

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Norton Radstock College

September 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 118/95

NORTON RADSTOCK COLLEGE

SOUTH WEST REGION

Inspected March–May 1995

Summary

Norton Radstock College provides education and training mainly for adult students on part-time courses although it is recruiting an increasing number of 16-19 year old students studying full time. The college has achieved its aims of increasing student numbers and improving some of its accommodation. The targets it has set itself are effectively monitored, using reliable data from its management information systems. Governors are supportive of the college and its work. There is an effective admissions service. The teaching is of good quality and students' levels of achievement are generally high. Students have good access to high-quality information technology resources. The college should: address weaknesses in the provision of tutorial and counselling support for students; improve library and learning resources; implement and monitor the equal opportunities policy; ensure that more staff quickly gain Training and Development Lead Body accreditation; improve some aspects of accommodation; continue to develop the quality assurance system; make progress in analysing the costs involved in delivering the curriculum; and strengthen clerking arrangements for the governing body.

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		2
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		3
Quality assurance		2
Resources:	staffing	3
	equipment/learning resources	3
	accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	2	Health and community care	1
Horticulture	2	Art and design	2
Engineering	2	Humanities	2
Business	2	Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2

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INTRODUCTION

1 A team of 16 inspectors spent a total of 62 days visiting the college between 20 March 1995 and 25 May 1995. They observed 138 classes and inspected samples of students' work. The inspectors held discussions with staff, students, college governors, parents and representatives from industry, the local community and the Western Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Inspectors also examined the wide range of documentation supplied by the college including the strategic plan and self-assessment report.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Norton Radstock College has a mainly rural catchment area on the border of south east Avon and north Somerset. The local community has its roots in agriculture, mining and the railway industry that served the mines. The college opened in 1948 to cater specifically for the needs of new entrants to the mining industry but the last pit closed over 20 years ago. The college is located in the centre of the small town of Radstock on the southern fringe of the Wansdyke district of Avon, nine miles from the City of Bath. There are close community links between Radstock and the small town of Midsomer Norton two miles away and together they comprise the district known as Norton Radstock. Until local government reorganisation in 1974, the district formed part of Somerset. Recent proposals for reorganisation will lead to the creation of a new unitary authority for the Bath and Wansdyke area from 1996. The college also uses two very small sites in Midsomer Norton and a large house about 13 miles away in Keynsham on the south east edge of Bristol.

3 Unemployment in Avon was 9.2 per cent in April 1994 and fell to 7.7 per cent in April 1995. A number of local employers have recently reduced the scale of their operations. Manufacturing industry now accounts for 30 per cent of local employment compared with 41 per cent in 1981.

4 Almost 90 per cent of the students enrolled at the college are over 19 years of age and 91 per cent are studying on part-time programmes. Enrolments have grown rapidly since incorporation. In 1993-94, a growth of almost 15 per cent was recorded and in the current academic year, the college estimates that it will exceed its target units of activity by 14 per cent. Enrolments by age, level of study, and mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3.

5 Other local providers of education for students over 16 years of age are the five 11-18 comprehensive schools in the Wansdyke District and the colleges of further education in Bath and Trowbridge which are both within 15 miles of the college. The Keynsham site of the college is three miles from St Brendans Sixth Form College.

6 The college directorate comprises the director, deputy director and finance manager. To form the senior management team, this group is joined by three senior academic managers, who each have responsibility

for a number of teaching units, and by three senior cross-college managers with responsibility for operations and planning, physical resources, and admissions and marketing, respectively. Teaching and support staff are managed through 10 units, each of which has a unit manager. There are 33 full-time teachers, 17 teachers on substantial fractional appointments, 192 part-time teachers and 54 support staff. In total the college employs 137 full-time equivalent staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7 The college's mission is to work with the local community to provide high-quality education, training and learning opportunities. It has committed itself to achieving this mission by 'encouraging students to become more responsible for their own learning, in an environment where equal opportunities and value for money lead to customer delight'.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The college offers a particularly wide range of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 3 in welding, engineering, motor vehicle, amenity horticulture, floristry, animal care, business administration, information technology, accounting, hairdressing, care, childcare, teacher training and at levels 1 to 5 in management. Students are able to enrol on most college courses throughout the year and to combine subjects and modules to create their own individual programmes. The information technology unit provides training on a drop-in basis.

9 The college provides a wide range of other part-time courses in response to needs identified in the community. Courses include languages, creative art and design, sporting and health programmes, and adult basic education programmes at college sites and a variety of community venues. The project funded by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, which brings together parents and children with reading and writing difficulties in a joint workshop programme, is one example of the college's response to the community. A community network group co-ordinated by the college acts as a consultative body to inform the college about community needs.

10 Full-time General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) are available in business, leisure and tourism, art and design, information technology, and health and social care. There are two access to higher education programmes, a general and a specialist programme in art and design, both validated through the Western Colleges Access Partnership. Eleven General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level), one GCE advanced supplementary (AS) and nine General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects are currently on offer, although there are plans to expand the programme in 1995-96.

11 The college's links with higher education, although small in number, are developing and include the certificate and diploma programme in informatics which can be taken on a full-time or part-time basis and can exempt students from parts of the University of Sheffield's bachelor of technology degree. There is also a postgraduate certificate in education

course validated by Bath College of Higher Education which is in its first year.

12 The college offers systems to accredit students' prior learning only in business administration and teacher training. Six students have taken advantage of this opportunity to date.

13 Links with local schools are productive. College staff attend careers events at schools by invitation and some liaison takes place with careers staff in schools. Some units offer promotional events but there is no college-wide approach to the provision of taster days for school pupils. There are some examples of effective collaboration; for example, college staff teach GCE A level accounts to school pupils, they have trained school teachers in assessment for GNVQs and they co-ordinate work experience for approximately 600 students in three comprehensive schools and two special schools.

