectorate. Examination results vary widely both between and within departments. There are low retention and attendance rates on a number of courses. In some areas, students on part-time courses perform better than full-time students. The achievements of mature students on the access to higher education course, on professional and management courses, and on the further and adult education teachers certificate, are particularly good.

45 Students' achievement in 1996 on the national diploma in sports science was good, with 80 per cent of those who started the two-year course achieving the award. Students on part-time advanced and higher education courses in science and information technology were particularly successful. Results in the new GNVQ advanced course in science were poor. Half of those who started the course did not finish and only half of those who did finish were successful. The achievements of students on the GNVQ intermediate course in science were also poor. Only 38 per cent of those enrolled successfully completed their course. Results for the science and mathematics GCE A level programmes are uneven. In a number of subjects, including biology and chemistry, the pass rates match the national averages for students in further education sector colleges, but many students do not complete their courses and do not sit the examinations. The college offers a small number of GCSE science and mathematics programmes. Students' achievements in GCSE mathematics

are similar to the national average for further education colleges, above the average in double science, but below it in both physics and human physiology.

46 Students' achievements on engineering courses vary widely. Students did better on the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national and higher national certificate courses in mechanical and production engineering than on electrical and electronic engineering programmes. Pass rates on both the national and higher national certificate in mechanical and production engineering are above average at 80 per cent. In electrical and electronic engineering, the pass rates in the national and higher national certificates were well below the national averages at 48 per cent and 38 per cent respectively. The department completed its first GNVQ courses in 1996. Students on the advanced course achieved a 40 per cent pass rate, and on the intermediate course 39 per cent. The success rate on the BTEC first certificate in motor vehicle studies is similar to the national average. Students on NVQ craft courses in electronics servicing, motor vehicle engineering and electrical engineering often achieve good results.

47 Students' achievements on the BTEC national certificate and national diploma courses in construction were below the national averages in 1996. The outcomes of both courses were affected by poor retention. Only a third of national certificate students completed their courses and just 18 per cent were successful. Students on the higher national certificate course were more successful, with 90 per cent of those enrolled gaining the award. Results achieved by students on NVQ plumbing courses are good, whilst those for the part-time day course in brickwork, carpentry and painting and decorating at NVQ level 2, are poor.

48 The rate of achievement of students on GNVQ business programmes in 1996 was adversely affected by high dropout, but most of those who completed their courses were successful. Over half the students on the intermediate course and 40 per cent of those on the advanced course, failed to complete their courses. The results achieved by students on higher national certificate courses in business studies are good, but half of those who were on the day-release course failed to complete their courses. The department runs a wide range of NVQ business courses at different levels and for different modes of attendance. The rates of success on these courses are mixed. Both retention and pass rates among students on management and professional studies courses are good.

49 Students' retention and success rates fell sharply when the first GNVQ advanced course in hospitality and catering replaced the BTEC national diploma. Students' achievements on the professional catering NVQ level 2 in 1995 were very poor, with only 12 per cent achieving the complete award. This course has been changed, and students now set out to achieve both an NVQ level 2 and level 3, in three years. Results gained by students on part-time day courses in 1996 were poor. Fewer than half of those

who started the year achieved the full award in the time anticipated. This applies to students seeking the awards of the Institute of Meat, and those seeking NVQ level 3 in kitchen and larder work, supervisory food production or food service, and confectionary and patisserie. Some students continue to attend college to gain all the competencies necessary for the NVQ. Only half the students were successful on the GNVQ advanced programme in leisure and tourism in 1996, although this was a considerable improvement on the previous year when only a third achieved the award. Results on the GNVQ intermediate course are also poor, with fewer than 40 per cent of those enrolled gaining the award.

50 Results on childcare courses are good. In 1996, all the students enrolled on the part-time NVQ level 2 in childcare were successful, and three-quarters of those enrolled for the National Nursery Examinations Board certificate achieved the award. Results on health and care courses have been less good. Whilst all the students who completed the GNVQ advanced award in health and social care gained a merit or distinction, more than half of the original group had left. The results on the GNVQ intermediate and the foundation level courses were very poor, with only 15 per cent and 33 per cent respectively, gaining the award. Results on hair and beauty courses have been variable, with the best results in beauty therapy courses. Three-quarters of the students on the two-year beauty therapy course were successful last year. The proportion of students achieving a complete NVQ level 2 in hairdressing is small, with only 20 per cent of those on the full-time course and 47 per cent of part-time students succeeding within the usual period of time.

