

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Southport College

July 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-96

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 77/97

SOUTHPORT COLLEGE

NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected September 1996-March 1997

Summary

Southport College is a medium-sized college of further education situated on Merseyside. It offers a broad range of general education and vocational courses across all FEFC programme areas. The college successfully collaborates with a number of partners to provide courses in 57 centres on Merseyside and in neighbouring areas of Lancashire. Courses designed to meet the specific needs of business and industry are developing. Governors are supportive; they establish strategy and use their expertise for the benefit of the college. Strategic planning is informed by a good analysis of market research information. The accommodation strategy is well managed. Links with local schools are good and arrangements for the enrolment and induction of students are effective. Systems for assuring quality are well developed but they are not used by all course teams. Teachers are generally well qualified although some do not have recent industrial experience. Changes to the management and staffing structures of the college have been accompanied by issues arising from a long industrial relations dispute. The college should: improve the standards of teaching and learning; develop opportunities for open and distance learning; address issues that account for low staff morale; seek to ensure that the achievements observed in service areas extend to all areas of the curriculum; improve the provision of basic skills support; achieve greater consistency in tutorial work with students; ensure that there are effective links between the observation of teaching staff, appraisal and the professional development of staff; improve the rigour of course evaluation.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Art and design and performing arts	3
Business	3	Humanities	3
Leisure and tourism	3	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and adult basic education	3
Hotel and catering	3		
Health and community care	2		
Hairdressing and beauty	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 Southport College was inspected in three stages during the autumn term of 1996 and the spring term of 1997. Inspectors spent a total of 81 days in the college. They held meetings with college staff, and inspected a broad range of students' work and the processes for enrolment and induction. They also inspected provision at outreach and franchise centres and their findings were incorporated into the grades awarded to the relevant curriculum areas. Inspectors met with representatives of the Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), head teachers, local employers, careers officers, managers of franchised provision, community representatives, parents, students, teachers and college governors.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Southport Technical College was opened in 1935, bringing within a single institution technical courses which had been offered throughout centres in the Lancashire County Borough of Southport since 1887. The Southport School of Arts and Crafts was founded in 1938 and the two institutions were amalgamated in 1983 to form Southport College.

3 Southport is a seaside town within the metropolitan borough of Sefton in the county of Merseyside. It has a population of approximately 94,000 and attracts many tourists and day visitors. The town enjoys good rail links to the south, to the city of Liverpool, and to the east, to predominately rural areas. The total population in the catchment area identified by the college, which includes some postal districts in west Lancashire, is approximately 333,000. Although the town itself has a relatively low level of unemployment and little economic decline, it is eligible to bid for regeneration funds as it falls within the Merseyside European Social Fund objective 1 area.

4 The main college site is located on a compact campus close to the town centre. The original buildings date from the 1930s and were extended in the early 1970s. The college has recently purchased and refurbished a three-storey building adjacent to the main site, known as the Pennington building. The college also owns two large houses adjacent to the main site and an adult education annexe in the neighbouring town of Formby. A former drill hall, close to the centre of Southport, is used for physical education, recreation and examinations. The building is also used by local community groups.

5 Further education in the area is also provided by a sixth form college which is about three miles from Southport College. There are further education colleges within easy travelling distance of Southport in the towns of Bootle, Skelmersdale, Leyland and Preston. There are five 11 to 18 schools serving Southport, Ormskirk, Formby and Maghull. Sefton Local Education Authority (LEA) maintains three schools for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; each has students over the age of 16. There are two major, and a number of smaller, private schools with

sixth forms in the area. In 1996, 64 per cent of school-leavers continued their education in a further education college or at a school, 8 per cent joined youth training and 7 per cent went into employment. The regional staying-on rate at 16 is 65 per cent; the national rate is 71 per cent. The unemployment rate in the town is less than the national average of 6.6 per cent and the regional average of 7.3 per cent.

6 The provision in the college reflects the lack of heavy industry in the locality and the preponderance of service industries, particularly those relating to leisure, tourism and the caring occupations, and to small to medium size businesses. The largest employment sectors in the Southport area are distribution, hotels and catering, public administration, education and health which together account for 67 per cent of all jobs. The college is one of the largest employers in the area. According to the 1996 Merseyside economic assessment, growth in employment over the next 10 years will mainly be in health, social services, business services, hotels and catering, and motor vehicle manufacture. Other growth areas will include professional services, distribution, insurance and instrument manufacture. Areas where a decline is expected include food manufacture, education, mechanical engineering and communications. Most of these declining areas of employment, with the exception of education, employ relatively few people in Southport.

7 About one-fifth of the college's students are aged 16 to 19 and most attend college full time. Prior to incorporation, most of the college's students came from within the borough; the college now increasingly attracts students from west Lancashire, to the north and east of Southport. Approximately 65 per cent of students are female; female students are in the majority across all modes of attendance. There are few students from minority ethnic groups, which reflects the catchment area. The college's programmes are offered to students through two faculties and 10 departments. At the time of the inspection, there were 11,491 registered students, of whom 1,963 were full time. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3. There were 185 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 136 full-time equivalent support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

8 The mission of the college, which is reviewed annually by the corporation, is 'excellence, relevance and accessibility'. The college aims to provide high-quality programmes and services, relevant to the needs of and accessible to the community which the college serves.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 The college offers a wide range of general and vocational courses from foundation to first-year degree level. The majority of students are on vocational courses. Over 50 per cent of all students are studying at foundation level. The majority of these are adults who are following

courses at franchised and outreach centres. Many of these courses are validated through the open college network. A number of other courses are run in partnership with local higher education institutions.

10 The college has developed a good range of provision to meet the needs of school-leavers. Students studying full time at the college can select from:

- 27 general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects
- 14 general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects
- 11 general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) which are offered in business, health and social care, hospitality and catering, leisure and tourism, art and design and information technology
- 20 national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in such areas as construction, administration and information technology
- 13 specialist Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diplomas which are offered in five curriculum areas.

The college provides GCE A level modular courses in physics, geography, psychology, biology and chemistry. All are recruiting well. In 1995-96, five GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects were taught within the GCE A level courses. Two discrete courses are offered for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In addition, 13 students with a hearing impairment joined college courses that lead to external qualifications.

