

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Rother Valley College

April 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 46/95

ROTHER VALLEY COLLEGE
YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE REGION
Inspected November 1994 – January 1995

Summary

Rother Valley College was originally established to serve the education and training needs of the local mining community in South Yorkshire. Since the decline of the coalfields it has developed a broader range of courses. The college has exceeded its targets for growth in student numbers. The governors show a commitment to the economic regeneration of the area, with the college playing a full part. Communications within the college are good and the management team is readily accessible to students and staff. There are good standards of teaching on care courses and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students achieve good examination results on advanced level vocational programmes. Teachers are well qualified and experienced, and the staff-development programme is appropriately related to the college's strategic priorities. The library and learning-resource centres are well managed. A quality assurance framework has recently been established. The college should further develop the range of courses it offers; improve co-ordination of work experience and commercial activities; ensure a more consistent approach by divisions to the implementation of college policies; ensure that annual course reviews are of a consistent high quality; improve the quality of work in construction and horticulture; raise students' examination performance at intermediate level; develop procedures to elicit employers' views on courses; improve computer hardware and establish an agreed standard for software; and rectify deficiencies in existing accommodation, particularly the staff work areas.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Computing and information technology	3	Hotel and catering	3
Agriculture	3	Leisure and tourism	2
Construction and engineering	3	Health and community care	2
Business	3	Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2

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INTRODUCTION

1 Rother Valley College was inspected in two stages during November 1994 and January 1995. A team of eight inspectors spent a total of 33 inspector days between 16 and 20 January 1995 inspecting aspects of cross-college provision. Prior to this, 22 days were used for the inspection of specialist programme areas. In all, inspectors visited 95 teaching sessions. They examined samples of students' written work and held discussions with college governors, senior and middle managers, teachers and support staff, students, parents, employers, a representative from the Rotherham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and a senior careers officer.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Rother Valley College in Yorkshire was established in 1928 to serve the education and training needs of the neighbouring coal mining industry. With the decline and eventual closure of the local coalfields it has diversified its provision to meet a variety of needs. The college serves a rural part of south Yorkshire, with its main site at Dinnington, seven miles south of Rotherham. It also recruits students from Rotherham, Sheffield, Doncaster and parts of north Nottinghamshire and north Derbyshire. It has six outreach centres at Thrybergh, Aston, Maltby, Wales, Wickersley and Brinsworth. Within a radius of 20 miles there are six other further education colleges. In the Rotherham metropolitan borough there are eight schools with sixth forms. During the past two years the college has expanded its course provision, providing education and training in a wide range of vocational and non-vocational areas.

3 At the time of inspection, 7,024 students were enrolled at the college. Of these 919 were on full-time courses and 4,263 on part-time vocational courses. A further 1,842 students were enrolled on part-time non-vocational courses. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2, respectively and enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area in figure 3. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

4 The local economy of the Rotherham metropolitan borough is dominated by the decline in the traditional industrial base of coal, steel and heavy engineering. This decline has not been compensated for by growth in service and high technology industries. Rotherham has an unemployment rate of 14 per cent, one of the highest in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. Within Dinnington, the unemployment rates for men and women stand at 17.1 per cent and 10.6 per cent, respectively.

5 The college is organised into six divisions: health, care and science; business and recreation studies; general education; agriculture, horticulture and catering; information technology and electronics; engineering, construction and motor vehicles. There is a developing programme of General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A

level) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses. The college has also introduced a range of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) at intermediate and advanced levels in business, health and social care, leisure and science. The college has established partnership agreements with colleges in Spain and the Ukraine. Student study visits are undertaken to France, Holland and Germany.

6 The college mission statement places an emphasis on 'offering high quality learning opportunities to help individuals reach their potential'. The aims of the college over the next three years include the provision of adequate accommodation to ensure that the college meets the curricular needs of its customers, the maintenance of a sound financial base, and the continued development and provision of community-based education.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 The college is making a significant contribution to the achievement of the national targets for education and training in the south Rotherham area. College figures show that student enrolments have exceeded growth targets. Twenty-four new courses have been offered since September 1993, including nine new National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and five new GNVQs. National targets for education and training are referred to in planning documents and these documents are disseminated widely amongst staff.

8 Although the college is the main provider of vocational education in the locality, colleges in Rotherham, Sheffield and Doncaster are within easy travelling distance. Before incorporation, there was an agreement with the local education authority (LEA) not to compete with neighbouring schools, all of which cater for the full 11-18 age range. As a consequence, there are no foundation level GNVQs, and limited provision at GCSE and GCE A level. GCE A level courses were not available for full-time students until September 1994, and only 13 students are currently enrolled. Systematic planning of course provision was introduced only a year ago, and is still not fully reflected in divisional planning objectives. Provision tends to reflect past history and staff interests rather than any effective analysis of the needs of prospective students and employers in the travel-to-work area.

9 The college, nevertheless, is succeeding in broadening its range of courses. There is a good balance of work at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, and many students are able to progress within further education, or on to higher education or employment. Courses cover a range of occupational areas: business and administration, computing and information technology, health and social care, recreation and leisure, hair and beauty, electronics, construction, motor vehicle engineering, agriculture, horticulture and catering. However, there are few management and professional courses in the business area, and a narrow range of provision in engineering and construction. In construction, staff have been slow to develop NVQ qualifications. There are effective links

with higher education institutions. For example, the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) teacher training course for further education lecturers links to a certificate of education franchised by the University of Huddersfield. Some 50 students attend access and foundation courses designed to prepare students without formal qualifications for higher education. The college is completing arrangements to become an associate college of Sheffield Hallam University for this work. A higher national certificate course in business is run in conjunction with Doncaster College.