51 The standard and presentation of finished work in art and design varied widely; much of this work was poor. The pass rates achieved by students on the BTEC national diplomas in graphic design and performing arts are consistently good at above 80 per cent. At the other extreme, only four of the 22 students who started the national diploma in design crafts, and half of those on the national diploma in clothing, completed their courses. The results achieved by students on the one-year foundation course in art and design have been good in each of the last three years. Only half the students on the two-year 'foundation plus' course were successful last year. GCE A level work was satisfactory, and students achieved good examination results.

52 Achievements in English at GCE A level and GCSE level are good. The GCE A level results of full-time and part-time students are above the national averages for further education colleges at both A to E and A to C grades. The results for the access course in humanities were good in 1996, but the number of students who have failed to complete the course has risen steadily over the last three years. Student dropout is high on full-time GCE A level psychology and sociology programmes, but those who took the examination in 1996 achieved results that are better than the national averages. Language students are well motivated and enthusiastic and they generally achieve well. GCE A levels results were

particularly good last year in Spanish and Italian, and for the evening course in Russian. One-year vocational language courses attract large numbers of students and their retention is good. Although many of these students progress from one level to the next, the college should seek ways to encourage more to present themselves for formal accreditation.

53 Recognition of the achievements of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is through a range of qualifications including numberpower, computer literacy and information technology certificates, a vocational access certificate, English Speaking Board examinations, and various first aid and hygiene qualifications. The use of such external accreditation is appropriate, but the achievements of students are modest. For students whose classes are classed as vocational, there needs to be more pathways to work related accreditation.

54 Many students have gained regional or national recognition in vocational, cultural or sporting fields. In the past year, a GCE A level student in Italian was awarded a certificate of excellence. Another student became *The Guardian* young political writer of the year. A chemistry student was among the top five from all the GCE A level examining boards and two students received Medical Research Council awards for the best BTEC national diploma and higher national certificate projects. In sport, one student gained a silver medal in the world canoeing championships; another is a member of the England women's cricket team; and several others have represented their county at football and swimming.

55 Of the 634 students aged 16 to 18 who gained awards in 1995, 18 per cent progressed to higher education, 27 per cent to additional further education, and 30 per cent went into employment or training schemes. The destinations of 25 per cent were unknown. Of the 907 students aged 19 or over, 5 per cent entered higher education and 6 per cent continued in further education. Four per cent went into other training schemes. Seventy per cent of students were already in employment, or entered employment after achieving their intended qualification. The destinations of 15 per cent were unknown. During the inspection, work on the destinations of the 1996 leavers was being completed.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

56 A course review and evaluation system was originally introduced in 1988. Central support activities, for example student services, were included in a later phase of development. A variety of other methods was also used to monitor the quality of provision, including student questionnaires, course evaluation by governors, and the use of consultants to give objective advice. Much effort was invested, but practice was inconsistent and little improvement resulted. The processes were not drawn together into a coherent system, nor did they relate clearly to the college's planning cycle. The college realised the significance of these shortcomings. The development of better quality assurance was identified as a priority for 1996-97 and committed managers, for example, to

improving student retention, student tracking, and curriculum monitoring and evaluation. The improvements to the system started in May 1996.

57 The revised policy and procedures for quality improvement are logical and clearly expressed. They cover all curriculum and service areas. Some service areas are already making significant progress. The responsibilities of governors, the academic board, managers and programme teams are defined but the roles of the governing body and the newly-emerging academic board are not adequately differentiated. Central to the new structure are programme review meetings, at which action plans are to be developed. At the time of inspection, action plans had been submitted for all programmes but because they varied in the level of detail which they provided, and because the goals to be achieved were sometimes vague or without deadlines, not all had yet been accepted as complete by the quality manager. The extent to which students had been able to contribute to review meetings varied widely. Following the internal reviews of programmes, meetings are held for each section to assess progress on quality and are attended by a vice-principal, section managers and team managers. Seven of these meetings had been held at the time of the inspection. Some improvements have occurred since the revised procedures were established. However, less than half the curriculum areas have been covered and the whole process has not yet gone through its first cycle. The later stages of the revised procedures have still to be tested in practice.

