

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

North Area College

August 1994

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 70/94

NORTH AREA COLLEGE

NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected March - May 1994

Summary

North Area College is one of eight providers of post-16 education in the borough of Stockport, greater Manchester. It offers an extensive range of academic, vocational and adult education provision and recruits successfully in a locality where competition is strong. It is an innovative and responsive organisation which has strong external links. The corporation has a broad range of relevant experience and expertise which it uses actively to support the college. Standards of teaching are generally high and relationships between staff and students are very good. A well-planned tutorial system is not always effectively implemented. Students achieve good standards in vocational courses but performance in GCE and GCSE examinations is weak. An agreed system for quality assurance is required and procedures for assessing the quality of courses should be further developed. The college management information system cannot meet current and future needs. Extensive changes to the college management structure are at an early stage of implementation.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science and mathematics	3	Care	2
Business studies	3	Humanities	3
Catering	1	Art and design	3
Leisure and tourism	3		

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INTRODUCTION

1 North Area College was inspected in three phases. Enrolment and induction procedures were inspected in September 1993, specialist subject areas during March 1994 and aspects of cross-college provision from 3 to 6 May. Twenty inspectors took part in the inspection for a total of 64 days. They observed 113 classes, examined a representative sample of students' work, inspected a wide range of documents including policy statements and minutes of major committees and attended a meeting of the board of the corporation. Discussions were held with members of the board, staff, students, parents, representatives from local schools, the Stockport and High Peak Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), local employers and the careers service.

2 The report is based on inspections carried out according to the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. The framework describes a four-year inspection cycle. When this cycle becomes fully established, colleges will have the opportunity to respond to the findings of earlier inspection reports before their quadrennial inspection and the subsequent published report. As this inspection occurred early in the cycle, the opportunity for such a response was not available.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 North Area College is situated in the north of Stockport, serving the immediate area and parts of South Manchester. There are eight other colleges within a few miles; four in Stockport, three in South Manchester and one in Trafford. Stockport College of Further and Higher Education is less than a mile away and Aquinas Sixth Form College is approximately three miles away. Also within the borough are The Ridge Sixth Form College, Margaret Danyers (Sixth Form College designate), and three schools with sixth form provision, Cheadle Hulme and Stockport Grammar Schools and Cheadle Hulme High School. Within a six-mile radius are City College, Loreto College and Xaverian College, all in South Manchester, and South Trafford College. In addition there are a further seven colleges and two schools with post-16 provision within 15 miles.

4 The college operates on a pleasant single campus of some nine hectares. It was built as a secondary school in the late 1950s and extended in the 1960s. The college was established in 1987 as part of the phased reorganisation of secondary education in Stockport and became a full post-16 institution in 1991.

5 There are 64 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 22 full-time equivalent support staff (figure 1).

6 At the time of the inspection, there were 1,074 students on roll. Eighty-five per cent were full time; 76 per cent were aged 16 to 18, and the remainder were mature students representing a wide spread of ages. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 2 and 3. Full-time equivalent enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 4. Approximately 80 per cent of full-time students

come from the immediate Stockport area, about 5 per cent travel from outlying districts, while the remainder travel to the college from south Manchester. Large numbers of students come to the college from the five local schools and smaller numbers come from a further 29 schools. The staying-on rate in Stockport is 75 per cent which is significantly above the average for the North West of 59 per cent and the national average of 65 per cent. The college was initially planned for a maximum enrolment of 450 full-time 16-19 students. Effective marketing, combined with the efficient use of resources has enabled the college to increase student numbers within the existing available space.

7 The unemployment level in the Stockport area is 9.6 per cent, slightly below the regional average of 10.9 per cent. The Stockport wards with the highest levels of unemployment are within the north area of the borough or close to its boundaries. Higher levels of unemployment exist in south Manchester, an area also served by the college.

8 The college mission is to promote 'quality education through partnership'. It links the 'concepts of excellence and capability through a people-centred approach which is based on total quality management'. The college is currently nearing completion of a restructuring plan which will consolidate student-centred learning initiatives developed over the last six years and allow for a significant move into open and distance learning.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 There is an extensive range of courses. Forty subjects are offered at General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level), and a further 15 at advanced supplementary. Thirty-four subjects are offered at General Certificate of Secondary Education level. Vocational provision has grown significantly and includes courses in the arts, care, catering, business and finance, and leisure and tourism. There are four Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma courses and one BTEC national certificate, together with three General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) at advanced level and five at intermediate level. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are offered in business administration, catering and travel. A further five City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI) courses and two Royal Society of Arts (RSA) courses are available. Courses and subjects are offered in whole-day blocks, an arrangement which has made attendance easier for mature students and those in work. Further flexible attendance arrangements may be agreed with individual teachers. The college is making good progress towards its objective of modularising courses.

10 The college has a policy of open access and all students who apply are offered a place. The enrolment target for 1993-94 has been exceeded by 62 per cent but the number of premature leavers is much higher than in recent years. No alternative courses are available for the large numbers of students for whom GCSE mathematics and English are inappropriate.

Courses in information technology are limited in number and do not cater for the whole college population.

11 In addition to their main programmes of study, full-time students are encouraged to select from a wide range of extension studies. The aim is to assist students to gain additional skills and acquire more interests. Participation is voluntary, but take-up is disappointing and only about 30 per cent of the students are involved. There are many opportunities for students to play sports and engage in outdoor pursuits.