10 The college is developing its external links. It is involved in a variety of regeneration projects, including the local Dinnington Initiative Partnership. Coalfield area funds are used to support a project run jointly with the local authority under which the college helps to train unemployed miners. European Social Funds support courses for women returning to study. Catering students obtain NVQ certification by operating a commercial canteen for the Kiveton Park Steel company. There are student work placements in a wide range of organisations. European partnerships have been recently created with several institutions to provide some student exchanges. The college has set up a small enterprise unit called Roval at Dinnington Business Park which offers full-cost courses in information technology, health and safety, and business start up. Staffing is limited and earnings modest, the unit is currently running behind its targets. There are good relations with Rotherham TEC through various working groups, and a number of TEC-supported pilot projects run in conjunction with Roval.

11 The college is well rooted in the community it serves. There are about 2,500 enrolments in adult and basic education, making extensive use of the main site, six outreach centres, local authority and other facilities, for a range of recreational and accredited courses. Several adult students, including unemployed and redundant miners, have obtained vocational qualifications and started local businesses, some of which now offer work placements and jobs to current students.

12 The college's schools liaison team contacts local schools and arranges open days, 'taster' events and visits. There are some popular link courses for school pupils in information technology and motor vehicle studies, and some modules in health and social care are provided for GNVQ courses run by the schools. The college is keen to expand this collaborative work, but staff find that many schools fear competition, discourage access and do not give pupils of school leaving age sufficient information about the full range of educational opportunities post 16.

13 Contacts with business and industry are fragmented. Work placements are organised separately by each division and plans to co-ordinate their work are embryonic. Reports from Roval describe difficulties in identifying appropriate members of staff to promote business links and the difficulties in meeting clients' needs to which this leads. The identification of new opportunities is hampered by the separate operation

of the college's information bases. Courses in health and care, and in floristry, have advisory committees, but in many other areas the links with employers are weak. Employers are offered few opportunities to influence course developments.

14 There is a marketing officer and a marketing group which is made up of staff from each division. Publicity materials are informative and attractive. College staff have different perceptions of the market served; they fail to make best use of labour market intelligence from the various TECs in the travel-to-work area of the college. Several courses at foundation and intermediate levels, including three newly-offered GNVQs, failed to recruit this term, and the absence of students progressing from them may put some advanced provision at risk at a later date. At the moment, the college's marketing strategy needs to address this problem more systematically.

15 The college has responded to the needs of groups of people who have not, in the past, considered taking further education courses. There are courses, including vocational training programmes, for the unemployed, and extensive provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is a variety of courses for women returning to study, including a 'women into management' course and a full-time 'women only' course in woodworking and furniture making. An open-learning centre is being developed to allow students to work at a pace which suits them.

16 The college has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and an active equal opportunities committee which regularly reviews both policy and practice. The policy features prominently in college literature and is covered in student induction programmes. Divisions adapt the policy to their own circumstances. The views of students with physical impairments are taken into account in improving access to college facilities.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

17 The Rother Valley College corporation has 15 members. Nine members are experienced in business areas directly relevant to the college's activities. Membership also includes a representative from the Rotherham TEC, the principal, a member of the college staff, a representative from the student body and one co-opted member from Rotherham Education Committee. There is currently a vacancy for an additional teaching staff member. Women are under represented.

18 The governors participate in the activities of the college and actively promote its interests within the community. For example, governors played an important role in the development of a partnership with Kiveton Steel, which involves catering students. Governors participate with college managers in initiatives to regenerate the local economy. They have a clear understanding of their statutory duties and they properly observe the distinction between governance and management. Governors take an

active involvement in strategic planning issues; there are standing agenda items on strategic planning at each subcommittee and corporation meeting. Governors have been actively involved in the formulation of the college health and safety, and equal opportunities policies. Corporation members receive a regular statement on income and expenditure, budget variances and cash flow forecasts. Governors actively monitor and review the implementation of the college's policies and their effectiveness.

19 The strategic planning process is well defined and consultative, involving governors, college managers, teaching and non-teaching staff. The committee structure makes full use of individual governors' background and expertise. Corporation meetings held once a term are well attended, and governors receive appropriate supporting financial, curriculum and student-related documentation. The governing body does not receive minutes or formal reports on the activities of the academic board. Although governor training takes place, their training needs have not been analysed in a systematic way. A governors' code of conduct and a register of interests have been produced.

20 The current management structure has been in place since September 1994. The senior management team consists of the principal and five assistant principals. The structure has allowed all members of the senior management team to operate across the college and to be involved with strategic planning, implementation of policies and reviews. Six heads of division have the responsibility for the teaching programmes of the college. Teaching staff understand the structure and the individual roles and responsibilities of senior managers and heads of division within it. Teachers and support staff have ready access to all managers. There are clear lines of communication, and the flow of information across the college is maintained through regular meetings of the senior management team, heads of division, staff meetings and open-forum meetings chaired by the principal. A weekly college-wide time set aside for meetings facilitates course team management and curriculum planning. The senior management team has set performance indicators to guide and motivate heads of division to work towards the achievement of the college's strategic objectives. There is, however, a lack of consistency between divisions in the implementation of college policies. The senior management team do not meet as a group with heads of division. The monitoring of strategic objectives at divisional level is the responsibility of the assistant principals, and procedures to ensure that they are effective are being considered by the senior management team.