14 Relationships with the two local special schools are particularly strong. The work is led by a designated member of the learning support unit. There is a part-time programme for year 11 pupils at the special schools and two full-time programmes for students with learning difficulties. Over 40 students are enrolled on these programmes, which have a strong vocational focus and include opportunities for work experience. Students are progressing well from these programmes, especially to youth training schemes.

15 The head of admissions is responsible for co-ordinating marketing activities. The emphasis is on advertising and promotional activities, which include the use of a community bus. Full-time and part-time prospectuses give basic written information about college programmes: they could be enlivened by greater use of photographs. The full-time prospectus does not reflect the opportunities for flexible study and some of the information it contains is out of date. A separate brochure outlines services to business.

16 There are good working relationships with the two local TECs. The college has a contract with Western TEC for youth and adult training programmes and new links with Somerset TEC have resulted in a contract to deliver youth training. Western TEC, Wansdyke District Council and the college have established a local business link, the Wansdyke Business Partnership. This provides a training consultancy for local employers, bureau services to small businesses and work experience opportunities for students.

17 Relationships with local employers are good. The college has initiated meetings between groups of employers in care, distribution, printing, motor vehicle maintenance and hairdressing in order to promote awareness of training and NVQs, and to encourage opportunities for the exchange of good practice between employers. Some of the groups, such as the care consortium have been very successful but not all involve employers in the planning and assessment of students' programmes. Short

courses for employers have included work in management, care, health and safety, information technology, motor vehicle maintenance and horticulture.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

18 The 16 members of the corporation fully support the college's strategy to increase student numbers and to improve its accommodation, and they work hard to achieve these aims. The relationship between the senior managers and the governors is constructive. Business members generally have experience at senior level in industry or commerce. In addition to the 10 business members and the director and deputy director, there is an employee of Western TEC and two co-opted members from the local community. At the time of the inspection, there was one vacancy. There are no staff or student members. The governors receive regular financial reports and a detailed annual report from the director which covers college performance. However, the governing body has yet to develop effective procedures for monitoring college policies, including equal opportunities and health and safety. There have been some training events for governors on aspects of their work.

19 There are subcommittees for remuneration, audit, and finance and employment policy and these are generally effective. The remit for the finance and employment policy subcommittee is to advise the main board, make and record recommendations and to seek approval by the board. In effect, many of the recommendations recorded in the finance and employment policy subcommittee's minutes receive little discussion at the full board meetings according to the minutes. This may be due to inadequate clerking. A new clerk has been appointed from 1 June 1995.

20 The draft strategic plan was sent to all staff and discussed at a series of consultative meetings. The three-year strategic plan is supported by a one-year operational plan. The college plans draw on business plans prepared by the unit managers which each include an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the unit's programmes, operational objectives, and targets for enrolment, retention and achievement. The majority of the plans are well prepared and useful.

21 Decision making within the college is ultimately the responsibility of the directorate. Although the directorate does not hold formal meetings, the members of the team work closely together. The senior management team meets fortnightly to share information and advise the directorate. At alternate meetings of the senior management team, members undertake thorough performance reviews of the achievement of targets including those for enrolment, retention and student achievement. Members of the team have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and have generally achieved the targets set. Targets for unit managers are clearly defined in the delivery contract which is agreed between the director and the unit manager. Unit managers are required to include targets in their business plans and progress towards achieving these is well

monitored. All full-time and fractional full-time academic staff are given key objectives to achieve each year.

22 The curriculum quality council replaced the academic board in September 1994. It has a wider remit to cover all aspects of monitoring the quality of courses and support services for students. The council is representative of the college staff and is seen as an effective forum for the discussion of academic affairs.

23 Staff, students and courses are based in one of the 10 units, each of which has a unit manager. The 10 units are: business administration, adult and community education, business and management, information technology, health and social care, industrial technologies, motor vehicle, learning support, horticulture and animal care. Some units have a very small number of full-time staff; for example, the community education unit only has 1.5 full-time staff but carries the responsibility for 2,730 students. The large number of part-time staff in this unit causes operational problems for some course teams. There is an annual schedule of meetings for units and course teams. Meetings are generally well attended but the extent to which discussions and decisions are recorded varies.

24 Responsibility for the management of the part-time teaching staff budget and a budget for consumable items is devolved to the unit managers. The finance function produces timely reports for budget holders. Unit managers have some flexibility to transfer funds between budget headings after consultation with the director or deputy director. Although there have been some attempts to produce a unit costing process, the college is not systematically determining the costs of its activities. In 1994-95, the college had an average level of funding of £16.53 per unit of activity compared with the median level of funding for general further education and tertiary colleges of £18.17. The college's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

25 There are well-developed, computer-based management systems such as the student record system which covers enrolments, retention and student tracking, examinations data and fees. The college has been part of a pilot project to develop an individual student record system and now has an agreed and fully-validated individual student record database. In general, facilities for student tracking are good. These systems provide valuable management information on a routine basis.

26 Health and safety are the responsibility of the physical resources manager. There is a health and safety policy which has been approved by the governing body but it is being revised by the college safety adviser to reflect the growth in the college and the changes in accommodation. The safety committee has the responsibility for monitoring the policy. The college has a series of risk assessments which it regards as inadequate and a further set of assessments is being developed by the new facilities manager.

27 There are several statements and policies relating to equality of opportunity and the avoidance of discriminatory practices. Responsibilities for implementing and monitoring these are not clearly defined nor understood throughout the college. The equal opportunities working group is the only forum where issues are raised and discussed. This group has no clear remit and none of the senior managers is a member. It meets infrequently and its reporting lines are unclear.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

28 The student support systems are currently being developed but there are many aspects still requiring attention. There is no senior member of staff with overall responsibility for tutorial support which is devolved to the curriculum units. While there is evidence of much good practice, the lack of a properly monitored, formal framework results in inconsistency of practice. However, most students feel well supported by their tutor, and the level of informal support they receive is good.

29 The central admissions centre has overall responsibility for administering and co-ordinating the admissions procedures, recruitment and promotional events, work placements and the production and dissemination of marketing materials. The centre is based in the reception area: its staff are trained in customer care and provide a welcoming introduction to visitors seeking information about the college. The manager of the unit is a member of the senior management group. A rolling programme of promotional events, some of which are specific to particular subjects or courses, is targeted on schools and adults in the local community.