12 A large programme of community education is run on behalf of Stockport Local Education Authority. Most of the 73 courses are non-vocational, but there is a growing number of courses which are funded by the FEFC and which lead to qualifications. GCSE courses in mathematics and English are offered but currently there are no programmes of adult basic education. There are plans to build on the existing links between day and evening provision. Daytime students are encouraged to attend evening courses as part of their extension studies. Evening students are encouraged to take advantage of the careers and advice provided by college staff on drawing up plans of action.

13 Marketing is vigorous and successful. A marketing officer co-ordinates a strong and systematic publicity drive. A Greater Manchester bus carries the college's name, logo and motto. Growth areas are identified and there is systematic targeting of potential students. A comprehensive research report on schools and the local labour market informs responsive course planning. Two-and-a-half years ago in response to market demand the college became the sole provider in Stockport of courses in hotel management and catering.

14 There are a number of productive links with the TEC. A recent project to improve industry/education links involved students in designing and running a residential team-building exercise as part of a training programme for a local company. This year, 72 students have benefited from careership awards which help to finance activities such as cultural visits or the purchase of additional equipment. A pilot project in preparation for the introduction of training credits has provided language tapes for open learning. Careers facilities are much improved and more accessible as a result of help from the TEC. Links at strategic level are being developed. The TEC nominee on the board of the corporation resigned when he left the TEC and the resulting vacancy has not yet been filled.

15 All vocational areas have established useful links with local employers who assist in curriculum development, course review and work experience. For example, there are valuable projects with the Greater Manchester Youth Games and Manchester United Soccer Festival which contribute to student learning and assessment in leisure studies. Work experience is available for students following courses in general education and about 45 per cent of the students take up this opportunity.

16 The college has established its own company, North Area College Venture Ltd, (NAC Venture). It has four main income-generating sections: a training consultancy; 'Compliments', the college's training restaurant; 'Hand in Hand', a 40 place nursery; and a print shop based on the college's reprographic section. The profit from these ventures goes to the college. In addition to generating income, the businesses are designed to provide learning opportunities for students and to offer valued service to the community. The training restaurant and the nursery provide effective realistic work environments for students of catering and care as well as providing students with opportunities for case study work, for example in psychology, English and communication studies. The nursery has proved helpful in allowing some students to return to study. NAC Venture is also engaged in full-cost consultancy work for employers.

17 In partnership with two local universities, the college is involved in the Initial Teacher Training/Education initiative. On this scheme, student teachers spend time on teaching practice supervised and advised by college staff who have undergone specific training. Performing arts courses are franchised from Southport College of Further Education and care courses are franchised from Thomas Danby College, Leeds. Teachers of modern foreign languages and of English maintain close links with universities.

18 There are effective curriculum links with local schools. For example, the modern foreign languages department runs successful intensive language courses for local high school pupils and the English department has established writing partnerships for 11-year old pupils. Students from the neighbouring school for students with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities are welcome in the college and participate in a flexible programme of link activities including art, drama, sports, science and wordprocessing. The college refectory is used by schools for short blocks of work experience.

19 The college has established productive international links. Last year, 12 languages students went on an exchange visit to a lycee in Beziers, Stockport's twin town. Thirteen catering students went to Paris last year for work experience which included an intensive language course. A successful week long European conference at the beginning of the year attracted 20 teachers and 120 students from a number of European countries. Links are now being established with schools and colleges in Belgium and Holland.

20 There is a college co-ordinator for equal opportunities and a comprehensive policy which is carefully monitored, mainly through staff and student surveys. Women are well represented on most courses; more than half of full-time students are women. Approximately 11 per cent of college enrolments are students from ethnic minority backgrounds, a figure in excess of the 6 per cent ethnic minority population in Stockport. There are no specialist courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and none are currently being planned. Some students with

learning difficulties are integrated into appropriate courses and if necessary, additional support is provided. There are currently seven dyslexic students and four students with moderate learning difficulties, all of whom are receiving additional support.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

21 The 15 members of the board of the corporation include the principal, two parent governors and nominees from staff and students. Other members are drawn from higher education and a variety of business backgrounds. They bring a good range of expertise from commerce, personnel and estates management, banking, financial planning, law and accountancy. There are four subcommittees: audit and finance, personnel, disciplinary and appeals. Two of these, the disciplinary and appeals committees, have not yet met.

22 Board members fully support the college mission. Meetings are regular and well attended. Members were closely involved in the development of the strategic plan and actively contribute to strategic developments. They are invited to all college events and to staff training days and many of them attend. Recently, at their request, governors have been designated as curriculum contacts and each is developing additional links with staff and students in their designated area.

23 Recognition of the demands of incorporation and the strategic plan has led to revision of the management structure. The senior management team consists of the principal, who currently takes responsibility for business development pending an appointment to the post, and four directors of student services, business services, the resource centre project and management information services and information technology. Previously, line managers of teachers were not specialists in the curriculum area concerned, and this led to difficulties in respect of curriculum leadership and development. The current structure has a team of 10 middle managers each leading a group of subject teams which includes their own curriculum specialism. Each subject team has, or will have, its own suite of rooms and facilities collectively known as a resource centre. The revised structure is envisaged by the senior management team as one which will ensure a clearer link between resource planning, accountability, staff deployment and the strategic objectives. Since the structure has been in operation for only three months, it is too early to identify its impact. As yet, some staff are unclear about management responsibilities within the new structure.

24 There are detailed written policies in a number of areas including equal opportunities, health and safety, study support and staffing. Responsibilities for monitoring the implementation of policies are clearly allocated and are carried out through a range of mechanisms, mainly staff and student surveys. Though extensive information is gathered, it is not always clear what action is taken as a result. There is currently no policy

nor implementation strategy for information technology across the curriculum. The few developments which have occurred have been piecemeal and unco-ordinated. The college has recognised this and has made a recent appointment at senior level to undertake strategic planning and development of information technology college wide.