21 The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is recorded as £12.74 per unit, the second lowest in the sector. The median for general further education colleges is £18.17. The college has a projected 12 month budget of £4.9 million for the period August 1994 to July 1995, of which 69 per cent is funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Summaries of the college's estimated income and expenditure are shown in figures 5 and 6.

22 A system of financial management under which budgets are delegated to heads of division has been introduced. It is not yet fully operational and current delegated budgets are limited to the purchase of consumables. Additional financial allocations are released when enrolment and retention targets have been achieved. A model for the comparative costing of course provision is being developed. The college's computerised management information system provides a regular and extensive range of reports to college managers. The senior management team receive frequent reports on college finance and students' recruitment, attendance and withdrawals. Information relating to staffing hours, accommodation and student destinations is still handled manually. The support staff for the computerised management information system have been appropriately trained. Although there is no formal management information development team to review the need for computerised management information, the management information system manager is a member of a number of college working groups and takes account of views expressed. There is a written policy for the planned updating and replacement of other hardware and software for the computerised management information system.

23 Heads of division are involved with the senior management team in setting course enrolment targets. According to the college figures, enrolment targets for 1994-95 have been achieved and between 1992-93 and 1993-94 targets were exceeded, with 12 per cent increases in total enrolments. Data on student retention and absences are monitored regularly by student services, course tutors and heads of division. The average retention rate for the college's full-time students in the academic year 1993-94 was 83 per cent. Student destinations and student progression are monitored carefully with the assistance of the Rotherham careers and guidance service. Additional destination data on students who go on to higher education are obtained from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Destination and enrolment data have informed course provision, and courses that consistently fail to meet enrolment targets or provide employment opportunities, are withdrawn.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

24 Pre-enrolment information, guidance and induction for students is well developed. Teachers liaise with local schools and contribute to careers events. Students receive supportive advice and guidance from first contact through to enrolment. A well-appointed nursery allows students with young children, who might otherwise have been unable to study, to enrol on courses. Students' basic education needs are diagnosed on entry and learning support is available if required.

25 Effective induction programmes are provided by the student services division. They are carried out at the beginning of the academic year in collaboration with course tutors from a number of schools. Some college

tutors pay insufficient attention to the records of achievement of the applicants they interview. Divisions fail to follow consistent practices for recruitment and induction. Periods between four days and eight weeks can elapse between the submission of an application form and the interview. In contrast, there are well-considered performance standards for acknowledging applications and notifying applicants of the outcomes, and these are routinely achieved in some areas.

26 Although there is a policy for the assessment and accreditation of prior learning it is not uniformly applied. Accreditation is currently available to students in business studies and for staff-development programmes leading to Training and Development Lead Body qualifications. It is less well developed for students of floristry and mature students accessing NVQ courses in hairdressing.

27 Weekly tutorials of one hour are timetabled for full-time students and most part-time students. The student services division provides an effective central team of counsellors and co-ordinators for students requiring learning support and for those with special learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Enhanced support in core skills is available to all students through the resource-based learning centre. Students know how to obtain careers advice within the college, and there is effective co-operation with the LEA careers service.

28 Tutorial support varies in its effectiveness between divisions. In some tutorials, students were given insufficient advice about their progress towards learning targets.

29 The college encourages students to maintain, update and use records of achievement. In most programme areas, students receive effective guidance on constructing action plans which involve them in setting their own learning objectives and evaluating their own progress. In engineering and business studies, there were instances where records of achievement had been superficially completed by students. In catering, teachers offered students little help with their action plans and the lack of written feedback from teachers limited students' progress. The individual action plans for students in the resource-based learning workshop are generally satisfactory, but they do not specify the objectives of the support programme or indicate how the progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is to be monitored.

30 There are effective procedures in place for the monitoring of student absences. During the inspection, the average student attendance rate for the sessions observed was 74 per cent.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

31 Of the 95 sessions inspected, 45 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses, which is lower than the norm for colleges so far inspected. Thirteen per cent of sessions had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. The following table shows the grades awarded as a result of the inspection.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		1	0	1	1	0	3
GCSE		0	1	0	0	0	1
GNVQ		0	5	6	3	0	14
NVQ		2	7	15	3	0	27
Other		7	20	18	5	0	50
Total		10	33	40	12	0	95

32 In computing and information technology classes, students experienced a range of teaching methods, including the use of case studies, group work, projects, practicals and student presentations. Teachers related the use of information technology to the vocational courses which students were studying. Classroom activities were well supported by relevant learning materials. There was sensitive support for students gaining basic skills in both information technology and mathematics. In a few classes, the practical sessions were ineffective and topics were not related to industrial or commercial practice. There were instances of students spending too much time copying notes from overhead projector slides.

33 In agriculture and horticulture, practical activities were hindered by the lack of specialist equipment, most of which was destroyed in a recent fire. Nevertheless, teachers coped well. They displayed a thorough understanding of their subject and knowledge of the industry. The subject matter of lessons was relevant to course objectives, but teachers occasionally failed to take sufficient account of the backgrounds and range of abilities of the students. There was good subject coverage in equine studies; students were involved in a wide variety of activities, including a lot of practical work. In one class at a local riding school, some students rode in a horsemanship exercise using a simulated road layout, while others acted as judges and gave the group their analysis of riding techniques. In a few of the horticulture classes, the standard of students' work was poor and the teaching of practical activities was not well organised.

34 In construction, teachers made use of relevant and practical projects which stimulated students' interest. The assessment of craft skills at the beginning of the course enabled staff to take account of individual learning needs and monitor progress during tutorials. Some lessons were poorly structured. In a few practical classes, the students' craft skills were of a low standard, and teachers failed to take account of the range of ability within the group. Engineering students were well briefed on project work and received regular reports on their progress. The use of computer-based learning allowed individual students to work at their own pace.