11 The range of provision for full-time students at foundation level is relatively narrow. Enrolments at the time of inspection accounted for 10 students on a GNVQ foundation course in business studies; 14 on a GNVQ foundation in leisure and tourism; 25 on a motor vehicle NVQ level 1 course; and 45 on a professional food studies course. The college timetable restricts the choice available to students wishing to combine GNVQs with a GCE A level or GCSE subject. Currently, only 20 students on GNVQ courses are taking additional GCE A levels and 58 are taking additional GCSE subjects. A range of modular GCE A level subjects is available to students. Some courses which had recruited a viable number of students are not running because there was a lack of specialist teachers. There are few opportunities for students to study by open or distance learning.

12 GCE A level students follow an enrichment programme validated by Liverpool University. The scheme was developed in co-operation with local schools and colleges to give students the opportunity to develop skills in areas not normally found in a GCE A level programme, such as working in groups. Enrichment activities are not as well developed for vocational students despite this programme being extended to GNVQ students. The college has sponsored students and staff to spend time on a sailing ship in an activity organised through the Sail Training Association.

13 The college has established franchising arrangements with 19 partners and a number of other bodies, for example, Sefton LEA, to provide increased opportunities for approximately 5,700 students to follow part-time courses. These include: foundation level courses validated by the open college network; 32 GCSE and 23 GCE A level subjects; and a range of NVQs offered at 57 centres in Sefton and parts of Lancashire and south Liverpool. The 'parents as educators' course at NVQ level 1 has been particularly successful and in 1996-97 attracted 378 enrolments, an increase of 40 per cent since 1995-96. This well-designed programme, run in conjunction with local primary schools, provides parents with an introduction to ways in which learning can occur in the classroom. It brings new students into education and training, and a small proportion of these students have progressed onto other courses at the college. The number of adult students at the college has increased by 35 per cent since 1993, primarily through outreach activities and collaboration with other partners off the college premises.

14 The college is developing part-time vocational provision for adults and employers. The provision includes: 56 NVQs from level 1 through to level 5, 46 of which are at level 2 or 3; an increasing number of 16-week courses in, for example, business, art and design and computing. Saturday morning courses have been offered for the last three years.

15 Links with schools and providers of higher education are developing well. Currently, about 130 students are on courses which include the first year of a degree in fine art which is franchised from Liverpool John Moores University, and a course that leads to a certificate in education that is franchised from the University of Central Lancashire. There are good links between the college and local schools. Nominated senior managers in the college have responsibility for links with groups of schools and liaise with the respective head teachers.

16 There is a well-constructed marketing strategy and operating plan and clear terms of reference for the keen and energetic marketing team. Surveys have been conducted to identify needs. For example, a recent Responsive College Unit survey and a competitor analysis for the college have identified demand for a new course for plumbers. The course has recruited 50 adult students who require national accreditation. A local needs analysis led to the extension of adult education courses in Crosby. Market research information is collected, thoroughly analysed and used constructively to inform planning on a college-wide basis. Links between the marketing team and programme teams are underdeveloped. Prospectuses and publicity material are well written, informative and attractively laid out, but not all curriculum teams use the available market analysis to plan provision.

17 Although links with employers are developing they are somewhat fragmented. The college has recently established an industrial liaison committee to bring their various business contacts together in a single forum. Work experience which features in many vocational courses leads

to the majority of the links with employers. Teachers regularly visit students on placements and in the best practice they use the opportunity to provide realistic assignments for students and to update their own knowledge of developments in industry. Only teachers running courses in art and design, business studies, and catering and leisure have been successful in securing good attendance by employers at advisory panels. More could be done to involve employers in the development of courses.

18 A modest range of courses, provided specifically for local businesses, generates income. The college's business and community partnership group has been reorganised recently to provide training for local companies and to oversee outreach and other collaborative arrangements that take place away from college premises. Recent courses include: information technology; NVQ assessor training; an NVQ in direct care and work-based assessment. International links are not well developed.

19 The college has established close working relationships with a number of colleges on Merseyside. For example, it is a member of the Responsive College Unit and the Merseyside Colleges European Group. With five other Merseyside colleges, it has made successful bids to the Department of Trade and Industry's competitiveness fund for help in establishing a major computer network. The network links the colleges to each other and to the Internet; the intention is to provide on-line training, leading to NVQs, for local businesses. For some years, the college has been able to use the European Social Fund to support some of its activities.

20 The partnership with Merseyside TEC is positive and constructive. Representatives from the TEC considered that the college was active in pursuing initiatives and demonstrated a commitment to any project in which it became involved. A number of successful bids for funding have been made. For example, computer software has been purchased to help students to develop key skills, and links with employers have been reviewed. The TEC has set aside funds to help the college address issues arising from the inspection. Under contract to Merseyside TEC the college also provides training for young people and adults. Staff in several programme areas have established links with the TEC although these are not yet co-ordinated. Partnerships with other organisations such as Sefton Chamber of Commerce and the LEA are constructive and useful.

21 The college has a clear equal opportunities policy and statement. An equal opportunities committee meets once a month. The induction programmes for new staff and students draw attention to the college's commitment to equal opportunities. There has been limited progress towards the development and monitoring of targets for use with departments and with course teams. The college monitors the gender balance on some courses. Following a survey of students on a vocational course designed specifically for women, the course was withdrawn after students expressed a preference for a similar course open to both men and women. An exercise that monitored the curriculum materials used on programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities led to the provision of training for the staff who are involved in such courses.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

22 There is a board of 17 members whose professional and business expertise includes banking, accountancy, law, local authority management, architecture, education, and tourism. This expertise has been used to benefit the college. Governors give their time generously to the work of the board and its five subcommittees. There has been a steady turnover in the membership of the board. Several governors who work in industry have moved away from the area to take up new jobs. Their replacements have brought new areas of expertise to the board. Newly appointed governors have appreciated a mentoring arrangement in which they are paired with another governor.