25 Communications between senior managers and teachers are good. Managers have a policy of openness and there are formal opportunities for consultation through weekly staff briefings, fortnightly staff forums and a weekly college bulletin. The main forum for discussion of college-wide issues is the academic board which meets monthly. Any student or member of staff can put items on the agenda and attend meetings. In practice, few students take up this opportunity. College staff are generally aware and supportive of college aims and objectives, though, as yet, subject and course plans rarely reflect key aims.

26 Some subject areas are well managed and have regular, minuted meetings of staff which enable them to work as a team. However, there is a lack of co-ordination between staff in half of the subject teams. There is little collaboration between subject areas and opportunities to share good practice are missed. Few teachers have job descriptions and in some areas responsibilities are unclear. The college is currently developing job descriptions for all teaching staff including part-time staff. Part-time staff are generally not involved in staff meetings; and even in areas where they undertake the majority of teaching, they have few opportunities to contribute to planning and review. The college has recognised this issue and the board has initiated a study of the cost of paying part-time teachers to attend curriculum planning and review meetings.

27 The college's unit of funding for 1992-93 was £2,789, a little above the median for sixth form colleges of £2,647. Summaries of the college's recurrent income and estimated expenditure are shown in figures 5 and 6. Regular reports on expenditure are produced for governors and managers. The budget allocation system is based on weighted student numbers. There is a limited amount of curriculum development funding for which subject teams can bid. Such bids are judged against the strategic plan. A larger amount of funding is allocated centrally to support developments to achieve strategic objectives. Such allocations are discussed by the board. Staff understand the system and feel it is fair. Budget holders receive updating reports on expenditure every half term.

28 Enrolment data are collected and analysed. There are increases in enrolment across most courses and subjects, with the exception of catering and of GCSE courses in English and science. Recent figures indicate a higher than usual number of early leavers. As a result of recent attention to completion rates and examination results, the college has put more emphasis on pre-enrolment counselling and guidance and on helping students to select suitable courses. It is intended that this strategy will be fully implemented next year and result in significant changes to enrolment and induction procedures.

29 Computer-based management information systems do not meet the present or projected requirements. Basic reports are produced but they give limited information which is often out of date. Academic staff cannot get direct access to the system and its inflexibility causes frustration. The college has recognised these shortcomings and has ambitious plans to develop new systems in conjunction with outside agencies. However, some managers and other potential users of the system have not yet been consulted on their information needs or on the nature and scope of the service they require.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

30 Recruitment is well organised. There are good links with high schools to ensure the smooth transfer of students. Visits by college staff, open days and taster days help to inform potential students about the college and its courses. The prospectus is clear and subject leaflets are detailed. Administrative arrangements for admission are smooth and efficient.

31 Students are given extensive pre-enrolment guidance and are encouraged to enrol on courses which match their achievements and aims. However, because of the current open-access policy students may choose to ignore this professional advice and consequently too many enrol on inappropriate courses. In these cases, drop-out rates are often high and examination results poor.

32 The quality of student and staff relationships in the college is excellent. Appropriate attention is paid to spiritual support and guidance as well as to student counselling. A chaplain and a counsellor are each available for the equivalent of one day a week. The college makes arrangements for collective worship in accordance with the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. There is a tutorial framework or contract in which the tutor sets out his/her responsibilities and expectations as well as the rights and responsibilities of students. Each tutor contract is a different, individual agreement. Contracts are in use in vocational areas and most subject areas. The tutorial system of one-to-one regular meetings to assess progress, set targets and consider wider issues, such as careers, is well planned and generally highly regarded by students. However, the quality of its implementation varies considerably. In the best cases, usually on vocational courses, meetings are regular and the process is clearly linked to the teaching programme. However, in others it is possible for students to miss tutorials for long periods of time without being contacted. This year the tutor to student ratio is high, usually in the order of 1:25 and this has exacerbated poor practice.

33 Tutors are central to the system by which students get access to learning support. During initial guidance interviews or during subsequent tutorial sessions, the tutor and student can complete a referral form requesting additional support. This year, 72 students have requested support; a half of these were for literacy difficulties, a third for numeracy difficulties and the remainder for both. Support is provided through basic

skills workshops but the staffing in these workshops is not sufficient for the number of students using them. A few students have been identified as dyslexic and these are currently being supported by one teacher. Only a few courses and subject areas including GCSE English and mathematics carry out a diagnosis of learning support needs. Students often link their needs to the subject and if they leave the subject they drop out of the basic skills workshop. The college has recognised that both initial assessment of learning support needs, and ways of meeting them, are insufficiently systematic and ways forward are being examined. As part of this, the existing study-support policy and accompanying procedures are being reviewed.

34 Central to the monitoring and recording of students' progress is the use of an action file for each student. This allows the recording of career goals, learning targets and achievements as well as providing key administrative documentation. The action plan developed contributes to the student's record of achievement but its use by students and staff is variable. There are examples of very good practice particularly in some vocational areas where there is rigorous up-dating and setting of targets. In some cases the file is little used. In a recent questionnaire, students indicated that the action file is potentially helpful but too large to be easily carried. Progress is monitored in a more formal way by the use of a thorough system of review days. Students following one-year courses have two such opportunities in the year. Those following two-year courses have two in the first year and one in the second. Parents may also attend, but the focus of discussion is with the student. Strengths and targets are documented on the review sheet in the action file.