Students responded well to questioning by teachers and produced written work of the appropriate standard for the stage and level of their studies.

35 The teaching of business studies was well planned. In most classes teachers displayed a thorough understanding of their subject. They made effective use of relevant examples from commerce to illustrate theory. There was a good rapport between staff and students. Students were making satisfactory progress in acquiring relevant knowledge and skills. The business administration lessons were well managed. Teachers dealt effectively with students from a diverse range of educational backgrounds. The training office provided a realistic work environment for NVQ students, who were involved in a variety of suitable tasks. In a few classes group work was poorly organised: students failed to work together effectively and teachers provided little feedback on what the groups had done. In some classes, information was provided too rapidly for students to absorb and teachers failed to ensure that students were keeping up with the work. Students generally experienced an appropriate range of methods of learning although some teachers placed too heavy a reliance on the dictation of notes.

36 Teaching in catering was characterised by good interaction between staff and students. Lesson planning was thorough. Students benefited from practical learning experiences which were both interesting and vocationally relevant. In a few classes, theory and practice were insufficiently related. Students failed to gain an appropriate breadth of work experience in the hospitality sector. In leisure and public services, teachers used a variety of teaching strategies which included opportunities for students to think for themselves and to discuss issues. They had a thorough knowledge of their subject and enjoyed good relationships with their students. Lessons were relevant and purposeful. A variety of commercial visits were effectively integrated with other aspects of the programme. Public services students, for example, assisted in the running of the 1994 World Boccia Championship in Sheffield. In a few classes, groupwork was ineffectively managed, and teachers failed to provide constructive feedback to students.

37 Teaching in health and community care classes was well prepared and well delivered and students were highly motivated. NVQ programmes were supported by relevant study materials which enabled students to work on their own with assistance from tutors. Students' progress was regularly assessed and monitored through well-designed assignments.

38 The teaching of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who were following the 'vocational plus' programme was thorough. Their programme provided vocational training in 'real work' settings. Lessons were well organised. Teachers had high expectations of students and formed positive working relationships with them.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

39 Students were well motivated, enjoyed their studies, and contributed readily to classroom discussions. Practical classes were carefully supervised in a safe environment. Community care students were developing a good range of interpersonal skills as a result of their group work. In business administration classes, students effectively managed some of their own learning through the use of a range of resource-based materials. In a number of curriculum areas, for example in construction and computing, students were not fully stretched, particularly in their project work.

40 Floristry and horse riding students demonstrated good practical skills, but these skills in horticulture were less well developed. Shortages of equipment in motor vehicle engineering limited the acquisition of practical skills and this was reflected in some poor examination results. The use of information technology was inconsistent. It formed an integral element of the work on the 'women into management' course, but GNVQ business courses made little use of information technology as a learning resource. In most areas of work, students had suitable opportunities to develop communication skills, both oral and written. Numeracy skills were less consistently developed. Some of the written assignments for students were carefully designed to encourage research and analysis, and a number of students were able to demonstrate effective skills in these areas.

41 Course retention levels were generally satisfactory. There were good retention rates on business courses: in 1994, for example, 95 per cent of students completed the part-time Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national certificate course. Retention rates for catering and construction courses averaged over 80 per cent. However, of the 17 students originally enrolled on the BTEC national diploma in computing only 11 are currently attending, and only nine students out of 20 completed the first year of the BTEC national diploma in engineering. Retention on full-time intermediate engineering courses averaged only 32 per cent. In some engineering classes there were also poor levels of attendance.

42 Eighty-four per cent of students in the final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education's 1994 performance tables were successful. This places the college amongst the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. The 1994 results show an improvement over 1993 when 78 per cent of students were successful.

43 In 1994, there were some good levels of achievement at advanced level. For example, 100 per cent pass rates were obtained on the BTEC national diploma in nursery nursing and on the national certificate in business and finance. In the business area, pass rates of over 90 per cent were achieved on accounting technician, administrative management and some secretarial courses. In engineering, caring and leisure courses, pass rates averaged over 85 per cent.

44 At intermediate level, 100 per cent of students completing in 1994 gained the NVQ level 2 standard in floristry, agriculture and horticulture. Similar results were achieved in construction, accredited by a college certificate of achievement. However, only 28 per cent of students who finished their course obtained first diplomas in electrical engineering and motor vehicle studies, and results were marginally lower than this in 1993. The pass rate on the BTEC first diploma in information technology was 50 per cent. In GCSE mathematics, only 36 per cent of candidates were awarded an A-C grade in 1994.

45 Foundation level results were good in agriculture, business, catering, caring, electronics, public services and recreation leadership: pass rates were close to 100 per cent. In 1993, pass rates at intermediate level averaged only 43 per cent but were better at advanced level where the average pass rate was 82 per cent. Results were poor in the BTEC business and finance first and national diplomas: the pass rates were 36 and 64 per cent, respectively. The college has no comparative figures for 1992.