23 Governors understand their role and wish to leave operational matters to the college managers. There have been occasions when they have been prepared to demand information and action to improve the effectiveness of management. They have found their regular training and development days helpful and instructive. A review of both their performance and their perception of their duties has resulted in improvements to procedures and papers. Weaknesses identified in the operation of the audit committee have been addressed. Attendance at regular meetings is monitored, and is generally good, averaging 80 per cent. A few governors are in frequent contact with the college; some governors in industry have difficulty in finding additional time for the college outside formal meetings. The resolution of governors to become more involved in the work of the faculties has not been fully implemented.

24 The aims and mission of the college are well publicised. The aims have recently been reviewed by the board as part of the current strategic planning cycle, and provide the context for departmental and faculty plans, to which all staff can contribute. Departmental curriculum plans cover course developments, quality issues, projections on student numbers, capital and other expenditure bids. They are drawn together into faculty business plans. The academic board advises on planning issues, including new course proposals, quality reviews, and the analysis of students' achievements. There has been some useful background research to inform planning, including an environmental analysis, and a recent benchmarking exercise to identify the college's performance and compare it with similar colleges in the sector. The accommodation strategy is guided by the need to develop and improve teaching and learning areas. There are some well-established policies, for example, those for health and safety, quality assurance, and equal opportunities, which have been endorsed by the board.

25 The staffing structure of the college has been kept under continuous review. Staff understand their roles and the lines of accountability. Several recent and substantial adjustments to the management structure have been made and as a result the responsibilities of some managers have increased significantly. The principal and three vice-principals form the principalship and meet together regularly as the executive management

team to plan ahead and deal with sensitive staffing issues. They also constitute the strategic planning group for the college. The senior management team of eight people, which includes the principalship, the two faculty heads, the head of client services and the finance manager, deals with most operational matters and receives reports from other committees. All 37 people with line management or service management responsibilities are brought together three times a year as the college management team to encourage closer working relationships. The group has no operational role. The organisation of support services into business support units has brought much useful expertise into the college since incorporation.

26 There are regular, timetabled meetings for all major groupings of staff. The groups are kept well informed about each other's work. There are many opportunities for staff to be briefed and consulted. Groups which provide fora for consultation include the academic board, student association, a union/management forum and associated special interest groups. Following the distribution about three times a year of an informative publication, the 'management review', the principal holds informal briefing meetings. Staff to whom inspectors spoke felt that senior managers kept them well informed, and were accessible both formally and informally to individuals and to groups. Records are kept of most meetings and include brief minutes and action points. Action points do not always indicate who is responsible for taking the action. This can lead to misunderstandings between groups and individuals.

27 Staff are supportive of the college mission, but not the means of achieving it. There has been relatively slow progress on curriculum matters, and some areas of the college have suffered from inertia, resistance to change and the impact of a long industrial dispute. The dispute over teachers' contracts has been prolonged and has affected morale and the smooth running of the college. Strategies are needed to raise the morale of staff and to focus attention on the positive aspects of future developments.

28 The new responsibilities of departmental heads have shown that if they are to change established work patterns, and grasp new opportunities some will need more help than they are currently getting. Specialist inspectors found that operational management at curriculum area level was uneven in quality. Some heads of department and programme leaders lack up-to date curriculum expertise, leadership skills, and the administrative ability to fulfil the range of expectations placed on them. Some service units are better managed and are moving ahead faster than teaching departments in the implementation of policy.

29 Strategic planning is closely linked to funding. Curriculum developments are undertaken where funding allocations permit. Problems over the deployment and continuity of staffing have reduced the quality of teaching in several areas of the curriculum. Students have discovered at

short notice that their teacher has been replaced or that several teachers are to cover the work. A few subjects were discontinued. The direct and indirect costs of staff sickness and reductions in the staffing establishment are high.

30 The college's average level of funding has reduced from £21.68 per unit in 1994-95 to £19.02 per unit for 1996-97. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges for 1996-97 is £17.97 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Financial procedures are clear and well managed. Staff understand their responsibilities for budgetary control, and where there are monitoring procedures, such as those for register audits, and expenditure on part-time staff and materials, these are firmly applied. While budget heads are carefully monitored, there is scope for closer control of the utilisation of full-time staff. The target for the enrolment of full-time students for 1996-97 had not been reached at the time of the inspection, although the overall college target of funding units has been achieved, mainly through increased franchised provision.

31 Thorough and regular reports on financial and other matters would help managers. Most managers are not networked to the computer-based management information system. Apart from regular financial returns, regular reports to senior managers are few. Middle managers have devised their own systems to provide for their information needs. There are, as yet, no agreed formats common to all managers which could be transferred to an electronic system. A user group which has recently been established is to address this issue.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

32 There have been substantial changes to the organisation of students' recruitment, guidance and support in the college. Considerable progress has been made in improving services to students. Marketing and guidance functions have been brought together into one unit. Staff in the team have a clear understanding of their role and a strong commitment to the well-being of students. Although there is a growing awareness of the value of providing support for students during their studies at the college, greater commitment at all levels of the college would drive forward further improvements. As yet, the management systems and communication channels that should link the marketing and guidance service, and the curriculum teams are not adequate. Hence students are not able to receive integrated support.

33 There are good systems in place for liaison with schools to provide pre-course information. Members of the guidance team co-ordinate activities with 35 schools, covering a wide geographical area, including six special schools and 10 schools with their own sixth forms. Curriculum teams contribute to a good range of information activities, such as 'taster' sessions, information evenings and open days. Applications are processed

centrally, and all full-time and some part-time students are interviewed by curriculum specialists. Systems to ensure prompt arrangements for interviews need strengthening. The college is undertaking a pilot project to maintain contact with students once they have been interviewed and before they enrol. There is variation in the quality of information and the appropriateness of some activities that are provided during this period.

34 Students can enrol on both full-time and part-time courses throughout the summer. Enrolment for most students with conditional offers takes place during a single day at the end of August. There is a further enrolment period in January. On the main enrolment day good advice was observed being given by both teaching and guidance staff. Students were treated courteously and professionally by all staff and enrolments were processed smoothly. Certain facilities were lacking: specialist careers advisers were not available; some waiting areas were inadequate; and there was a lack of privacy for guidance and enrolment interviews. Student satisfaction was carefully surveyed throughout the enrolment period, and improvements are being incorporated into the next enrolment period.