30 The admissions procedures are clearly documented. They ensure effective tracking of individual students from the enquiry stage through to enrolment, although overall figures on the proportion of initial enquiries leading to eventual enrolments are not calculated. Guidance interviews are expertly carried out by admissions centre staff, unit managers and senior managers. Interviewers are provided with outlines of the various courses.

31 The college provides assistance with childcare and transport. There are creche facilities for 16 children aged from six months to three years at Keynsham and Radstock, and 20 nursery places for children aged from two to five are available two miles from the college. The creche is free to students and there are some free places in the nursery. Both facilities are bright and cheerful and the places are in great demand. The college provides a free bus service to students who live in the Keynsham area and recruitment from there has increased since the service began. Access funds, administered by the student services officer, are allocated principally to assist with examination and registration fees and with essential books and materials. The college waives tuition fees in some cases of hardship.

32 There has been no college-wide induction programme for students in 1994-95, although most courses provide their own introduction. The flexible nature of much of the provision means that students have good opportunities for changing course if they wish, either during the induction period or later. Last September the learning support unit offered to screen all full-time students in order to identify their literacy and numeracy needs. However, less than 60 per cent were screened because not all teaching units responded to the offer. The identification of students' need for additional support and the extent to which these needs are addressed, depends on the initiative of individual tutors and the willingness of the students to attend the workshops provided. Qualifications in numberpower and wordpower are available in the workshops and students can receive help with specific projects which they find difficult. Records of work and action plans are maintained and shared with the course tutors. All full-time tutors are to be trained in the identification and assessment of learning needs and the delivery of learning support by September 1995.

33 There are comprehensive and well-documented procedures for the recruitment, guidance and support of adult basic education students and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students are interviewed individually. Thorough notes are taken of what is discussed and, subsequently, there is careful monitoring and recording of students' progress. Parents are involved where this is appropriate. Students with physical disabilities are well supported.

34 All full-time and some part-time students have a personal tutor who is normally the subject or course teacher who interviewed them prior to entry. This helps to provide continuity. Although many students have a structured tutorial programme as part of their course, there is no specification of the kind of tutorial support which might be provided and no concept of entitlement. The staff are committed to providing high standards of support both in their role as tutors and as subject teachers. Students particularly value the individual tutorial sessions they receive. However, the frequency with which students meet their tutors, and the content and form of their tutorials, depend on the teaching unit within which they are studying and the individual course tutor. Tutors have a limited awareness of the college procedures for addressing problems related to absenteeism. Tutorial issues are raised as agenda items at unit team meetings but they are not a regular item and tutors do not come together specifically to discuss such issues. The quality of the provision is not monitored by the college.

35 Students are not encouraged to maintain records of achievement although those with learning difficulties are asked to bring existing records to interview and, once on their course, to keep a logbook of their achievements, which can be presented at job interviews. An individual action plan is completed by central admissions but the student and tutor have little involvement in its completion and maintenance. There are

inadequate arrangements for consulting with parents on the progress of younger students.

36 There is no service provided by trained counsellors within the college. Staff are able to refer students to the student services officer who provides advice on welfare and financial matters, co-ordinates the careers provision and provides a substantial amount of personal guidance to students. Students are referred to outside agencies if their needs cannot be met by the college support systems. There has been insufficient monitoring of students' needs to ensure that the present level of guidance and counselling is sufficient.

37 Careers and higher education advice and guidance are available to all students. They are provided by the local careers service and by the student services officer. There is specialist guidance for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A well-equipped careers library is situated within the students' common room. Responsibility for providing information about the careers service, and for encouraging students to arrange careers interviews rest with personal tutors. The extent to which they fulfil this responsibility varies, and the level of students' knowledge and use of the service is low.

38 Attempts by the student services officer to encourage students to participate in a students' association have met with little success. There is little in the way of social or sporting activities in the college. The facilities which are available, such as the students' common room, are little used.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

39 The following table summarises the grades given to the 138 teaching sessions inspected. Seventy-two per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses and a further 24 per cent had a balance of strengths and weaknesses. The weaknesses outweighed the strengths in only 4 per cent of sessions. The generally high quality of teaching was a feature of all subject areas inspected. The profile of grades awarded to teaching sessions is significantly better than the national grade distribution for the 11,000 sessions inspected during 1993-94. The table below shows the grades awarded for the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GNVQ		3	8	4	0	0	15
NVQ		8	15	8	1	0	32
GCE AS/A level		1	2	2	0	1	6
GCSE		0	4	1	1	0	6
Basic education		4	5	3	0	0	12
Other		20	29	15	3	0	67
Total		36	63	33	5	1	138

40 Courses are well planned and fully documented. Most lecturers follow well-prepared schemes of work which ensure that the aims of the courses are met. Good planning is particularly evident on Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and GNVQ courses in health and social care and in business and finance. In a few cases, however, schemes of work are simply a list of topics to be covered with little indication of the depth or treatment intended.

41 Teaching sessions are well prepared and effectively delivered. The aims and objectives of sessions are clear and are communicated to the students at the start. For example, in art and design teachers plan each session with the needs and interests of their students in mind; they share their objectives for the lesson with students, in practice, most of these objectives are met. Engineering students respond well when questioned on their workplace experience and the activities, designed by lecturers, ensure that they are attentive and involved in their work for the whole of the session.

42 Relationships between students and lecturers are good. Students are treated as adults and feel valued. Relaxed, friendly and productive working environments are the norm. In health and social care, students contributed freely to discussions and were appropriately challenged on their assumptions. In an information technology class for students with moderate to severe learning difficulties, there were two staff for six students providing a very supportive environment. The use of well-differentiated assignments in this class provided an appropriate challenge for each student.