46 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities took a full part in activities, and were able to talk competently and confidently about their work. They were gaining in confidence as they acquired a range of core skills which would enable them to progress to other courses or into employment. Students who were successful in basic horticulture programmes were now working towards NVQ level 1 standards. Students on the 'vocational plus' and basic skills programmes, as well as those pursuing their studies through resource-based learning workshops, were able to achieve a range of externally-validated qualifications. There were some good levels of success on the 'vocational plus' programme, with 50 per cent of students gaining wordpower and numberpower qualifications at foundation level. On the basic skills course, however, there were some students who had attended for several years without showing evidence of educational progress.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

47 Staff are aware of, and support, the commitments in the charter for further education and the statements and intentions expressed in the college's own charter. The college's charter has been distributed to all students. It is available in Braille, large print, audio-tape and Urdu language versions. It makes clear statements about what a student or employer can expect and includes performance standards for the college. There are no proposals for external publication of charter outcomes, but it is intended that the college management and academic board will receive regular reports on performance in relation to the service standards contained in the charter. Students spoken to during the inspection were knowledgeable about the charter.

48 In preparation for the inspection, the college produced an internal quality-assessment report which identified issues of concern and attempted

an evaluation of the college's position under each of the inspection report headings. The judgements within the self-assessment report were broadly in line with the findings of the inspection team. However, the report was not comprehensive and the analysis would have been more useful if strengths and weaknesses had been described separately within each section, so as to show clearly the relative balance between them.

49 A detailed quality framework was developed and introduced during the 1993-94 academic year, as an integral part of the strategic planning process. Quality assurance procedures for college courses and programmes became operational from September 1994. They involve the use of performance indicators and the systematic review and evaluation of courses. An end-of-year quality report will be made to the academic board and the governing body. Teams of support staff are also starting to develop quality standards within the curriculum areas in which they work.

50 Internal review and evaluation groups have been established across the college. The programme team is responsible for the review and evaluation of courses and the development of action plans. Each division has a quality group which co-ordinates quality monitoring and liaises with divisional heads. It is also intended to set up programme and divisional advisory committees to help the course teams conduct their reviews. Some reviews have been completed to timetable, and followed up with action plans, but elsewhere staff have not been implementing the procedures in a consistent manner, and the timetable has slipped. Evaluation reports on some courses have not been fully completed for 1993-94, and the presentation of the annual quality report to the academic board has slipped from November 1994 to a planned date of February 1995. These weaknesses in the system mean that the accuracy and completeness of performance indicators and other information on courses are questionable. There are difficulties in making reliable comparisons over time and between different areas.

51 Students have the opportunity to contribute to the quality assurance process through their response to mid-course and end-of-course questionnaires. The information is not published but it contributes to course review and evaluation and is presented to the college marketing group for use in publicity material. There are no formal arrangements to elicit employers' views of the college; feedback is informal, through routine liaison on such matters as work experience placements. New procedures are planned to increase students' and employers' participation in course review.

52 The quality framework includes internal verification. External verification, moderation and inspection reports contribute to the process. There are appropriate arrangements for internal verification of NVQ and GNVQ awards, and good progress is being made in internal assessor awards for staff across the college: 44 per cent of full-time teaching staff have achieved assessor awards and 16 per cent internal verifier awards.

Plans are well developed for a further 41 per cent to achieve assessor awards and for 22 per cent to receive internal verifier awards during 1994-95.

53 The college's staff-development plan is appropriately related to the priorities set out in its strategic plan. There is a central programme for staff development which is not specific to curriculum areas or college functions. Otherwise, divisional heads bid for staff training and development to meet particular curriculum needs. The funding available for all staff training activities in 1994-95 is 1 per cent of the total college budget.

54 Current staff-development provision which is not curriculum specific includes a three-day induction programme for new members of full-time staff, and a single day or evening course for part-time staff. New teachers also undertake a continuing programme of development during their probationary year. The college recognises the need to get the maximum value from staff-development activities; participants in staff development are encouraged to report on, and share with colleagues, what they learn from the experience. However, the college lacks effective mechanisms for evaluating the whole of its staff-development activities.

55 A staff-appraisal scheme provides an opportunity for all staff to discuss their performance with a trained appraiser, identify their development needs and draw up action plans. Staff have undergone appropriate training and there are procedures and safeguards for appeals and to protect confidentiality. It is planned that all teaching staff will undertake their first appraisal interview by March 1995, and non-teaching staff by August 1995. The procedures will be evaluated at the end of the cycle. The college is working towards the Investors in People award: a preliminary assessment is planned for January 1995, and the results should indicate whether the college meets the standards or whether further action is required.

RESOURCES

Staffing

56 Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Ninety-six per cent of full-time staff have a degree or appropriate professional qualification, and 92 per cent have a teaching qualification. About a third of full-time staff have recent and relevant industrial experience. The college is developing more industrial secondments and work-exchange schemes as a matter of priority. All teaching and non-teaching staff have job descriptions. The full-time to part-time ratio of teaching staff is 3:1. Part-time teachers make a valuable contribution to the work of the college. For example, a female self-employed furniture maker teaches on a successful women-only furniture course. In caring and hairdressing, part-time staff provide up-to-date experience of professional practice.

57 The college is conducting a staffing analysis to assist its planning. Measures are being established to assess the use which the college makes of its staff. An informative staff handbook has been produced. It covers personnel policies and procedures, health and safety issues and details of the college structure and organisation. A similar booklet has been produced for part-time staff. Newly-qualified teachers are assigned to a probation co-ordinator who monitors progress during their first year and provides support and development.

58 The levels of administrative and technical support are generally satisfactory. Twenty-two technicians support the key curriculum areas and central services such as reprographics and audio-visual equipment. Technician staff are represented at appropriate divisional meetings and meet as a group at least once each term. The work of the 33 administrative staff is co-ordinated by a college administration manager. Staff are deployed flexibly. Meetings of all administrative staff are held monthly.