35 All full-time students have an induction programme, which works well in introducing them to the key college staff and services. Well-documented arrangements are made to accommodate students who enrol late. The students' handbook is contained within the students' diary and is well laid out and easy to read. The college is moving towards a common format for course induction activities and handbooks. Whilst there are examples of induction programmes which are well structured, involve students and give appropriate information, there is still wide variation in the quality of the programmes. Individual teachers have responsibility for the induction of part-time students but this policy operates unevenly.

36 There is a good range of support services available through the guidance unit. Staff have a breadth of experience and expertise and specialist help is brought in to cover such areas as welfare rights. An effective case worker system has been developed to ensure the recording and follow through of all enquiries and the unit regularly seeks feedback from its users. The counselling service is valued by students. Staff are well qualified and accessible. Generally, appointments can be made for the same day. Students speak highly of the level of individual care and attention that they receive. A key area of work for the unit is the provision of information on courses. However, the unit is not always provided with accurate and up-to-date information by course teams.

37 All full-time students have a minimum of one hour each week of tutorial support. Tutors are provided with a checklist of suggested topics. The content and delivery of tutorial programmes is the responsibility of course teams and there is considerable variation in the quality of the experience for students. There are examples of good practice where carefully thought through programmes are linked to the needs of students

on particular courses. There are no formal tutorial arrangements for part-time courses, or for one-year, full-time GCE A level students. Tutorials have been disrupted on some courses as a result of staff sickness and staffing changes. More robust structures are required within the college if the tutorial programme is to be further developed. There are few opportunities for staff development or for the sharing of good practice in this area.

38 Processes for reviewing and monitoring students' progress are not well developed and practices vary across the college. In some course teams, there is good practice in action planning and some students receive regular reports on their progress. All full-time students have an entitlement to update their record of achievement as part of the tutorial programme. Students can use a computerised programme which is proving popular with some, and support is available through curriculum workshops. However, only a small number of students complete a national record of achievement, and there is limited commitment to this process amongst teachers. Monitoring of students' attendance is working well in some areas but in others there is little evidence of prompt or effective action taken as a response to poor attendance. College guidelines on procedures are clear but they are not followed consistently.

39 The college provides a good level of personal support for students on adult basic education courses and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on both discrete and mainstream provision. There is a good relationship with Birkdale School for the Hearing Impaired. The school provides note-takers and communicators to support students with a hearing impairment. Special needs co-ordinators in secondary schools and staff responsible for links with special schools are effective in easing students' transition to college and in identifying the support which they are likely to need. One 11 to 18 secondary school has arranged a 'compact' with the college to ease the transition of GNVQ intermediate pupils into advanced study at the college. A similar arrangement to ease the transition from further education to higher education is currently being negotiated with Liverpool John Moores University.

40 The college has made progress in establishing systems to identify those students who may require additional support in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. A questionnaire entitled 'Can I Help You?' is completed by students at their enrolment. All full-time students visit the learning support unit during induction for an initial assessment in literacy and numeracy. Students who require support should attend workshops. Few do so. In September 1996, 851 students were assessed and 138 were identified as needing support. By the end of January 1997, only 32 had attended workshops. Initial assessments take too long to process. There has been insufficient staff training to enable support work to flourish across the college and there is insufficient specialist help to deal with the wide range of students' needs. Currently, the learning support unit has

difficulty in attracting students because it is located in an annexe, and perceived by students primarily to have a remedial role. Plans are in place to relocate the unit in a new learning resource centre.

41 Careers guidance at the college is implemented through an external careers guidance organisation. Considerable progress has been made this year in raising the awareness of staff and students about the service and in developing an identifiable careers information base. Currently, not all tutors involve the careers adviser in their tutorial work. Careers support has been integrated with the college's guidance facilities. The careers base is housed in the students' guidance unit and the careers adviser operates as a member of the team. The provision of higher education guidance for students is effective; they receive an appropriate level of specialist advice from course teams about opportunities for progression. There is a need to clarify what students can expect from careers education and how it can be organised, particularly for students on non-vocational courses.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

42 Inspectors observed a total of 199 teaching sessions. In 53 per cent of these strengths outweighed weaknesses which is 10 per cent below the average for all colleges inspected during 1995-96 according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. Almost 8 per cent of the sessions had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. The attendance rate for classes inspected was 72 per cent. The best attendance rates were in mathematics and basic education and the poorest were in humanities and art and design. Inspectors observed an average of 12 students in each session. The following table shows the grades given to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	5	10	16	0	0	31
GCSE	2	12	8	2	0	24
GVNQ	5	14	11	3	3	36
NVQ	1	14	12	1	1	29
Other vocational	5	15	19	4	0	43
Other	8	15	12	1	0	36
Total	26	80	78	11	4	199

43 Science was taught in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Course leaders maintained good records of attendance and achievement. Teachers set work regularly and marked it promptly. However, the marking of students' work varied considerably in quality and was often poor. Annotations by teachers did not always correct errors of fact or

spelling, identify omissions or suggest how students could improve their performance. Inadequate planning of courses and lessons reduced the quality of many of the sessions that were observed. There was insufficient variation in the teaching methods used and many lessons lacked sufficient pace. For example, in one lesson a well-prepared handout was issued to students who were given time to read it. After approximately 15 minutes the teacher then read out the handout to the whole class, without interruption. In other lessons, there was insufficient checking on the learning taking place.

44 In mathematics and computing, teachers prepared their lessons well. Assignments were often well written and provided students with clear criteria for assessment. Teachers of art and design and computing worked together to enable students to concentrate on some imaginative projects. Mathematics teachers supplied students with worked examples to illustrate mathematical principles. Subtle mathematical details were often clearly explained. However, in too many sessions students spent too much time copying notes from the board. Some teachers made ineffective use of questions directed at students and failed to check sufficiently on the learning that had taken place. In some practical lessons, students' learning was affected by a shortage of sufficient computers.