43 Teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching techniques. There were many good examples of small groupwork and whole class discussions and debates. The great majority of the teaching was lively and effective, and students responded with enthusiasm and commitment. In a session on family literacy, six mothers each with a child, were working together to improve literacy skills through co-operative project work. Each pair was able to choose their own topic. Two tutors and a wide range of resources were available to support the work.

44 Lecturers demonstrated the importance of using a wide range of sources and encouraged students to pursue individual research. In a GNVQ advanced course in health care, students watched a video which, using a range of research material, made the case that poverty was a major factor in the poor health of children and adults. The class then divided into two groups and debated the issue in an engrossing session which sharpened awareness and retention of knowledge. In business and management, a tutor showed a video on Japanese methods of car production in the context of motivation theory. The students had been well briefed prior to the video and had been told what to look out for. The tutor led a very effective follow-up discussion.

45 Marking is usually thorough and accurate with lecturers providing informative written comments on students' work. In business

administration, work is regularly assessed and teachers give helpful comments on how improvements can be achieved. Assignments in information technology have clear assessment criteria against which marks are awarded and comments are also made on the content of the work. In engineering, there are clear marking schemes for welding courses. In health care although the marking is sound and there is substantial feedback from tutors, some of the more able students receive insufficient criticism to enable them to improve their performance.

46 The quality of teaching in practical subjects is high and staff set appropriate professional standards. In horticulture, the nursery and grounds provide opportunities for students to develop practical skills relating to landscape, turf and arboriculture. Activities in engineering workshops are well managed and ensure that all students are participating in a practice or assessment task. In business studies sessions, secretarial workshops, and practical sessions in information technology, there are good learning support materials and lecturers move easily from teaching the whole class to helping individual students.

47 On many courses, for example business studies, leisure and tourism, and health and social care, training in information technology is required by the awarding body. In these cases, students are able to demonstrate appropriate levels of competence in the use of computers. Students on the nursery nursing course, providing feedback on their research into nursery school policy and provision in the United States of America, gave high-quality presentations of data. The accompanying handouts produced using information technology were of a professional standard.

48 On some GNVQ courses, the teaching and assessment of numeracy and communication skills were not adequately integrated with the rest of the programme.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

49 Examination results, with a few exceptions, are generally good and frequently very good. Students are well motivated and approach their work with enthusiasm and commitment. Most students participate confidently and effectively in discussion and are fully involved in the learning process, features encouraged by the excellent relationships which exist between students and lecturers.

50 In most subjects, students develop relevant practical skills at an appropriate level and produce work to good professional standards. Practical outcomes in welding and assignment work in computing are particularly good examples. Students on most courses are given opportunities to solve problems and to work on projects in pairs or small groups and the majority develop effective team-working skills.

51 Students' written work is generally good. There are examples of exceptionally well-presented work in health care, humanities and computing. The majority of students acquire good organisational and note-taking skills.

52 GCE A level represents only a small proportion of the college's work but most results for 1993-94 were worse than in the previous year. There was a total of 147 entries for GCE A level examinations in 1994; eight resulted in a grade A pass, 20 a grade B pass and there were 67 grades C-E. The overall pass rate was 65 per cent compared with 71 per cent in 1992-93. This compares with a national pass rate of 68 per cent for further education colleges other than sixth form colleges. Of the 147 candidates, 112 were over the age of 18 and their performance, with an average points score of 3.2 (where A=10, E=2), was much better than those in the 16-18 age range. The performance tables published by the Department for Education in 1994 show an average points score of 1.1 for the 35 candidates in the 16-18 age group, which places the college in the bottom 10 per cent of sector colleges on this performance measure.

53 There were 181 entries for GCSE subjects in 1994 in accounts, business studies, human biology, mathematics, psychology, sociology and English. The performance of the 127 students over the age of 18 was good; 70 per cent of candidates gained grades A to C against a national average of 60 per cent. Of the 54 students in the 16-18 age range 33 per cent achieved grades A to C against a national average of 38 per cent for sector colleges other than sixth forms. Overall, 64 per cent of all candidates gained grades A to C and there were particularly good results in psychology (85 per cent), sociology (83 per cent) and English (81 per cent). None of the nine entries in biology obtained a pass at grades A to C.

54 Students generally display good levels of ability in the core skills of communications, numeracy and information technology. In written GCSE German and French, students showed independent study and research skills in a range of exercises. In art and design there were examples of the effective use of numeracy work leading to experimentation with geometric shapes. Student projects in the GNVQ advanced course in health and social care used survey techniques, questionnaire design and data analysis effectively.

55 There were only six students aged 16-18 in their final year of study on vocational courses included in the Department for Education's 1994 performance tables and all achieved their qualification. Other courses with a 100 per cent pass rate were the BTEC national diploma in care course, the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) advanced management in care course, the C&G information technology course, the C&G basic competence in information technology course, and the GNVQ leisure and tourism courses at both foundation and intermediate level. Most vocational courses had a pass rate of between 80 per cent and 100 per cent.

56 For the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) advanced diploma in information technology (NVQ level 3), 15 out of 16 candidates were awarded full certificates. On the University of Sheffield certificate in informatics, the first year of the university degree, 7 out of 12 students completed the programme and have gone on to further study. On the

access to higher education programmes, 24 out of 36 students successfully completed their programmes and secured places at higher education institutions.

57 Approximately 75 per cent of full-time and 93 per cent of part-time students who enrolled for a programme in 1993-94 completed it, although there were considerable variations between courses. For example, the average retention rate for part-time health and social care courses was high at 97 per cent while full-time courses in the information technology and computing unit had a retention rate of 61 per cent. Students are punctual for their classes and attendance is monitored. In the 138 classes visited during the inspection, the average level of attendance was 81 per cent.

58 Comprehensive destination statistics are not collected for the whole student population but an analysis of the intended destinations for full-time students who completed their programmes of study and left in July 1994 indicate that 11 per cent intended to go on to higher education, 27 per cent intended to remain in further education and 23 per cent intended to take employment. The intentions of the remaining 39 per cent were not known.