58 The academic board has not made an effective contribution to quality assurance. It received an annual summary of student achievements, but there has been little use of these data to shape improvements. Its academic standards subcommittee did not meet between June 1995 and October 1996, although its members had been consulted about some course proposals.

59 The college has provided a wide range of development opportunities for teaching and support staff. There is a budget for this purpose of £225,000, which represents 1.7 per cent of college income. The staff-development plan, which was in draft form at the time of the inspection, is more detailed than in earlier years and includes costing. Planning is influenced increasingly by a balance of individual and institutional needs derived from the college strategic and business plans, and from staff appraisal. The staff development committee of the academic board is to be replaced with a new employee development committee and a college forum, to obtain a wider representation of staff views. The outcomes of staff development are evaluated, but the college intends to extend the process so that it contributes to staff self-appraisal. There is a well-organised induction process for all staff, which includes observation of teaching.

60 The college has two separate appraisal schemes for teaching and support staff. Both are well documented and the results are intended to assist decisions on staff development. The scheme for teachers is

mandatory, but the scheme for support staff is voluntary. Only 40 per cent of support staff have participated in appraisal, but all lecturers were appraised in the first cycle of the scheme in 1992-94. Subsequently the pace has slowed; 78 per cent of teachers who were eligible were appraised between 1994 and 1996. The scheme does not require observation of teaching but such observation has been piloted in the department of engineering, and frequently occurs in languages and humanities. The college plans to extend these initiatives to an annual cycle of lesson observation as part of the new quality assurance scheme. The college registered for the Investor in People award in 1992 but it has not yet achieved it.

61 In preparation for inspection, the college produced its first formal self-assessment report. No indication is given of the process which was used to develop the report. The headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*, are followed but the style of presentation varies from section to section. Strengths and weaknesses are not always clear and some parts of the report are bland. In the sections covering teaching and learning and students' achievements there is little analysis or recognition of the areas where results are poor. The college and the inspectorate do not agree on the contents of some sections of the self-assessment report, particularly those on governance and management, and students' recruitment, guidance and support.

RESOURCES

Staffing

62 In most curriculum areas, staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. They are particularly well qualified in English, and in computing where many staff have recent industrial experience. In a few instances, staff do not have qualifications which are appropriate for the courses that they teach. In science, new part-time staff are not fully aware of safety policies and procedures. Progress towards gaining training and development lead body assessor and verifier awards is satisfactory in most areas but slow in a few, for example in construction. Summaries of qualifications are not available; data have to be derived by searching individual curricula vitae. There are 279 full-time equivalent teachers. All but one are now on new contracts of employment. A vice-principal monitors the efficient use of teaching staff time. In 1995-96, the college met its aim of employing part-time teachers to cover 20 per cent of the total curriculum. Over 50 per cent of full-time teachers are women. Only four of the 13 senior managers are female. More than 70 per cent of staff are over 40 years of age. There are 206 full-time equivalent support staff. In most curriculum areas they provide an effective service, although there is insufficient administrative support in some departments.

63 Essential personnel policies have been in place since incorporation. Some have been reviewed recently or are being reviewed, including

detailed guidance on recruitment and selection. Information on the age, ethnicity, disability, and gender of applicants for full-time appointments is carefully monitored and a detailed annual report prepared, but the college does not act on the findings. The personnel database does not easily produce information which can be used for human resource planning. The college is developing a comprehensive human resource strategy to help ensure that there is a match between the requirements of the curriculum and the number and skills of teaching staff. Personnel services have been strengthened recently by the appointment of a vice-principal for human resources and communications, and an employee development manager. There is a personnel officer. They bring to the college experience of personnel work in industry. All college managers have job descriptions. Job descriptions for full-time teaching staff are reviewed during appraisal but the number which have been revised is unknown. Some job descriptions for support staff are out of date.