35 Careers guidance is co-ordinated by two members of staff, one who deals with higher education and one who deals with general careers advice. An officer from the Stockport careers service is also available on an appointment basis on one day a week. The newly-created careers library is adequately stocked and in an accessible, drop-in location. Higher education guidance is well-developed with clear information packs, an advice evening and visits to open days. Personal tutors, however, are responsible for careers guidance in the first instance. Although there have been in service training sessions within the last two years, there are uneven levels of advice. No-one is on hand to give advice in the careers library. There is no centrally-taught programme of careers education.

36 Absence rates in some lessons are high. The monitoring of attendance patterns is inconsistent and unsatisfactory. There is variable practice depending upon individual tutors. In a minority of cases only is student attendance regularly checked and absences followed up.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

37 Almost 60 per cent of the teaching sessions inspected had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses. The distribution of inspection grades is shown in the table overleaf.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE A/AS level		3	23	16	4	0	46
GCSE		0	7	9	1	0	17
GNVQ		2	0	4	1	0	7
NVQ		0	12	2	0	0	14
Other		6	14	7	1	1	29
Total		11	56	38	7	1	113

38 There is some good teaching which is characterised by the variety of activities it includes to sustain the interest of students through the long timetabled sessions. For example, in the hotel reception course, students engage in discussions and role play, as well as information-gathering sessions and practical activities. Generally, lessons are planned and prepared thoroughly. Most staff display sound and up-to-date knowledge of their subjects and enjoy good working relationships with their students. In sociology, the teaching successfully links content, theoretical perspectives, study skills and literacy skills. There is some lively, informative teaching which makes good use of directed questions and allows students to draw on their own experiences. In leisure and tourism and care courses, for example, the teaching is linked well to work placement activities. In modern languages and business studies effective use is made of group work to develop students' communication skills.

39 There are, however, some examples of poorer teaching. Some sessions do not take account of the different abilities and needs of individuals nor allow students to participate sufficiently. In some GCSE English and communication studies sessions there are insufficient checks to ensure that students are understanding topics. The reinforcement of learning in history and government and politics is poor. In some cases, the teaching is inadequate to motivate students to concentrate for the half-day teaching block which is the normal length of a teaching session. On some courses, only one member of staff teaches the whole course and consequently students experience only one teaching style.

40 In most subject areas, there are full schemes of work, in which activities are clearly linked to the aims and objectives of syllabuses. In catering, work additional to that required for NVQ assessments is included in all programmes to ensure balance and adequate understanding of the competencies being developed. Core skills are well integrated in sociology, leisure and tourism, caring and performing arts programmes but insufficient attention is paid to their development in other areas; for example, in English, communication studies, history, and government and politics. Opportunities for students to develop information technology skills are not incorporated sufficiently into GCE A level and GCSE courses in business studies, law, sociology, history, languages, mathematics and science.

41 In some subjects there are regular procedures for assessing students' work. Assignments in different aspects of business studies, languages, science, caring and catering courses are marked thoroughly and contain constructive and supportive comments from teachers. There are inconsistent approaches to the assessment and marking of work in art and design, languages and GCSE English courses, and insufficient detailed criteria for grading students' work in leisure and tourism. In performing arts, some of the assignments are too easy and there is insufficient moderating to ensure consistency of standards

42 Good use is made of teaching aids in some subject areas. In sociology and languages, for example, video and audio material are used effectively to enhance and reinforce learning. However, there is a lack of visual stimuli in art and design courses. Computers are rarely used as teaching aids in GCE A level and GCSE courses.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

43 Most students have a positive attitude to their studies. Many are well motivated and hard working and display a sense of enjoyment. They are able to speak about their work confidently and are not afraid to contribute to discussion or to make oral presentations. Some art and design, mathematics and science students are less forthcoming when asked to describe their work. In performing arts and design technology courses, some students lack a sense of urgency to complete tasks in the time available.

44 The development of appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding is variable across the different subject areas. Modern languages students have a good grasp of the languages they are learning. English, communications and sociology students are developing relevant technical vocabularies. However, in other areas, notably performing arts and design technology, students' analytical skills are insufficiently developed. Some first-year GCE A level and GCSE students have poor knowledge and understanding of basic scientific principles. There are weaknesses, too, in students' abilities to present written work which is well structured and grammatically correct. In catering, care and leisure and tourism courses there are some good examples of students applying what they have learned to tasks or simulations which mirror activities required in the work place. Generally, practical work is carried out competently and safely, although insufficient attention is paid to safety rules and procedures in the laboratories.

45 The GCE A level examination results are generally poor. In 1992-93, GCE A level students achieved a 60 per cent pass rate, grades A-E, compared with the national average for sixth form colleges of 80 per cent. The average points score of the 152 students aged 16-18 entered for two or more GCE A levels (where A=10, E=2) was 9.5, placing the college just below the half-way mark in the national table of institutions within the further education sector. A significant number of students embark on

GCE A level courses with modest GCSE qualifications. The college should examine the overall performance of individual GCE A level students compared with their entry qualifications to determine the extent to which students under-achieve, meet or exceed expectations. From a sample of 109 students who arrived at the college with four or more GCSE A-C grades, only 66 per cent achieved two or more GCE A level passes.

46 Subjects with smaller numbers of students taking examinations tend to have better pass rates. For example, there were 100 per cent pass rates in modern languages (12 students), government and politics (eight students), photography (six students) and textiles (five students). The data provided by the Advanced Level Information System confirm that the actual grades achieved by students in art and design, biology, design technology, modern languages and government and politics are better than their predicted grades based on GCSE entry qualifications.