Equipment/learning resources

59 The college has compiled an inventory which grades the condition of items of equipment on a one to five scale. Equipment levels across the college are generally adequate. In catering, much of the capital equipment is new and in good condition. Some of the purchases are supported by industrial sponsorship. The partnership with Kiveton Steel ensures that students have access to up-to-date commercial equipment which is well maintained by the company. In business administration, the training office for NVQ provision is well resourced with modern office equipment. A recent fire caused the loss of most large items of equipment in agriculture and horticulture. The gap is partly filled by making good use of off-site facilities, including local farms and a riding school. In engineering, construction and hairdressing, equipment levels are basic and not always up to commercial standards. An 'on-demand' reprographic service is provided for staff, and audio-visual equipment is delivered to all parts of the college upon request. About 90 per cent of teaching rooms have an overhead-projector facility.

60 The college has an information technology network for staff and students' use and a separate system to generate management information. There are some 150 computers on the main college site. Although the college has a replacement programme, many of the computers are ageing and have out-of-date software. The ratio of students to workstations is less than the average for similar colleges. The open-learning workshop contains 16 modern computers. Specialist software for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is more restricted, and this group has little information technology equipment for their core programmes. There is no overall college information technology co-ordinator, although a user group has recently been reconstituted and is now addressing the lack of agreed software standards in the college.

61 The main college library has a wide range of periodicals and computer search facilities. The textbook provision for catering, agriculture, horticulture and caring is poor. The library is well managed and has a staffing complement of six, two of whom are qualified librarians. The shortage of study spaces is recognised in the college's development plan. The method of allocating library funds to curriculum areas is not systematic, but relies largely on the separate demands of teaching staff. A library users' group has been established recently to advise the librarian on priorities. Book losses in 1993-94 accounted for 1 per cent of total library stock. A new open-learning centre was opened in September 1994 to house a wide range of materials for a variety of client groups. Self-study facilities, with guidance from teachers on their use, are offered in the centre during much of the college week. Catering and information technology students, in particular, make good use of the resources available. For students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities many of the resource materials have been produced in-house, and designed appropriately for the adult status of the students. All full-time students are provided with basic textbook resources for their courses of study.

Accommodation

62 The main college site is located in Dinnington, where all the major study programmes are delivered. There are also six outreach centres within a seven-mile radius of the college, mainly on the outskirts of neighbouring Rotherham and Sheffield. The original building on the main site was constructed in the 1930s and a purpose-built extension was completed in 1980. There are 22 temporary classrooms on the main site, accounting for about 25 per cent of teaching space. The original building has recently been refurbished, and the entrance area remodelled. Other recent improvements include a new open-learning centre, science and electronics laboratories, a training office and an extended administration area. Most of the accommodation in this building provides a pleasant learning environment, but the 1980s extension is in poor decorative order and the staff work rooms are cramped. The college lacks sufficient private study spaces for students and there is no meeting room for adults. Other deficiencies are the lack of changing room facilities and of recreational and sporting facilities. The majority of the temporary classrooms on the main site were condemned as beyond economic repair in a recent survey commissioned by the FEFC. Space utilisation is low: a recent college survey concluded that an average of 35 per cent of total seats available were actually in use. This in part reflects inflexible room usage.

63 A comprehensive accommodation strategy has been developed which recognises the need to replace the temporary buildings. Sufficient funds are available to implement the first phase of this strategy which will provide new accommodation for hairdressing, construction and agriculture courses by the end of 1995. Since the remodelling of the entrance area there is access to most parts of the building for students with physical disabilities.

An outline maintenance schedule has been formulated for the current academic year. However, a buildings condition survey has yet to inform a long-term preventative maintenance plan.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

64 The college is making progress towards achieving its mission. Its strengths are:

- the wide range of courses offered
- the buoyant enrolments
- a governing body which has made a significant contribution to the work of the college
- effective communications and accessible managers
- good standards of teaching on some courses
- high levels of achievement on advanced programmes
- a staff-development programme directed to strategic objectives
- the well-qualified teaching staff and structured support for those new to teaching
- the well-managed library and learning-resource centres
- a comprehensive accommodation strategy.

65 If the college is to progress, it should:

- improve the co-ordination of work experience and commercial activities
- address lack of consistency between divisions in the implementation of college policies
- extend accreditation of prior learning to a wider range of vocational programmes
- raise standards of teaching on some courses
- raise levels of achievement on some intermediate programmes
- improve the quality of annual reviews for some courses
- develop procedures to elicit employers' views on the college and its courses
- further develop the use of performance indicators
- improve information technology hardware and establish an agreed software standard
- address deficiencies in accommodation, including staff work areas.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

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

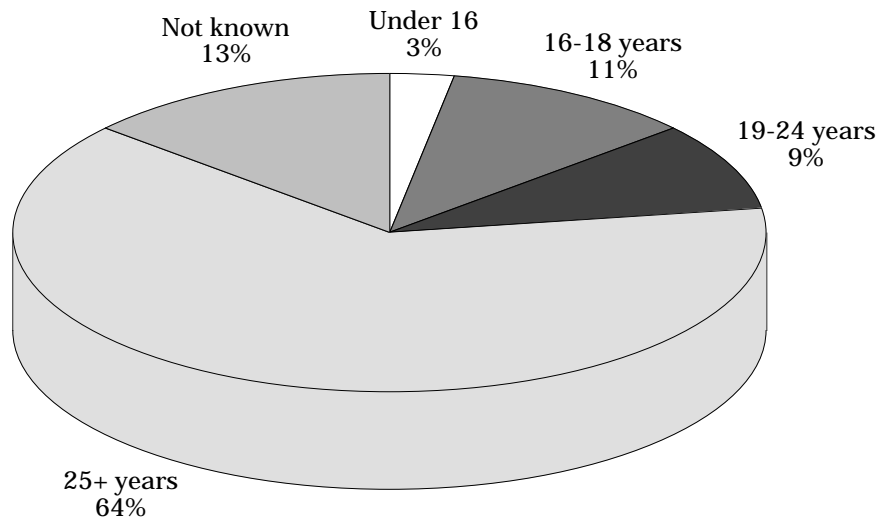
 - 5 Estimated income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