Equipment/learning resources

64 Most classrooms are well equipped with whiteboards, overhead projectors and video replay equipment. There is a minimum standard for the level of equipment which should be available in each classroom. A good central service supplies and maintains audio-visual aids and reprographics. Most curriculum areas have an appropriate range of specialist equipment. In some departments equipment is particularly good. In construction there is extensive modern surveying equipment, and motor vehicle students are able to work on modern cars and diagnostic equipment. Many of the machine tools in engineering are old, but they are well maintained and they allow students to learn the appropriate skills. The foundry is well equipped and there are welding facilities covering a wide range of industrial applications. The hairdressing reception area and the dispensary are well equipped, and there has been recent investment in media technology. Catering equipment is basic, but adequate for the range of courses. There are poorer facilities in some areas: one hairdressing salon has old and damaged equipment; a beauty therapy room needs modification to ensure privacy; lighting for performing arts is old and outdated; there are too few photography facilities for the number of students now using them.

65 A computer network for both curriculum and administrative purposes extends across the two main sites. A wide range of software is on the network, including compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases. The network has been enhanced through the TEC-funded telematics project, which links all Oxfordshire further education colleges to the Internet, global electronic mail and conferencing facilities. In 1995-96, the ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students improved from 1:14 to 1:12; the college's target is to achieve a ratio of 1:10. Overall, 10 per cent of the computers are available to students on open access; facilities at Blackbird Leys are particularly poor. There is a planned replacement programme for equipment.

66 There are three libraries, one each at the Oxpens and Blackbird Leys sites and a very small one at Cricket Road. Last year, the library at Oxpens was attractively refurbished. It houses a careers office and the centre for learning skills. There are 108 study places in the library and 35 places in a quiet study room nearby. At Blackbird Leys, there are 36 study places, and a quiet study room has recently been added. The combined stock at Oxpens and Blackbird Leys numbers about 29,000 books, of which only 2,300 are at Blackbird Leys. There is no book security system at Blackbird Leys. There are 500 videos and over 200 journals in the libraries. Provision for English is good, including literature, criticism and modern fiction, but there are few books in foreign languages. The Library Association recommends 17 books for each full-time equivalent student as an adequate level of provision; the college has only eight. The budget for the library has been increased in each of the last two years, but was underspent last year. Each member of the library staff is linked to an academic department but the effectiveness of this liaison varies considerably. A review of the library and information services is being undertaken.

Accommodation

67 The Oxpens campus has eight purpose-built teaching blocks on a pleasant site. The accommodation is in good condition and almost all of it is relatively new. Most of the buildings have access for wheelchairs, although some internal doors are difficult to open. Some temporary units on the site are used for storage and one houses a day nursery. There are too few car parking spaces in the daytime and they are only available to staff, and students with disabilities. Blackbird Leys was constructed as a secondary school in the 1960s. The building was extended when the college moved in some 20 years later. The condition of the buildings varies, but they are well decorated. The two three-storey blocks have no lifts. Various options are being considered for development at Blackbird Leys.

68 The college uses two old Horsa buildings for art and design in premises at East Oxford School, which is on a small site with restricted access. The college rents part of the Cricket Road School, mainly for the management and professional studies unit. Near Oxpens is a small leased property, St Thomas' School, which is used for courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Accommodation is also leased in that locality for graphic design. The college intends to consolidate all its work on two main sites, phasing out the smaller buildings as the new arts block at Oxpens and the development at Blackbird Leys are completed. The college is aware that its space at Oxpens and Blackbird Leys is underused. Room occupancy varies throughout the day and efficiency is affected by GCE A level timetables shared with local schools. Timetabling is computerised, and a senior manager controls room allocations. The college has developed performance indicators based on the earnings generated on each square metre of floor space. The estate is well managed by a professional team who have drawn up a realistic maintenance schedule. The buildings are well decorated and regularly cleaned.

69 Most accommodation is fit for the purpose that has been determined by the college. Accommodation in engineering is particularly good. The workshops at Oxpens, especially fabrication and welding and the two machine shops, are maintained to a very high level. The motor vehicle workshops at Blackbird Leys are laid out to industrial standards, and include a reception area and a parts department with a computerised database. Similarly realistic working environments have been created in construction, catering, and business studies. The Castle Mill restaurant and Waterside Bistro, and the hairdressing and beauty salons at Oxpens, are open to the public. A few classes take place in unsuitable accommodation. For example, inspectors observed students with learning difficulties making pizzas in a classroom without a wash basin or a cooker. Performing arts students have inadequate space.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

70 The major strengths of Oxford College of Further Education are:

- the wide range of courses
- the work with a consortium of local schools
- the close links with the TEC and local employers
- well-informed and active governors
- effective strategic planning
- the work of the student services department
- the learning skills centre.