47 In 1993, a total of 521 entries to GCSE examinations resulted in 151 examination passes in the range of grades A-C. This represents a success rate of 29 per cent compared with the national average for passes at grades A-C of 50 per cent. There are very poor results in two subjects which have large numbers of students. In English, of the 85 students who took the examination, only 20 per cent achieved grades A-C; in mathematics, 15 per cent of the 164 students achieved grades A-C. Fewer than 25 per cent of the entries for biology (20 students), chemistry (19 students) and business studies (21 students) achieved grades A-C. However, the pass rates at grades A-C of 72 per cent and 60 per cent in physics (18 students) and sociology (15 students), respectively, are above the corresponding national averages. A significant proportion of students who are entered for two, three or four GCSEs fail to gain any grades A-C. The college should analyse systematically the extent to which students who embark on GCSE courses improve their qualifications.

48 Students are more successful in vocational courses. Catering students consistently achieve pass rates which exceed the national averages. In 1993, of the 41 students working towards NVQ qualifications, nine students gained full certification and 32 students carried forward units of competence. All 17 business administration students gained NVQ units and 77 per cent gained the full award at intermediate level. There are good results in the RSA word processing course, with 97 per cent of students gaining distinctions. Of the 12 students who followed the BTEC first diploma in caring, all gained an award. However, the results in leisure and tourism are poor, particularly those relating to the first diploma in leisure studies and the leisure and recreation course.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

49 The college has a strong commitment to total quality management. The turning of this commitment into systematic and effective procedures for assuring the quality of courses and subjects has yet to be achieved.

50 The basic philosophies underpinning the college's approach to quality are clearly documented and articulated by staff at all levels and by the students. The mechanism for translating them into practice is the development of supportive relationships between individual students and their personal and subject tutors, leading to the college's aim of providing 'quality education through partnership'. The approach is based on a staff-student framework which involves the agreement of the contracts between individual students and their personal and subject tutors. Though this approach is central to quality assurance, its implementation varies considerably. Currently, contracts between staff and students are agreed only in some curriculum areas.

51 A series of performance indicators has been developed to allow the college to measure progress towards the achievement of its strategic objectives. The college objective of enabling students to become capable of planning and managing the quality of their own learning is effectively monitored through indicators such as sound student action plans, clearly understood and agreed learning targets and well-maintained records of achievement. There is frequent monitoring of students' perceptions of their courses and information gathered is published to staff and students. Systems for measuring and evaluating student achievement in examinations, retention and attendance rates are not well developed, especially at college level. Most subject teams monitor attendance and retention rates and destinations but the system for recording this information centrally is slow and unreliable. The lack of a reliable college management information system means that the setting of targets for subjects and courses and the accurate monitoring of performance against these is not possible. Although in some subjects and courses, reviews are undertaken, particularly in response to the demands of awarding bodies, a systematic approach to course monitoring and evaluation has yet to be developed.

52 Implementation of quality assurance procedures has been delayed by the substantial changes in the management structure and personnel. Responsibility for the implementation of quality control has only recently been allocated to the newly appointed quality director, who has a college-wide role, and to the resource centre leaders who have a curriculum review role. In spite of this, the programme area of hotel and catering studies provides an example of particularly good practice. Within this area there are clearly expressed policies on quality and its assurance and these are all put into practice through appropriate procedures.

53 There is extensive in-house staff development linked to cross-college initiatives such as tutoring, the development of learning approaches for the new resource centres and the introduction of GNVQs. However, the overall planning for staff attendance on external courses, is insufficient. A relatively low proportion of the staff have the skills and confidence to incorporate appropriate information technology in to their teaching and there is an urgent need for a planned programme of staff development in

the area. A staff appraisal system was introduced in 1991-92 and student opinion contributed significantly to the process of appraisal. The staff who took part valued the process highly. Half the staff still have to be appraised. An induction programme has been introduced for newly-appointed staff. Its effectiveness has been variable and particularly limited for part-time staff.

54 The college plans to publish its charter indicating service standards and targets by 31 July 1994 and has an agreed action plan in order to achieve this. All students receive copies of the Charter for Further Education.

RESOURCES

Staffing

55 All teaching staff are appropriately qualified in the subjects they teach. Most have teaching qualifications and, where appropriate, relevant industrial experience. All teachers have a tutoring role for which they are trained. Staff are innovative and enthusiastic and respond well to the flexible approach which is required of them. Teaching staff are generally effectively deployed to ensure the spread of expertise across subjects. However, some teachers lack experience appropriate to their current role, for example in the English department. In some areas of art and design and English there is a shortage of specialist expertise. The leisure and tourism section places a heavy reliance on part-time teachers and arrangements for their support are poor. Reception staff are helpful and welcoming and clerical staff are able, supportive and well supplied with information technology equipment and office space. There is inadequate technical support in some subject areas, for example, business studies and no clerical support in leisure and tourism despite high work-placement administration and assignment documentation.

Equipment/learning resources

56 The range of specialist equipment is adequate to good in most subject areas. Design technology classes benefit from a good range of specialist equipment and computing facilities. Conversely, catering students work with equipment which is not up to industrial standards, though teachers make strenuous efforts to ensure that this does not unduly affect the quality of learning. Music equipment is in short supply. Information technology across the college is inadequately resourced and has a high student to workstation ratio of 16:1. Some of the computers and software are outdated and only of restricted use. The college has recognised the urgent need to improve this provision and a new information technology resource centre is planned. Most subjects have a good supply and range of learning support materials, especially in business studies, classics and mathematics. In some classrooms, for example, English, the writing boards are not adequate for the purpose. Over-head projector facilities are lacking in

some areas, for example in business studies, and some subjects are short of audio-visual equipment, notably art and design.