59 During the last academic year the college began a pilot project analysing the value added to students' achievements through study at the college, by comparing qualifications on entry with achievements on exit. A great deal of work has been put into the construction and validation of the model and the initial results confirm the generally high levels of achievement, suggesting that students with lower achievement on entry are particularly advantaged by their college experience.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

60 The college is committed to a policy of continuous quality improvement and has developed its quality assurance system over a number of years. The associated plans and procedures are well documented but there is insufficient understanding of how the college system is intended to operate at programme level.

61 At management level, quality assurance is implemented through a well-developed system of setting targets which are published in the strategic plan. Targets are set for enrolment, retention, part-time hours, income generation and student achievement together with other targets and objectives relating to development issues. Monitoring of progress is effective and individual members of the senior management team have responsibility for reporting regularly on progress to other members of the group. Targets at institutional level are reviewed and revised through the planning process and through discussions with the senior academic managers and unit managers. Performance indicators for enrolment and retention are used by the senior management team who receive regular reports generated by the central information system.

62 There is a detailed quality assurance manual which contains procedures relating to the students' experience of the college. Procedures are identified for dealing with inquiries, guidance, enrolment, induction, provision of student services, the operation of courses and examination entry. The manual, used by unit managers and cross-college staff, focuses mainly on administrative procedures. It does not yet include procedures for academic activities such as assessment, internal moderation and verification, and course evaluation and review. Such procedures would help to address some of the comments made by external organisations regarding the lack of a college internal verifier system.

63 There is a system of course evaluation which relies on the use of three questionnaires to gauge students' perceptions on entry, on course and as they leave. Staff respond to the comments which are received. Their evaluation of courses, however, is of variable quality; some course evaluation reports do not include comments about important aspects of provision. For example, analysis of examination performance is often missing and agreed actions are not always clear. The variable quality of reporting at course level is identified in a recent college self-assessment report. Summaries of course team reports are prepared by senior academic managers. These are discussed in meetings of the quality council, the minutes of which are presented to the governing body. The governing body also receives reports on overall enrolments and examination performance.

64 A set of standards has been developed for teaching and learning but not all staff are familiar with the standards and they are not used effectively to aid evaluation. Students also show no awareness of these standards although those for teaching and learning have been incorporated into the questionnaires used to obtain students' perceptions of the provision.

65 The college has a system for the annual appraisal of teaching and support staff which is effectively linked to the college's staff-development programme. Training plans for all teaching and support staff are being developed and staff are generally positive about the system. Appraisal does not include direct observation of teaching. Although the system is intended to include part-time staff, few of them have been appraised. To some extent therefore, the advantages of enhancing the quality of staff performance through appraisal and development is lost in teams where a large percentage of teaching is undertaken by part-time staff.

66 Staff development is well managed and approximately 1.5 per cent of the total college budget is dedicated to it. As part of the strategic planning process, training targets for all staff have been identified. Staff evaluate training courses they have attended and the outcomes of the training are discussed at their next appraisal meeting. The college has committed itself to achieving the Investors in People award.

67 All new staff attend an induction programme which deals mainly with systems and issues at college level. New staff who lack teaching

qualifications are offered the opportunity to begin training during their first year at the college.

68 Governors, staff, students and members of the community were involved in commenting on the college charter during its preparation. Students receive a copy when they enrol. The charter gives information on the facilities and services the college offers, together with the standard of service students, employers and members of the community can expect. Some of the language used contains too much jargon. There is no systematic check that the published standards of service are being met and the corporation does not have a significant role in the monitoring and further development of the charter.

69 The college produced a self-assessment report for the inspection. This contained no analysis of the strengths and weaknesses associated with teaching and learning nor student achievement. Most sections contained useful factual information but the level of analysis and evaluation was modest.

RESOURCES

Staffing

70 All full-time college staff below directorate level now have the same contract of employment, which includes an element of performance-related pay. The percentage use of hourly-paid part-time staff varies between units but, with the exception of adult and community education, no unit exceeds 37 per cent. The wide range of courses offered in units often results in high administrative workloads for permanent staff.

71 Permanent teaching staff are suitably qualified for the work they undertake. Approximately 42 per cent have subject-specific degrees which are relevant to their current teaching commitment and the remainder generally hold advanced level craft or technician qualifications. Most full-time and permanent part-time staff have undertaken some teacher training, with 60 per cent holding a professional teaching qualification. Instructors in information technology, horticulture, welding and motor vehicle work are used effectively to help assess students and support teaching. Most full-time and part-time staff have relevant experience outside education, many in professional and/or management positions. Since 1993, staff in health and social care, motor vehicle work and horticulture have taken advantage of opportunities to update their professional experience. Progress towards the achievement of assessor and verifier awards has been slow. At present, 28 per cent of staff working towards assessor qualifications have achieved their award. Ten staff are registered for internal verifier awards and, to date, six have achieved the qualification. Only one member of staff is qualified in the assessment of prior learning.

72 To date, all personnel work has been undertaken by the director and the deputy director: a part-time professionally-qualified personnel officer has been appointed as from 1 June 1995. Overall, the level of clerical support for the teaching units is inadequate. A single member of staff in student services is responsible for counselling, careers, students' union liaison and 16-19 year olds' applications to higher education. There is no technician support for art and design, languages, hairdressing or health and social care.

Equipment/learning resources

73 Library provision is based solely at the Radstock site. No provision is made at Keynsham. The service is staffed by a newly-appointed learning resources centre manager, two half-time qualified librarians and two half-time library assistants. Opening hours are from 08.30 to 20.00 with a 16.00 finish on Fridays. There are 40 study spaces which, although below the library association's norms, are adequate for the low level of usage. A draft development document has been produced outlining aims, objectives, staffing and quality issues. It has been supported by the results of a recent student user questionnaire and by meetings with each of the unit managers.

74 The library provides a range of services to staff and students including books for loan and reference, access to newspapers, periodicals, compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) computers and the Internet. At present, there are significant amounts of out-of-date stock in some areas including business administration and engineering. Library resources in art and design subjects, languages, mathematics, health and social care, horticulture and animal care are poor, and in some instances staff and students make little use of the library. There are few library guides or written information about new services available to users.