71 If it is to continue to improve the quality of its provision, the college should address the following issues:

- the variations in the organisation of academic departments
- the inconsistent provision of tutorials
- improving the effectiveness of the academic board
- the limited planning and effectiveness of a significant amount of teaching
- some poor examination results
- poorly-planned provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- development of effective quality assurance
- resolution of the use of the Blackbird Leys campus
- improving the library stock
- increasing open access for students to computers.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)

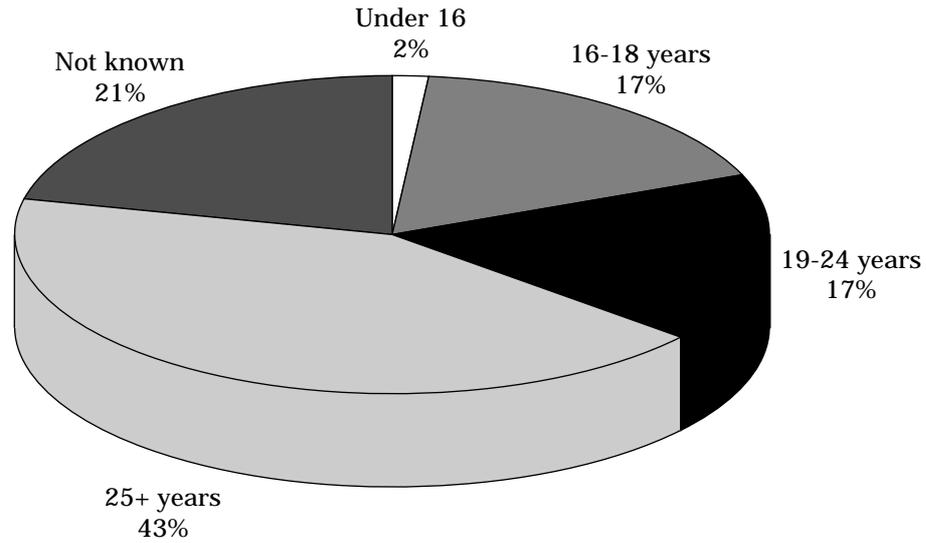
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 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

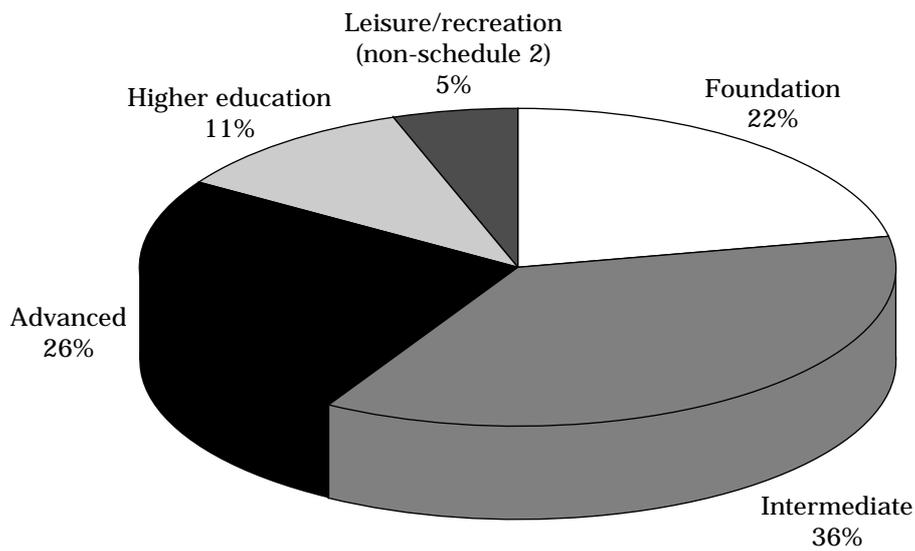
Oxford College of Further Education: percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 17,219