45 In courses on business, management and administration much of the teaching and learning was adequate but uninspiring. Lesson plans varied in effectiveness. The best plans showed the progress that students should make in the lesson. Some demonstrated how teachers intended to meet individual students' needs. In a minority of lessons teachers used a range of activities to interest students and promote learning. Assignments were often set in a realistic vocational context although some lacked imagination. Teachers in many subjects used well-produced learning packs which allowed students to progress at a pace which suited them. In the poorer sessions students copied from overhead transparencies or took down dictated notes; the pace was slow and the students were bored. In other sessions, teachers failed to check on the level of understanding achieved by students. For example, a video on starting a business was shown to students. Only one student took notes on the video. When the programme ended the lecturer made only one comment on the programme then moved on to the next topic. In many lessons, students were passive observers rather than engaging in purposeful activity. In some sessions, low student numbers, staff absences and frequent changes in staff seriously disrupted the learning of some students.

46 In catering and hospitality, teachers prepared well for their lessons. Schemes of work were logical and covered the syllabus. Teachers catered effectively for students of different abilities and enabled individual students to progress at a pace which suited them. Students with disabilities were well supported in kitchens and classrooms and were able to play a full part in the activities. Teaching was generally sound and teachers used a variety of activities which were successful in interesting and involving

students. In some subjects, such as food costing, the key skill of numeracy was integrated with the teaching. Good links with local industry have been established through a consortium of local hotels. These have provided students with opportunities to take part in realistic catering projects. In a minority of lessons, teaching required a stronger focus on the vocational aspects of the subject. For example, videos used to develop customer service skills were not set in a relevant hotel and catering context. In some practical sessions, the teacher did not challenge students who were not wearing protective clothing. Generally, the development of the skills of numeracy, communication and information technology in assignments was unsatisfactory. At the time of the inspection, the college restaurant, which was open to the public, did not have sufficient customers in the evening to provide a realistic working environment for catering students. On leisure and tourism courses, teaching was generally effective. Students on the GNVQ courses could choose from a good range of travel and sport options. Key skills were taught in discrete lessons and were not sufficiently integrated with the vocational units. Students taking the NVQ in travel services were insufficiently prepared to understand or complete their portfolios.

47 There was much good teaching in health and community care. The best teaching was characterised by appropriately challenging and varied activities. Students were introduced to their course through careful induction activities which included an explanation of assessment guidelines. Teachers sometimes made good use of the experience of mature students to enrich the learning experience for younger students. In a lesson on early childhood education the teacher asked the students to look carefully at their own experiences in moving from school to college to help them to begin to work on children's transition from home to their first experience of school. The students worked in pairs to consider the types of anxiety that may be present during such periods of transition. The class then went on to look at a video produced by a school in the region showing how children were helped to cope with the transition from home to school. All students were engaged in work experience for a part of their course. Assignments were often linked to work experience. Many teachers brought recent relevant professional experience and good subject knowledge to their work. In some lessons, an activity was insufficiently challenging to engage the interest of the students or continued for too long, thus losing the students' attention. Some teachers underestimated the ability of the students in their classes.

48 Courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy had coherent schemes of work which matched the needs of students in the department. However, half of the lesson plans that were inspected failed to define learning objectives or to provide a realistic timescale for activities. Teaching was generally sound although in approximately 50 per cent of the lessons observed the teacher dominated too much and failed to build on students' existing knowledge or experience, particularly their experiences on work

placement. Full-time vocational courses were enriched by the inclusion of French studies or by students developing the key skills of numeracy and information technology. Teachers developed supportive and effective working relationships with students. In many practical sessions, teachers displayed the professionalism which they were promoting to their students. The assessment of students' practical work was thorough and consistent. In some sessions teachers made too little use of questions that challenged students and indicated the extent to which students were understanding their work. Some practical sessions lacked pace and commercial realism. Opportunities to link theory to industrial practice were sometimes missed.

49 In art and design and performing arts, teachers used a good range of teaching and learning activities to motivate and interest students. In a dance lesson, the teacher worked with students to create a routine. Each student had to create the next section and the teacher helped students to sift ideas or develop new ideas. Teachers established good learning relationships with students. The majority of assignments covered interesting topics and most made clear the purpose that lay behind the learning. In performing arts, there was an appropriate balance between theory and practical studies. Students took part in a wide range of productions which enhanced their learning. In art and design, although teachers devoted a great deal of time to working with students on an individual basis, students' progress was not well documented. Part-time and visiting teachers provided students with valuable knowledge of industrial and commercial developments. In the best sessions, the students' attention was engaged and they were encouraged to develop knowledge of an appropriate range of media as well as critical skills. In the poorer sessions, weak planning led to a lack of rigour and pace; students were not encouraged to undertake thorough research, and, as a result, produced work which was unimaginative and poorly presented. Key skills were often not integrated with practical work.

50 In most humanities and teacher training courses, lessons were well planned. Teachers developed pleasant purposeful relationships with their students. The best lessons were thoroughly prepared and taught in a lively manner, and teachers used a good variety of activities which engaged students' interests. A lesson for trainee teachers was particularly successful; the teacher managed student presentations in a way that ensured that all relevant aspects of teaching were covered. In modern languages, students were, for the most part, challenged by their reading and listening tasks. However, opportunities for students to practise the target language were underused. In English and other language lessons, schemes of work and lesson plans were not used consistently; many were just brief outlines of the topics to be covered. In the poorer lessons, the teacher dominated, made too much use of whole group teaching, and gave too little thought and planning to the differing abilities of the students. Progress of students in a number of GCE A level subjects suffered from change of teachers during the year; anxiety affected both students and

staff. Other classes were interrupted by activities involving students' protests, which also caused disruption to students' own learning programmes. There were insufficient links between teachers running courses at the main college and teachers at other centres.