75 Most teaching rooms are well equipped with general-purpose learning aids, including whiteboards and overhead projectors. Access to video facilities is satisfactory.

76 The adequacy of specialist equipment varies. In horticulture and animal care the range and condition of equipment is adequate to cope with the courses currently taught. There is no training office for business administration students, although students are provided with work experience through the Wansdyke Business Partnership. In some areas, for example, foreign languages and art and design, there are some shortages and inadequacies in the equipment base. In general engineering, much of the equipment is old although recent capital expenditure has provided industry standard equipment in welding, fabrication and motor vehicle studies.

77 The college's information technology policy, which has been in place for more than five years, lays down college-wide standards for hardware and software. Implementation of the policy has been consistent and has resulted in very good provision. There are approximately 200

high-specification workstations for students' use. Machines are available in the library, in the open-access centre and in a separate drop-in centre intended for general use. Access for students to the open-access centre, from 08.30 until 20.00, is good. A wide range of modern software is available, and there are sets of user guides, many developed by students within the college. Support for users is provided by students on the information technology technicians course. There is a sound strategy for developing communications networks for both teaching and administrative purposes.

Accommodation

78 There has been substantial upgrading of the accommodation since 1993, including redecoration, carpeting and the installation of blinds. Arrangements for site maintenance, caretaking, and security are generally good. Standards of cleaning throughout the college are high.

79 Accommodation at the main site in Radstock has been enhanced recently. A substantial new teaching block, which includes 16 teaching rooms, an information technology centre, some staff accommodation, two student lounges and administrative offices was completed in December 1994. This is an outstanding facility. An adjacent building, dating from the early 1960s, provides a small amount of general purpose teaching accommodation, a well-presented reception area, a student services centre, office space, a refectory, a library and a learning-resource area. There are also some engineering workshops, some of which are of a barely adequate standard. Approximately 25 mobiles are used as teaching rooms. The external condition of most of the mobiles is poor although, internally, most have been fitted with carpets and blinds in an effort to improve the environment. Some of the mobiles, including those used for business administration, provide satisfactory accommodation but others, including those used for hairdressing, mathematics and computing, are poor. There is no science laboratory on site, and students working towards GCSEs and GCE A levels in biology are required to use the facilities of a local school. Storage facilities for horticulture and for art and design materials are inconvenient and not always secure.

80 Unit managers are responsible for organising the schedule of use for their specialist rooms. General teaching rooms are timetabled centrally but there is limited analysis of the use of accommodation. Average group sizes are low and, at the time of the inspection, many rooms were underused.

81 The quality of staff accommodation at the Radstock site varies. There are excellent facilities within the new teaching block. However, this contrasts sharply with some cramped and isolated staff accommodation elsewhere on the main site; in one case, three senior managers and a secretary are housed in a single room.

82 The Keynsham site accommodates some management courses, construction craft work, business administration and adult education provision. Although the site offers an attractive working environment, many of the rooms are small and lack the flexibility necessary for effective teaching and learning. With the exception of some construction craft workshops, access for wheelchair users is very difficult.

83 Two other small sites used by the college during the inspection were the former Midsomer Norton station, which provided unsatisfactory accommodation for art and craft work, and the cottage, a small administrative and teaching facility in the centre of Midsomer Norton. The former has now been vacated permanently.

84 There is sufficient parking at both sites to cater for staff and students. Social and refectory facilities for students are limited; there are small refectories at Radstock and at Keynsham and a student common room area only at Radstock. Access to facilities for wheelchair users at the Radstock site is generally good. There is a lift in the new block and automatic doors to the two main blocks. Toilet facilities for students with disabilities have been installed in the permanent accommodation and there are ramps to the majority of mobile classrooms.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

85 The college is making good progress towards achieving its aims. The strengths of the college are:

- the good quality of teaching resulting in generally high levels of achievement
- the growth in student numbers and improvements in accommodation
- a supportive governing body
- effective monitoring of progress towards targets, supported by reliable management information
- the wide range of courses leading to NVQs
- opportunities and support provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- an effective admissions service
- tutors who know their students and provide good informal support
- a strong commitment to improving quality systems which include all college activities
- high-quality resources for information technology, with good levels of access for students.

86 In order to continue to raise standards, the college should address the following:

- inadequacy of the clerking arrangements for the governing body
- poor implementation and monitoring of the equal opportunities policy
- the inconsistency in the provision of tutorial support for students
- poor provision of library and learning resources
- inadequacies in the provision of counselling services for students
- some poor accommodation and limited analysis of the use of accommodation
- the slow progress made towards analysing the cost of college activities
- the slow progress made towards gaining Training and Development Lead Body accreditation by staff
- some lack of understanding of the quality assurance system at programme level.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at June 1995)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (as at June 1995)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at June 1995)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

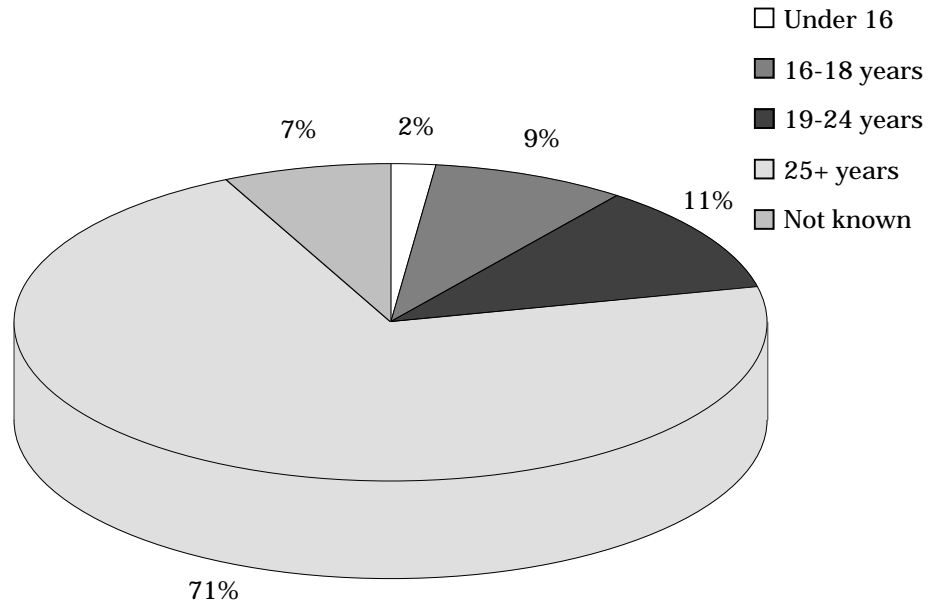
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