Figure 2

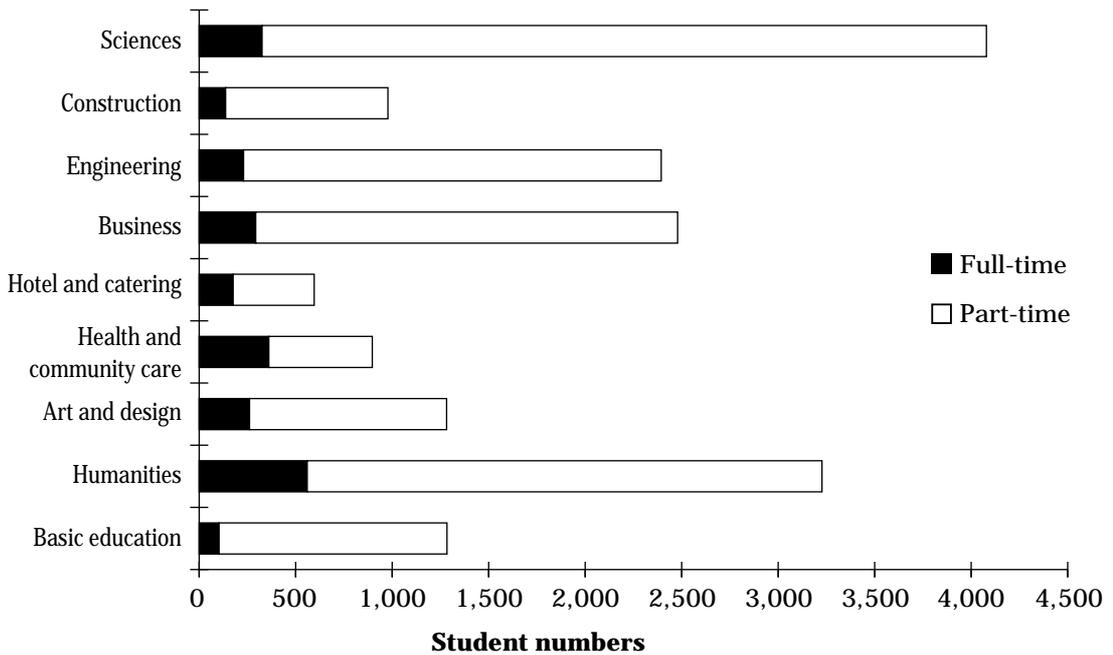
Oxford College of Further Education: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 17,219

Figure 3

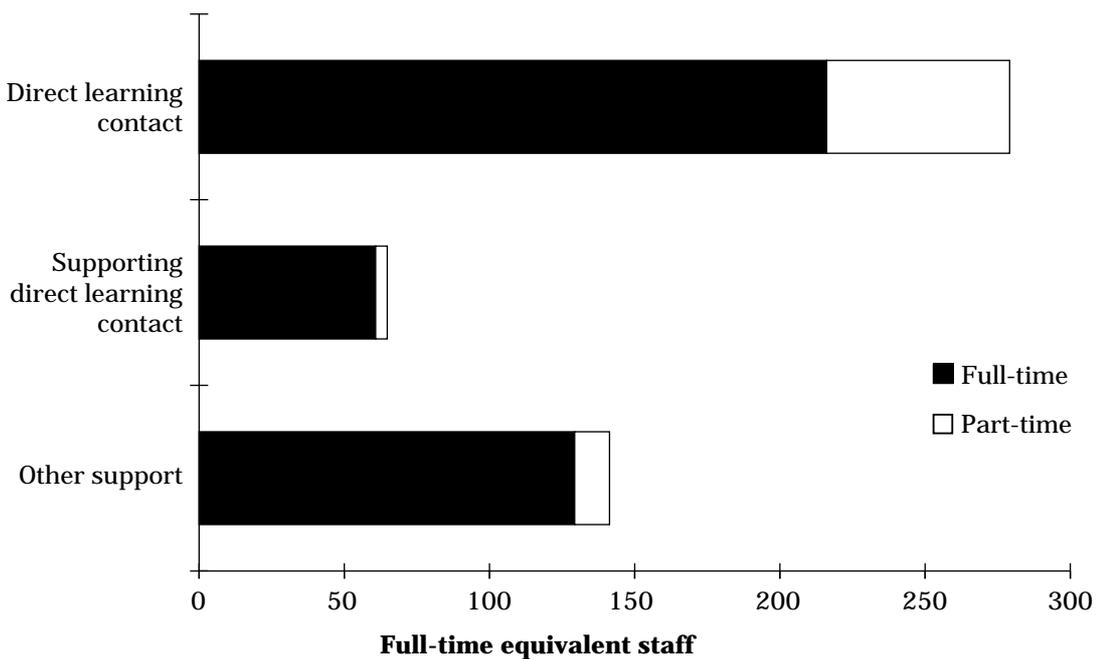
Oxford College of Further Education: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 17,219