51 Lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were generally well planned and had clear intentions. For example, during a demonstration in a cookery lesson the tutor reinforced learning on the concepts of size, shape, number and time. Some lesson plans focused more on the student activity rather than the results to be achieved. Most students attended discrete courses although an increasing number attended mainstream lessons in design, business administration and catering, and received support from specialist support workers. In graphic design, three paraplegic students were working effectively with personal computers provided by the college. However, some groups attending practical sessions in areas such as hairdressing were still taught separately. Teachers paid careful attention to marking students' work. Some lessons for adults had an appropriate balance of activities and others successfully encouraged students to take more responsibility for their own work. However, the range of teaching and learning activities used by teachers was narrow. For example, in some sessions teachers gave students too much support, and in others they paid insufficient attention to the development of oral communication skills. In a minority of sessions, students carried out pointless tasks such as copying without understanding the work. Sometimes there were students who failed to take any part in the activity of a lesson.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

52 In science, students generally wrote clearly about their work. Adult students contributed enthusiastically to lessons. Younger students tended to take no active part in the lessons and showed little enjoyment for their subject. Practical work was carried out safely and students had the basic skills appropriate for their course of study. Attendance rates in many sessions were low. Many students failed to hand in work that was set. The proportion of students who achieved grades A* to C in GCSE subjects was at or above the national average. However, too many students left their courses before taking the external examination. The achievements of students in GCE A level science examinations were below the national average for further education colleges.

53 In mathematics and computing, students produced work which demonstrated a good understanding of their subject. Some imaginative coursework showed that students had used their skills in information technology to enhance the presentation of mathematical information. Computing students developed some exemplary computer programmes with clearly-laid-out explanatory notes. Students who completed computing courses at the college were generally successful in achieving their qualification. Retention rates on a number of full-time courses were

observed to be low. For example, of 10 students aged 16 to 18 who joined GCE A level computing in 1994, only three completed the two-year course. The pass rates for GCE A level mathematics and computing were below the national average for further education colleges.

54 In business, management and administration studies, accurate student achievement data were hard to identify. Generally, achievement rates on GNVQ advanced and intermediate courses in business and most professional accountancy examinations compared favourably with rates in similar colleges. The results of students on GCE A level courses in business studies and accounts were below the national average for further education colleges. In 1996-97, clearer application of entry criteria has been applied to such courses as the BTEC national certificate and early assessments indicate that the current cohort is showing improved achievements. Results of students on the GNVQ foundation business course were good in 1995-96, but discontinuity caused by staff absences is reducing student motivation and achievement. In lessons, students responded well to questions from the teacher and worked well with each other. Assessed work was generally appropriate for the level of course, although not all teachers paid the same attention to correcting mistakes in grammar and spelling. On administration courses retention rates improved to 80 per cent in 1995-96.

55 In hotel and catering studies, teachers developed productive working relationships with students who worked well and enthusiastically in groups or individually as the situation demanded. Students achieved results that were up to industrial standards and displayed appropriate social skills when working in areas to which the public had access. Around 75 per cent of students who completed the GNVQ hospitality and catering advanced course in 1996 went on to courses in higher education. In some subjects, students did not display an appropriate understanding of the importance of food costs. Retention rates on some courses, such as GNVQs, were good but on many courses, including most NVQs, rates were poor. Attendance was poor on many courses. For example, on part-time courses that were inspected attendance averaged 53 per cent. The achievements of students in external examinations were variable. The results of students on leisure and tourism courses were generally poor. Retention rates on GNVQ courses are improving slowly but they remain below the national averages. Since 1994, the pass rates have generally failed to match the national averages. In 1996, only 58 per cent of GCE A level physical education students achieved grades A to E.

56 Students on health and community care courses generally enjoyed their studies and were enthusiastic about their lessons. Teachers made good links between theory and practice and students showed a mature understanding of the qualities needed to be an effective carer. Although key skills have been incorporated into most courses there is scope for further work on the use of information technology and communications in

some courses. In external assessments, students generally performed well. Adult students on nursery nursing courses consistently achieved good results, often gaining 100 per cent success. Students on BTEC national diplomas generally achieved a success rate of between 70 and 85 per cent, which is comparable with results gained by similar colleges in the sector. In 1995-96, the success rate for GNVQ intermediate and foundation courses was about 80 per cent. There have been retention problems on some courses, but strategies have been developed which have led to an improved retention rate in 1996-97.

57 In hairdressing and beauty therapy, students spoke with enthusiasm about their study programmes. In some lessons they demonstrated professionalism and motivation. The standard of students' responses to written assignments was satisfactory although the quality of presentation and organisation of some portfolios, and the quality of some other written work was poor. Students responded well to practical assessments and recorded their own individual progress with pride. They worked safely and competently in practical lessons. However, in some theory lectures students' participation was minimal and they did not demonstrate sufficient understanding of the subject area covered in the lesson. Retention rates and the level of students' achievements were low on both two-year, full-time hairdressing and beauty therapy programmes. For example, in 1995-96, in beauty therapy only 35 per cent of students completed the course and of those only 25 per cent achieved the full NVQ level 2. Rates of achievement on one-year vocational courses have varied significantly from one year to another.

58 In performing arts, students were enthusiastic and very committed to the course. They worked effectively in groups on practical projects and many developed high levels of performance skills. Students who completed courses in art and design, and performing arts often did well in external examinations. For example, all students who completed BTEC national diploma or GCE A level courses were successful. However, the poor retention rates on many of these and other courses, meant that the proportion of students enrolling on a course who passed was often low. When students attended classes regularly, their work was generally well presented and supported by some good research. Some interesting life drawing and some imaginative three-dimensional constructions were produced. For students who completed their course the rate of progression to courses in higher education was good.

59 In many of the humanities and teacher training courses, students displayed high levels of motivation and interest in their subject. In languages, the better students took a lively part in class activities and achieved high standards in their oral work. Some students, however, failed to develop oral skills beyond a superficial level and a few took little part in the learning activities. The results achieved by students in external examinations were variable and, in many cases, poor. However, some results were impressive. In GCSE history, psychology and sociology grades

were above the national averages for all further education colleges in 1995-96. Although the numbers entering GCE A level English were small, the pass rate has improved over recent years and in 1996 it was above the national average. However, few of the GCE A level subjects achieved a pass rate which was better than the national average, and the proportion of grades A to C gained by students was low. Overall pass rates at GCE A level were further reduced by the low retention rates on many courses. Often, fewer than 45 per cent of those students who started a two-year course completed it.

60 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on discrete courses generally enjoyed their work. Some developed a range of oral and group work skills and made appropriate progress. Opportunities for work experience were integrated with their courses. However, there were insufficient opportunities for students with learning difficulties to progress on to more advanced studies. In adult education courses, an increased number of students were successful in gaining external qualifications, but the proportion, at 28 per cent, remains below the level of achievement in similar colleges. Progression routes were available for students on basic education courses. In some lessons students further developed their learning in simulated work situations. Some students, although they repeated work, were making little progress.