57 The library is comfortable and has a separate quiet area for private study which is often full at peak times. It is efficiently managed by one full-time qualified librarian who is responsible for the allocation of library capitation, which is £16,000 this year. Assistance is provided by a full-time trainee from a youth training programme and, in the event of illness, adequate cover is provided by a member of the reprographic section situated opposite. The supply of text books is adequate in all areas except leisure and tourism. The availability of reference books is poor in some areas, for example, business studies.

Accommodation

58 The accommodation at North Area College is clean and comfortable and most rooms are decorated to a reasonable standard with adequate shelving and storage space. The reception area and the other public areas are welcoming and comfortable. All ground floor rooms are accessible to students who use wheelchairs but the first and second floors are not. Consultants have recently been appointed to develop an accommodation strategy. There are plans for 12 curriculum area based resource centres and full access for wheelchair users is included in this. In some programme areas, the rooms and furniture are set up to allow a flexible approach to learning and there is often good use of relevant wall displays that enhance the learning environment. For example, the science department has a good range of well-displayed posters encouraging women into engineering and science careers.

59 The college uses its classrooms efficiently, although two rooms are too small to suit their purpose, and some lessons suffer frequent interruptions because other classes are being held in the same room, for example, in leisure and tourism. Students on leisure courses make good use of the adjacent leisure centre's facilities. The college has a modern training restaurant, a nursery and an excellent reprographic and stationery section all of which benefit students and staff. There are a number of open, informal seating areas around the ground floor of the college though these are not appropriate for private study. Good use is made of empty classrooms for this purpose but none are formally designated for this. There is a large 180 seat dining area which is full to capacity at most lunch times. It is also used by the students as a social area throughout the day.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

60 The college is making progress towards achieving its ambitious aims and objectives. The particular strengths of the provision inspected are:

- an active and supportive board
- effective and successful marketing
- an extensive range of academic, vocational and adult education provision

-
- productive links with a wide range of external organisations and groups
 - high standards of teaching in most areas
 - good relationships between staff and students.

61 If the college is to make its planned improvements, it should consider:

- a strategy for the use of information technology across the college and arrangements for its implementation
- the development of a central information system to support monitoring and planning at college and subject level
- the poor retention rates in some subjects
- poor examination results in GCE and GCSE subjects
- a system for identifying and meeting learning support needs
- practical arrangements for assuring the quality of courses and subjects.

FIGURES

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

2 Percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)

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

4 Full-time equivalent enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)

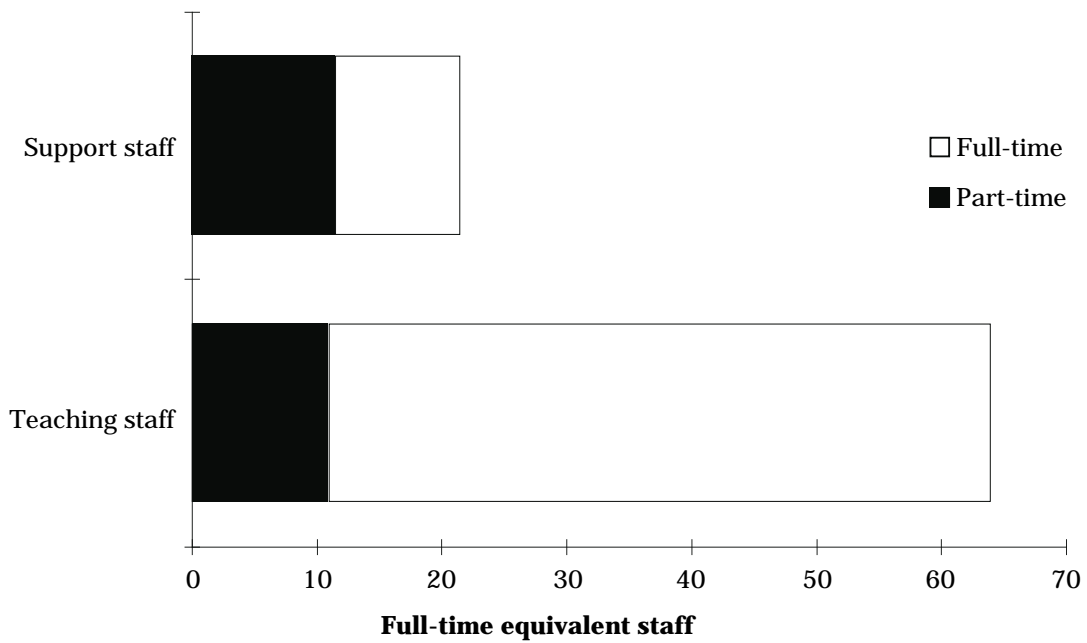
5 Estimated income (for 16 months to July 1994)