Figure 4

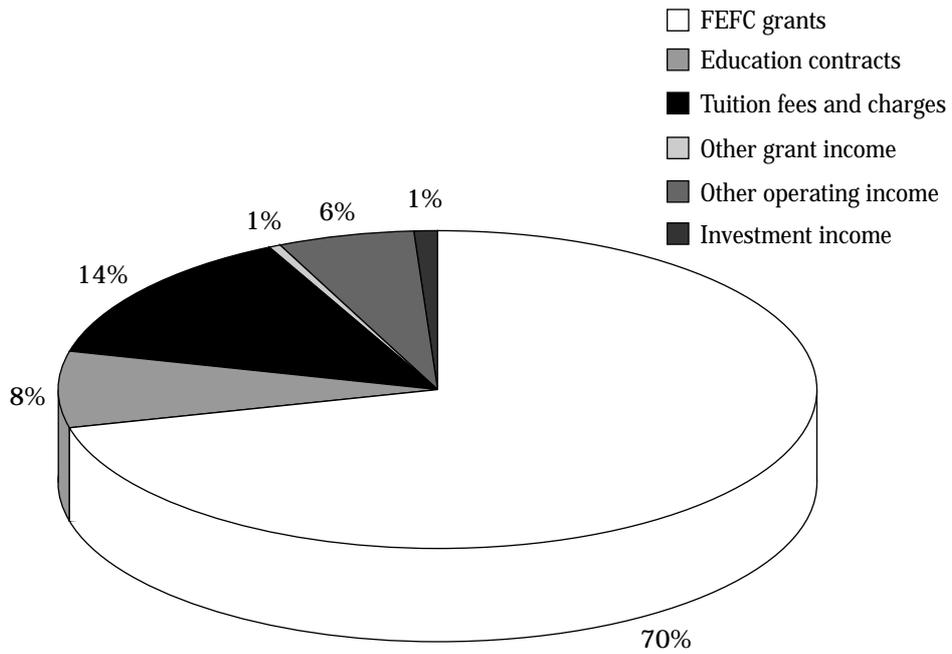
Oxford College of Further Education: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 485

Figure 5

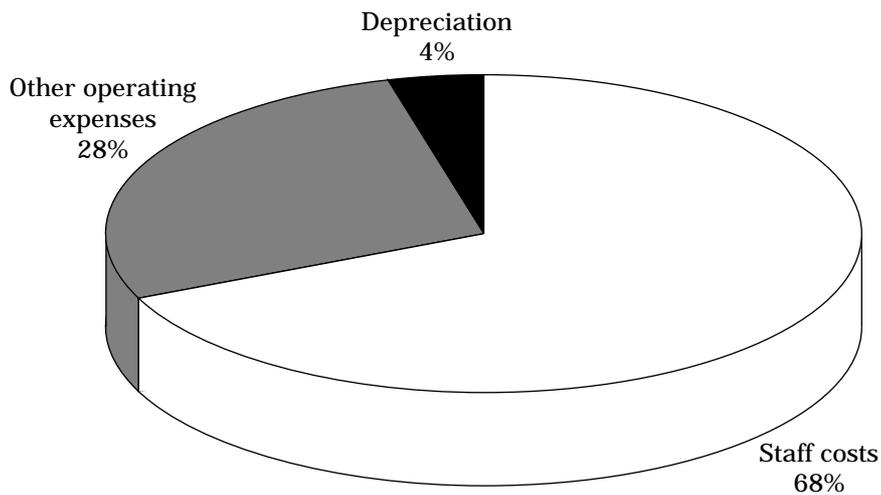
Oxford College of Further Education: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £13,757,000

Figure 6

Oxford College of Further Education: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £13,624,000

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