61 The 120 students, aged 16 to 18, entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1995-96 scored, on average, 3.3 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2), according to the 1996 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. This shows an improvement from 2.4 points per entry for 1995.

62 Seventy-four per cent of the 181 students in their final year of study in the advanced vocational courses included in the DfEE's 1996 performance tables were successful. This places the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. This figure shows a deterioration in the level of achievement since 1995, when 78 per cent of entries at advanced level were successful. Sixty-six per cent of the 169 students in their final year of intermediate vocational courses were successful. This also places the college in the middle third of colleges in the sector on this performance measure. Data from the college showed that of 1,033 full-time leavers who completed their courses in 1996, 48 per cent continued their studies on a course in further or higher education. Seventeen per cent obtained employment and 10 per cent remained unemployed. The destinations of the other 25 per cent of students were unknown.

63 On a large number of courses many students left before completing their studies. On some courses, students' achievements were also affected by poor levels of attendance, which often went unchecked by teachers.

Retention rates were particularly poor on:

- two-year GCE A level subjects
- GNVQs and some BTEC national awards
- NVQs taken over one or two years, full time and part time.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

64 The college has made good progress in developing its quality assurance system over the last eight years. It is a founder member of a network of colleges in the north west which meets regularly to share good practice. Documentation to support the quality system is particularly thorough and well designed. A handbook clearly sets out the procedures to be followed, a calendar of events, meetings to be held and deadlines for action. Course teams and support services are required to keep quality portfolios, most of which contain useful documentation to aid the management of courses or services. A quality manager reports to a vice-principal; they hold regular minuted meetings to oversee the development of the quality assurance strategy. A quality standards subcommittee of the academic board was set up in 1995 but teaching staff have refused to serve on the committee during the industrial dispute.

65 In addition to their regular meetings, course teams are required to hold four meetings a year to focus on quality issues. The meetings coincide with the returns from the college student evaluation questionnaires. Departmental quality groups comprising course team leaders and chaired by the head of department then consider the outcomes of the meetings. The vice-principal and/or quality manager attends reviews of these meetings and provides guidance and encouragement to departments in the formulation of their reports. The meetings are well documented and issues that require action are followed up. Some departments are slower than others to implement targets that have been agreed.

66 The documentation to support course evaluation is well designed and includes a section for data on enrolment, retention, achievement and destinations. All full-time courses, and a sample of part-time courses, are reviewed annually. Some staff regard the system as over reliant on paperwork. Many staff are content to comply with the system but do not yet demonstrate a total commitment to the quality culture which the college is trying to create. Several reports are more self-congratulatory than self-critical. In hair and beauty, the course review was in the main thorough and objective. Other reports are bland and lack analysis; for example, they contain references to results being 'good' or 'as expected'. In science, course review documentation is not taken seriously nor is there a systematic approach to quality assurance. The large number of part-time staff in languages and the informality of approach in the department to quality assurance limit its effectiveness. Data from the college's management information system are widely regarded by staff as unreliable and therefore, in their view, not an accurate basis for review. The analysis

in course reviews of data on performance does not take account of national standards or benchmarks that would allow comparison to be made with the rest of the sector. Course reviews are aggregated into faculty reviews, a process that encourages generalisation and discourages the use of measurable standards which could identify improvements in performance. The reviews give too little attention to teaching and learning. There is a need for course teams to take more responsibility for setting and monitoring progress towards quality standards in a way that would be likely to improve the learning and development of their students.

67 The college support services are organised into two quality groups. Each meets once a term to discuss quality issues. Good progress has been made in raising the awareness of staff working in support services to the benefits of quality assurance. At the groups' meetings, teams take the opportunity to share good practice. They particularly welcome the improved communications which have been achieved between the support teams and academic staff. Teams have set themselves standards against which to monitor their performance but have not yet analysed data in a way that would measure their progress.

68 In the spring term 1996, a quality audit team that had been elected by the staff began a programme of audits to measure compliance with the college's quality assurance requirements. Individual audit teams consisting of two members, one from management and one from the staff, were trained for the task. The audit teams aim to complete six audits each year. Since spring 1996, seven audits have been carried out covering: three subject departments; the information and statistics sections; provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; and two off-site centres. Prior to the audit, the area under investigation is invited to complete a self-assessment of its compliance. Good arrangements exist for the reports by the audit team to be fed back to staff. Recommendations for improvement are made and action plans are followed up by the quality manager.

69 The arrangements for assuring quality at franchised centres are developing well. All franchisees have received an initial audit from the college to test the appropriateness of their systems for holding the franchise. The college aims to undertake three spot-check audits on each provider during the year. In addition, a schedule has been drawn up to complete two full audits each year. In 1996, such an audit which used a suitably amended version of the college's standard documentation was completed on two providers. They are not due to receive their next full audit until the year 2003. A second schedule has been drawn up for curriculum teams to undertake audits of providers working in their curriculum areas. The college encourages the teams to use their expertise to monitor issues such as staff qualifications, students' achievements, schemes of work and assessment plans. More work has to be done to involve college curriculum teams fully in contributing to quality assurance in franchised work.

70 Students complete standardised questionnaires three times a year. The questionnaires cover: access and first impressions; college services and learning programmes; and programme evaluation. Industrial action has resulted in non-co-operation with some quality assurance processes. This affected the number of student questionnaires returned in 1995-96, when between 18 per cent and 36 per cent of the questionnaires circulated to students were returned. Action taken by college managers to improve the response rate was successful during the next year. The first student survey of 1997 had a response rate of 62 per cent. Student focus groups were introduced in 1995-96 to supplement the feedback from students that was obtained through questionnaires and through the contribution of student representatives at course team meetings. A bulletin informs students of the issues that were raised through questionnaires and the action which the college has subsequently taken. Feedback from employers is also obtained through questionnaires. The 1995-96 responses to the questionnaire indicated that 66 per cent of employers were satisfied or very satisfied with the service from the college.