6 Estimated expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

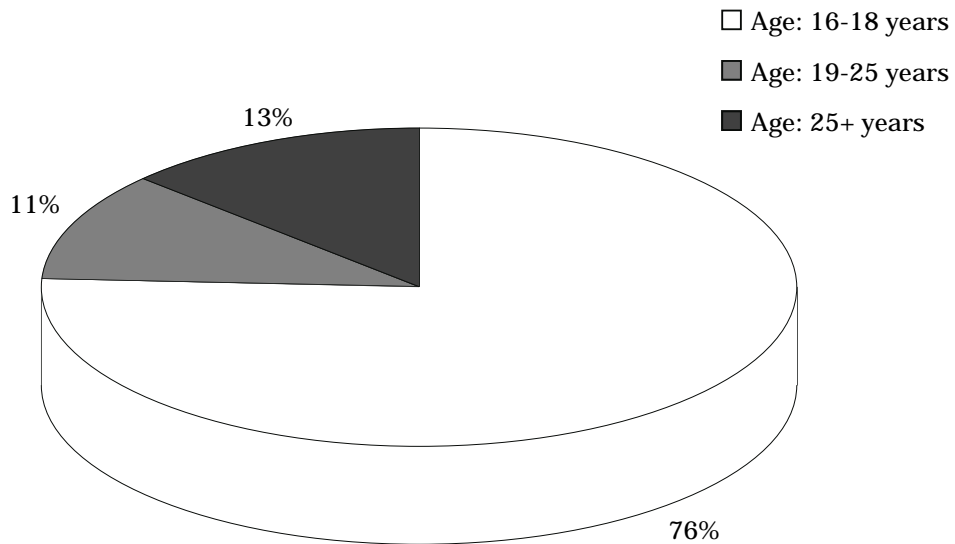
North Area College: staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)



Full-time equivalent staff: 86

Figure 2

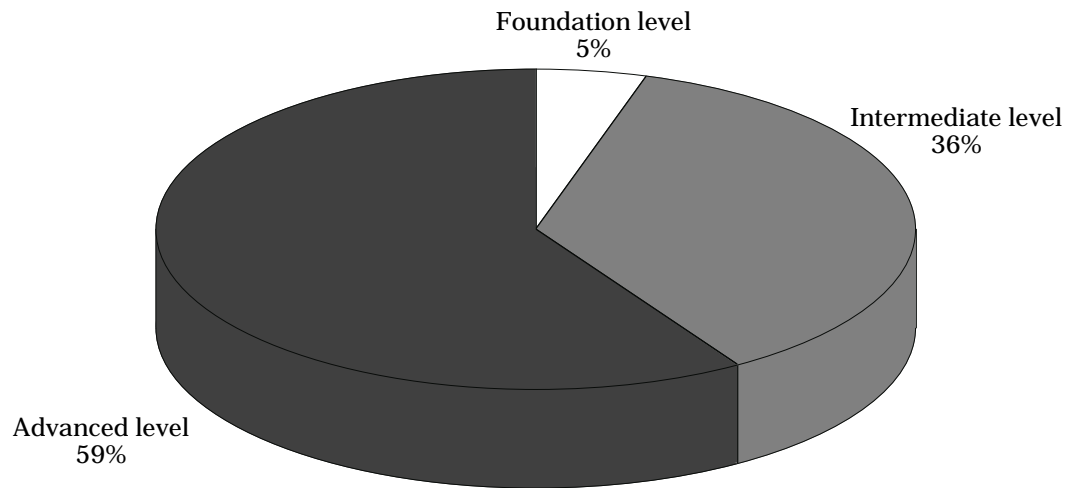
North Area College: percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)



Enrolments: 1,074

Figure 3

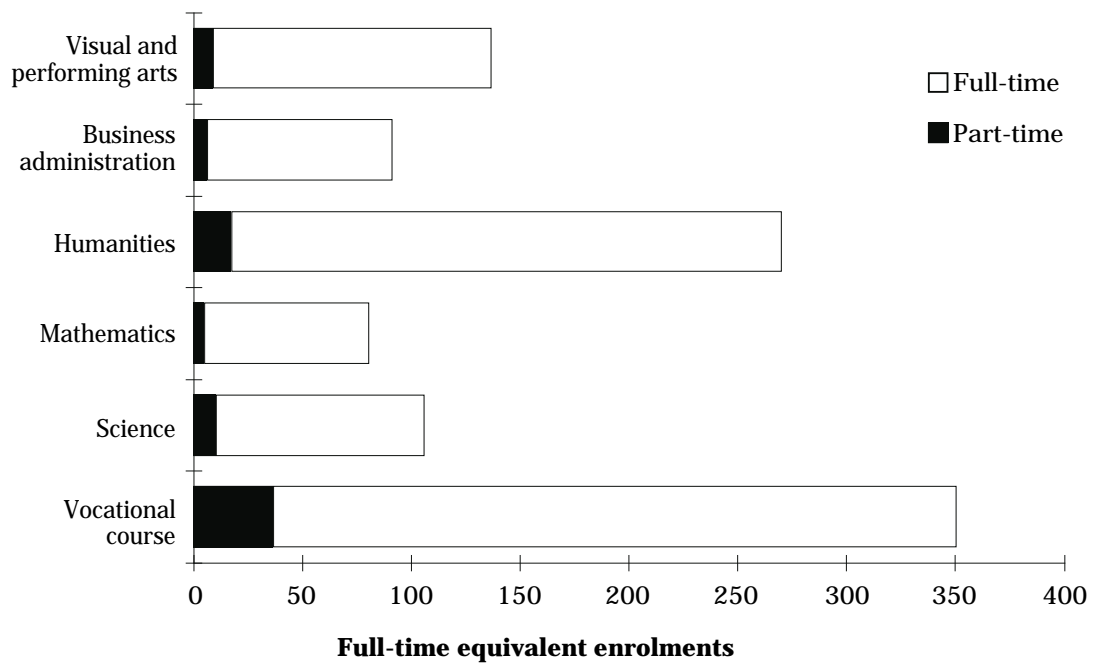
North Area College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)