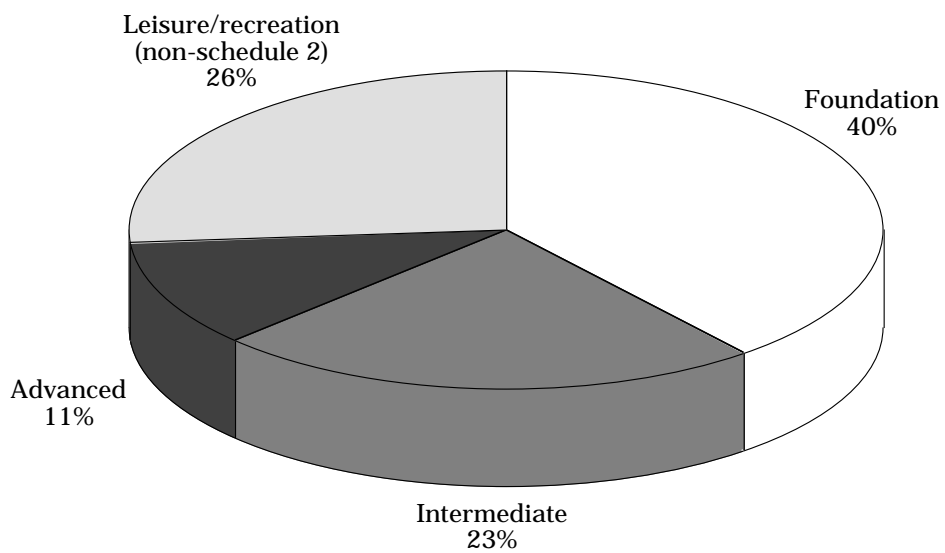
Rother Valley College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 7,024

Figure 2

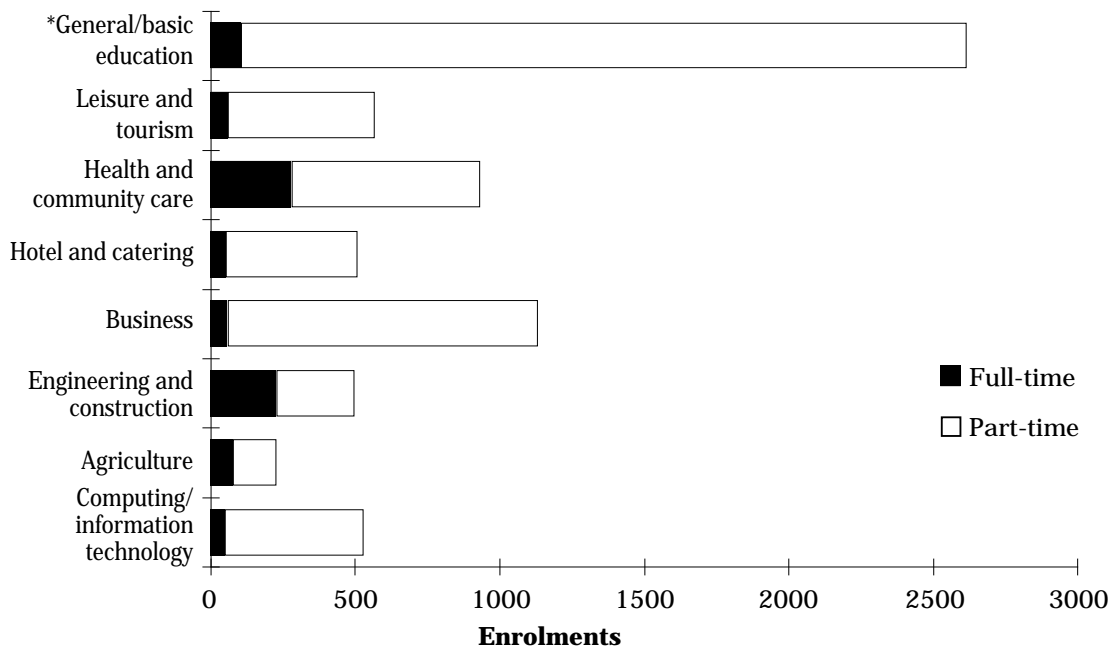
Rother Valley College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 7,024