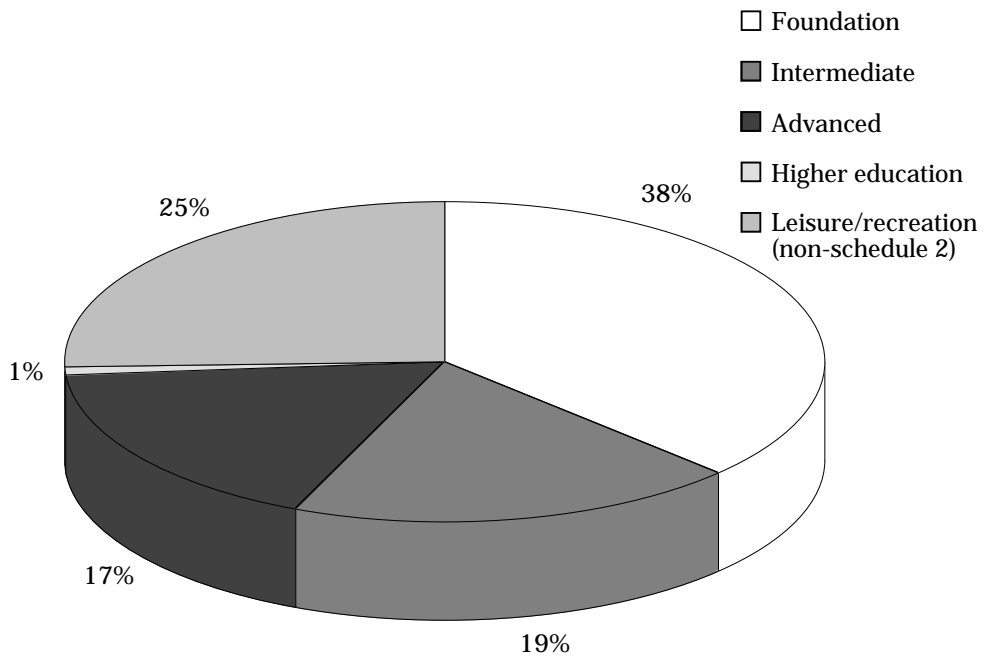
Norton Radstock College: percentage enrolments by age (as at June 1995)



Enrolments: 8,449

Figure 2

Norton Radstock College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at June 1995)



Enrolments: 8,449

Figure 3

Norton Radstock College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at June 1995)

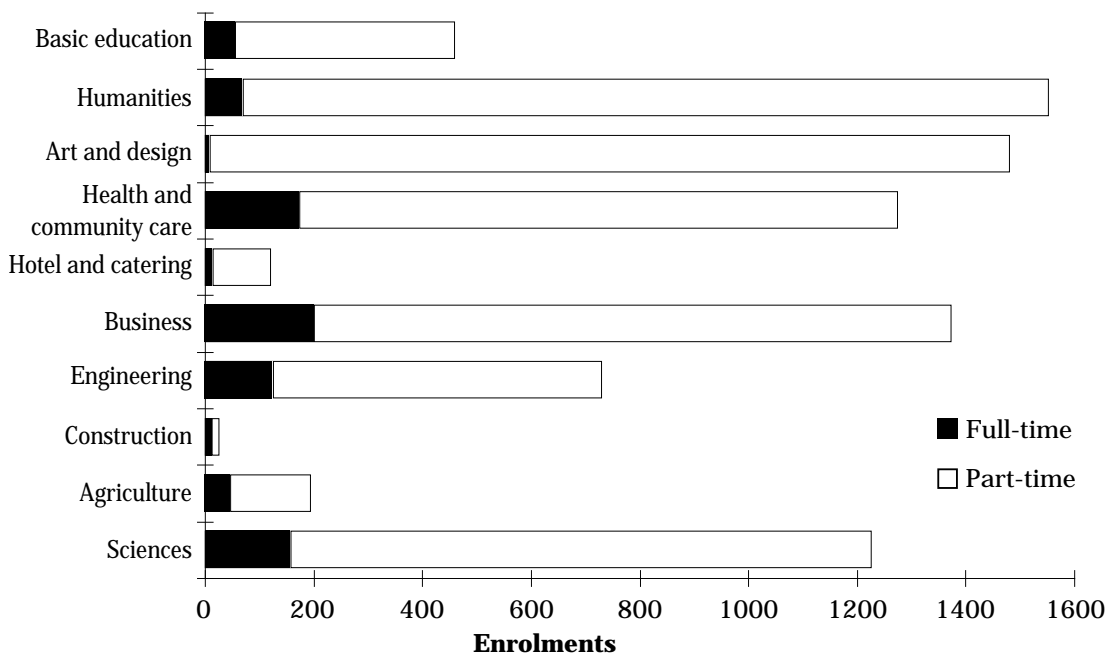


Figure 4

Norton Radstock College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994–95)