Enrolments: 1,074

Figure 4

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



Full-time equivalent students: 1,037

Figure 5

North Area College: estimated income (16 months to July 1994)

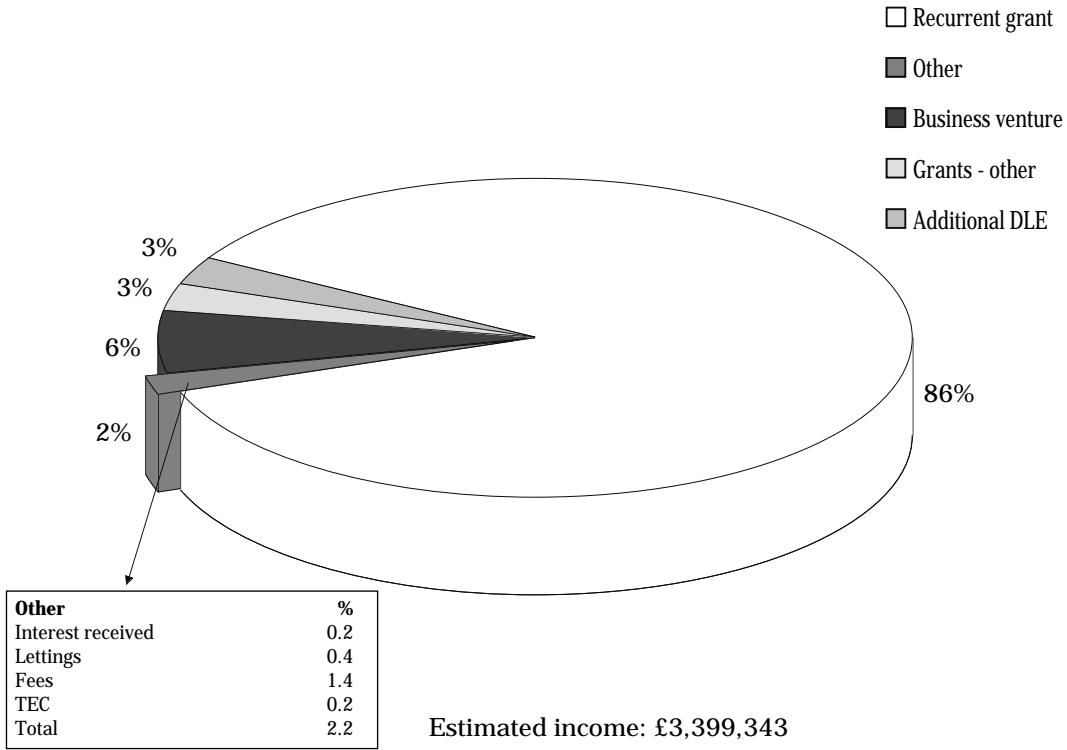
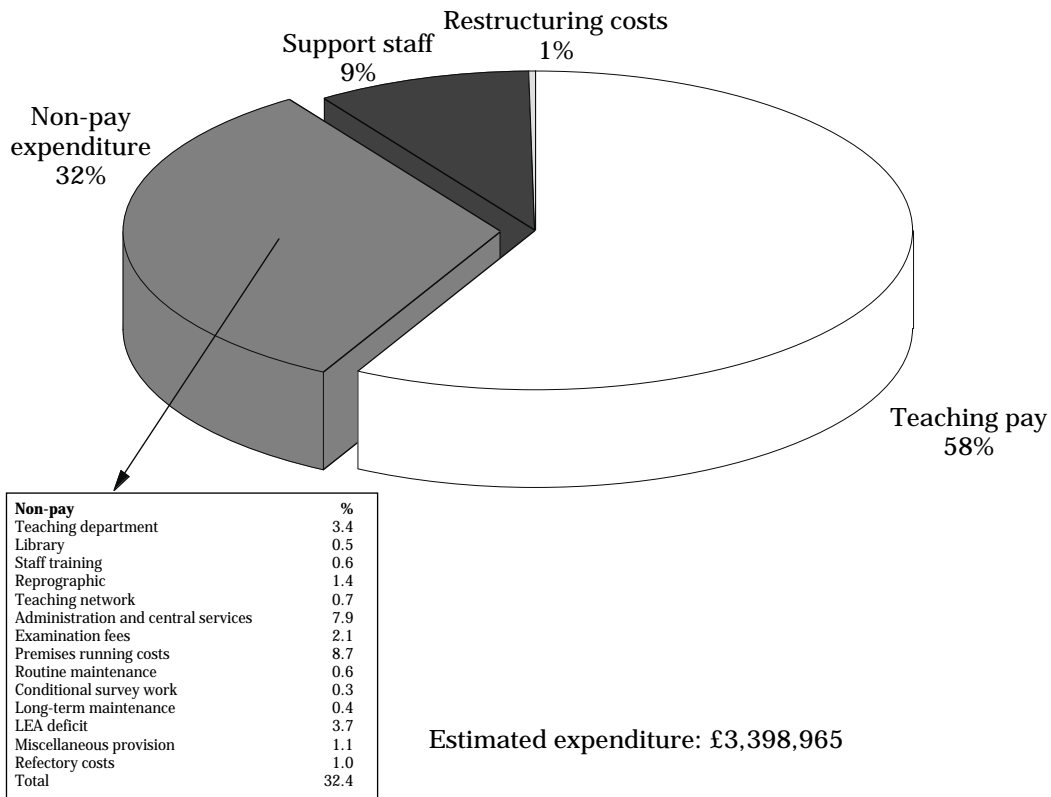


Figure 6

North Area College: estimated expenditure (16 months to July 1994)



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