Figure 3

Rother Valley College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

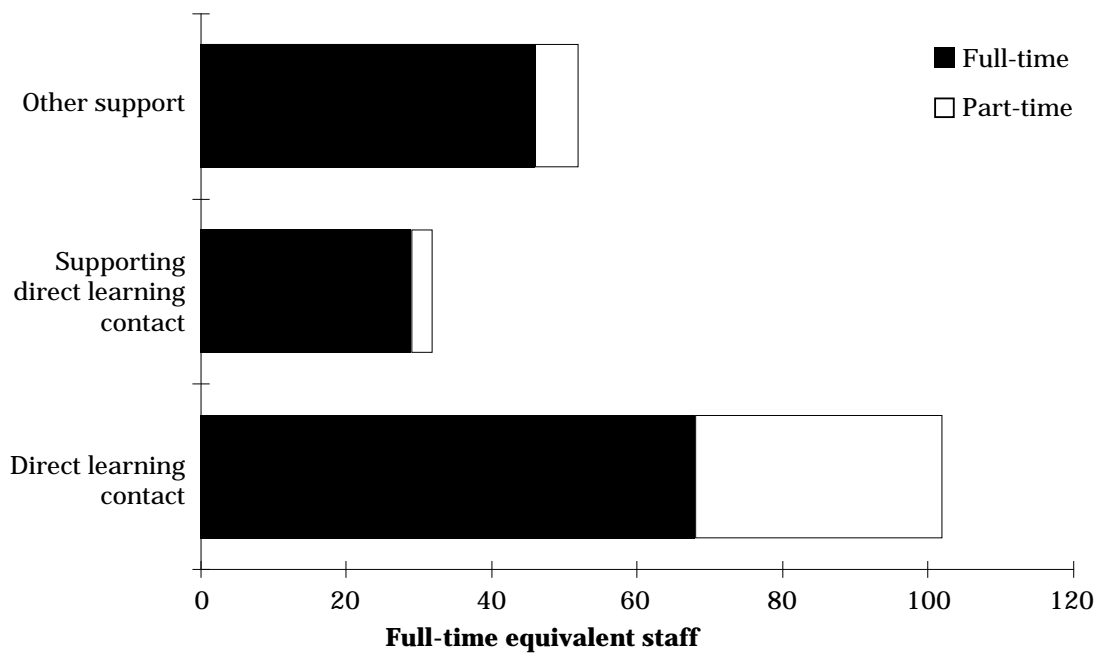


Enrolments: 7,024

**1,842 part-time enrolments are for non-vocational courses.*

Figure 4

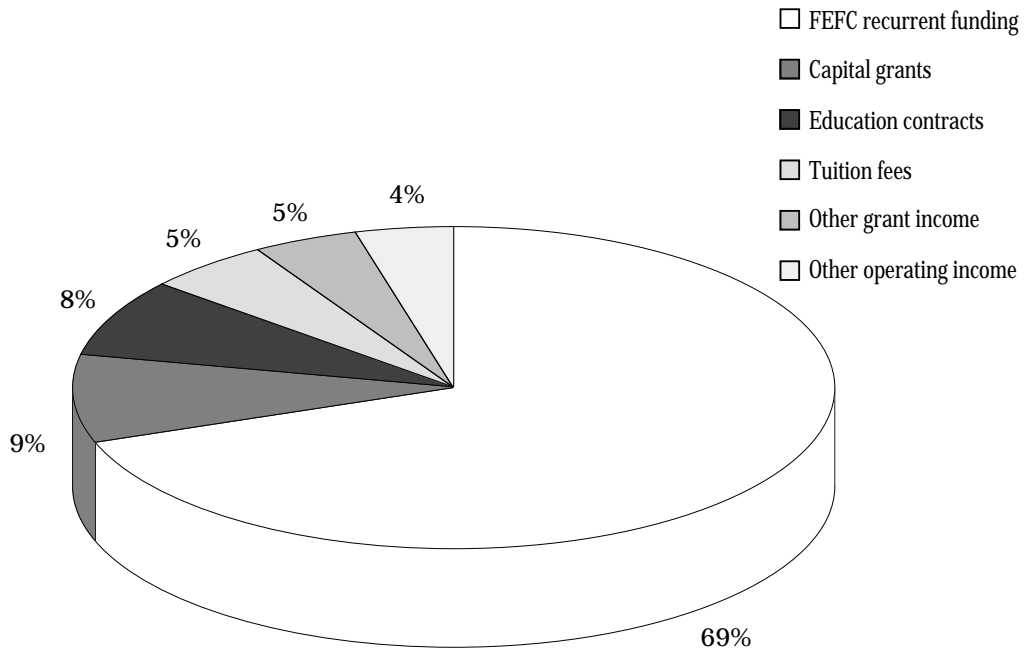
Rother Valley College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 186

Figure 5

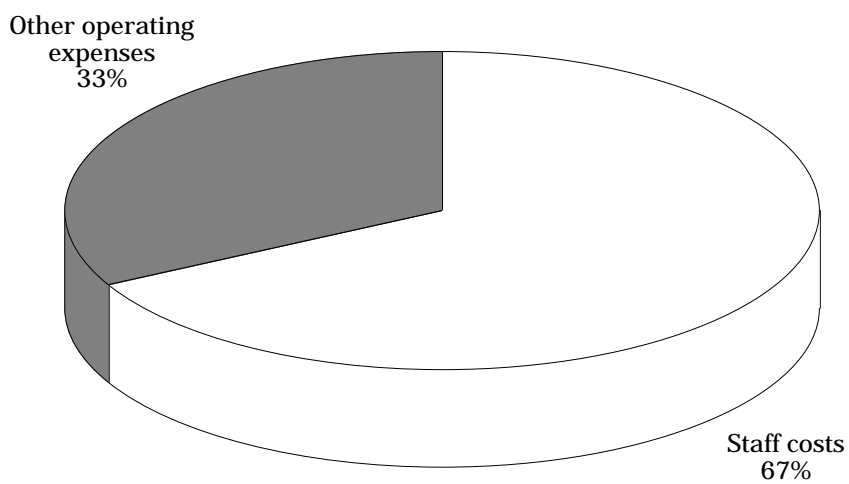
Rother Valley College: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Estimated income: £4,947,000

Figure 6

Rother Valley College: estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Estimated expenditure: £4,821,000

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