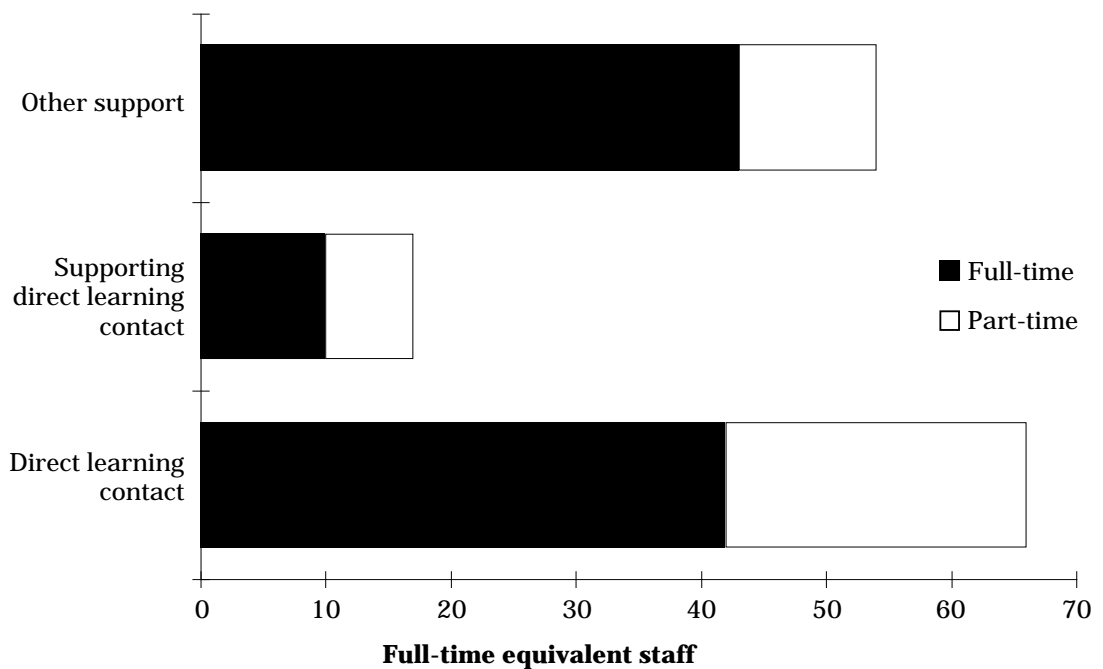
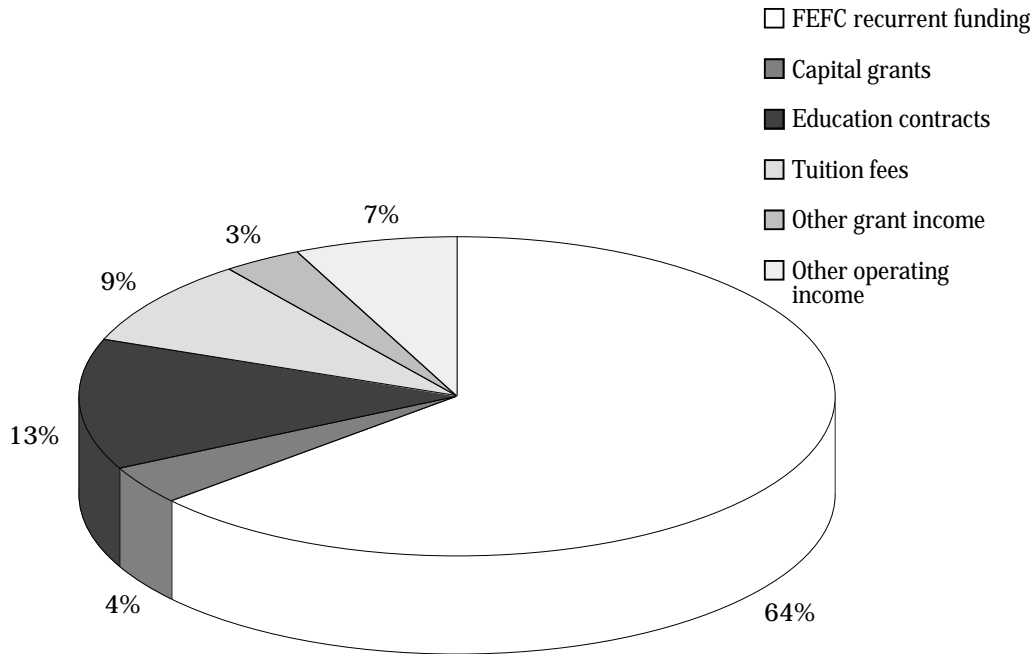


Figure 5

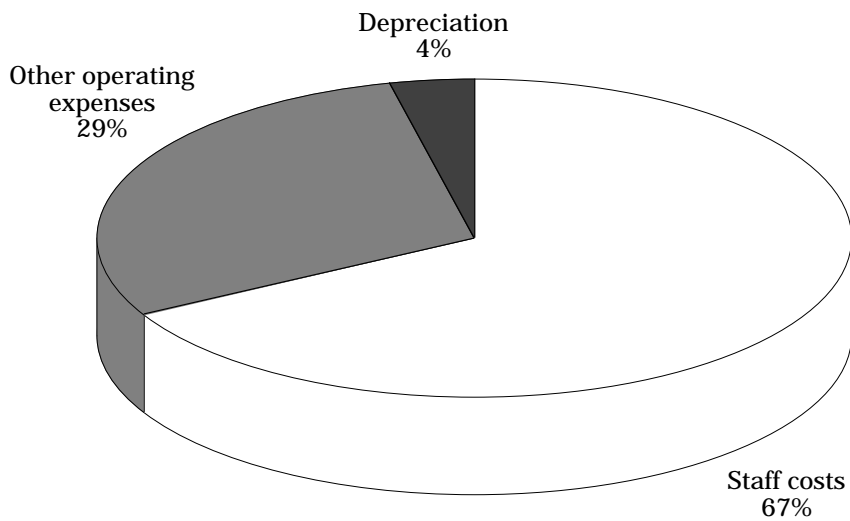
Norton Radstock College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £3,691,000

Figure 6

Norton Radstock College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £3,655,000

Note: this chart excludes £1,000 interest payable.

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
September 1995