71 The college's system for internal verification is well documented. It is understood by staff and students. In care courses, the portfolios are well indexed, making it straightforward to track the progress of students. In business, records are generally complete but there are variations in their quality. Course teams respond appropriately to issues raised by external verifiers and their responses are monitored by the quality manager.

72 There is no effective system to monitor the performance of individual staff or to identify their development needs. The college developed its own appraisal system and implemented it from 1993. It was designed to apply to all teaching and support staff and was intended to identify the development needs of staff. It did not include classroom observation as part of the process of gathering evidence. A scheme to observe classroom teaching was launched in 1995-96 in an attempt to identify good practice. The scheme is not linked to appraisal and participation is voluntary. The appraisal scheme is currently being reviewed. Only those staff who have volunteered have been appraised in the current academic year. The college's staff-development budget in 1995-96 was £68,000 which is approximately 1 per cent of college income received from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Thirty-five per cent of the budget was delegated to faculties. A staff-development programme that is run within the college continues to take shape. It covers issues such as management development, assessor accreditation, quality assurance and health and safety. Staff development is not always given sufficient attention and consideration within departments. There are insufficient links between the outcomes of course and service reviews, and the construction of staff-development programmes.

73 The college quality handbook sets out the criteria on issues of quality which courses will need to meet to satisfy commitments made in the college charter. Students have received copies of the charter and staff have attended briefings on it. Students are less well aware of the complaints procedure that is contained within the charter. The report to the corporation on the implementation of the charter in 1996-97 includes an analysis against charter headings of complaints received. Only 44 complaints were received in 1995-96, most of which are concerned with examinations, assessment or college facilities. Students at a Spanish class for adult students, where there had been three lecturers since September 1996, were unaware of college procedures for registering their complaints.

74 The college produced a self-assessment report using the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report sets out the college's view of its strengths and areas for development; it does not specifically refer to weaknesses. Sources of evidence are indicated to support judgements. An action plan specifies the individuals responsible for taking action and target dates are attached. The report was compiled from the self-assessment reports produced by curriculum teams and cross-college services. The curriculum self-assessment reports were shared with specialist inspectors during the inspection of programme areas. The report was well produced and contained judgements which in many areas closely matched those made by the FEFC inspectorate; no grades were produced which could be compared to inspectorate grades.

RESOURCES

Staffing

75 Teachers are generally well qualified for their work. Sixty-five per cent of full-time teachers are graduates and 34 per cent of the staff have higher degrees. Seventy-five per cent of full-time teachers but only 39 per cent of part-time teachers have a teaching qualification. Fifty-eight per cent of full-time and 64 per cent of part-time teachers are female. Sixty per cent of full-time and 75 per cent of part-time support staff are female. All four members of the executive management team are male. An extensive training programme has ensured that most staff involved in GNVQ and NVQ programmes, with the exception of art and design, have obtained an assessor award from the appropriate training and development lead body. Fifteen per cent of full-time teachers have had industrial experience within the last five years. The number of part-time teaching staff at the college has increased but only 12 per cent have recent industrial experience. In some curriculum areas staff have taken short industrial secondments. Teachers in catering and leisure and tourism make good use of opportunities to update their commercial experience. In some other subjects staff need to update their industrial experience. Staff teaching performing arts have a good balance of professional and teaching skills.

76 In the 12 months leading up to the inspection, staffing of the teaching areas has been subject to substantial change. In that period, the number of full-time teachers has been reduced by 28. Fifteen of the full-time staff have been on long-term sick leave. Month-on-month, the number of staff working days lost through sickness has increased dramatically from 84 days lost in February 1996 to 338 days lost in February 1997. The number of part-time teachers has increased from 223 to 278. There are well-established personnel practices and procedures which have been developed to meet changing needs. The same recruitment procedures are being introduced for part-time teachers as are used for full-time staff. The college expects all departments to employ part-time staff to provide at least 25 per cent of department teaching hours. New staff, full time and part time, receive an appropriate induction but some staff have not been allowed by their line managers to participate fully in the programme. The college plans a further reduction of 25 full-time staff from September 1997.

77 There are 99 full-time and 73 part-time support staff in the college of whom 50 are employed on term-time-only contracts. This includes 21 full-time and 15 part-time technicians. Technician support is well regarded in several areas of the college. However, inadequate provision of support was observed in hair and beauty, computer-aided design and in some areas of business studies. The two full-time library staff are well qualified and experienced and are supported by three part-time assistants, all of whom have information technology skills.

Equipment/learning resources

78 The majority of curriculum areas are appropriately equipped for general teaching purposes with, for example, whiteboards and overhead projectors and screens. However, in some curriculum areas equipment is in poor condition. In September 1996, the college appointed a manager of learning resources. Audio-visual aids, reprographics and desktop publishing, library and all learning resource areas, which includes information technology, are now audited and subject to planning and maintenance. In art and design there is a good range of specialist media equipment and the majority of studios and workshops are adequately equipped. However, art and design base rooms have some old, neglected equipment. Specialist equipment in science is appropriate but storage areas need to be rationalised. Practical areas in business studies, hairdressing and leisure have a good range of specialist equipment. In catering, there are plans to replace equipment and refurbish the kitchen areas. Resources used in franchise and outreach centres are of an appropriate quantity and quality.

79 Students have access to 304 networked computers which gives a student to computer ratio of approximately 10:1 for those attending programmes on college sites. Computers are located in 24 areas throughout the college. In five locations, including the library, there is

provision for operating compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases with an impressive catalogued list of 110 disk titles available. A limited number of computers cannot operate some modern software effectively. There are 37 computers, some with high specifications, serving graphic design and media applications. Good facilities, including computers and other learning materials, are provided in a GCE A level and a GNVQ workshop. In business studies some computers are old. The travel agency lacks appropriate industrial-standard software. There is a limited range of software for modern languages which has also lost its satellite reception facility since transferring to another building.

80 The college library has a stock of 28,000 books and 121 journals which serves the majority of courses well, with the exception of some areas of science, business studies and catering. Throughout the college there is a total of 347 video titles and a wide range of learning packs. All of these resources have been catalogued and lists made available to all members of staff. The college's desktop publishing facility has been used to produce good learning materials to support some parts of the curriculum. The building of a large learning resource centre above the existing library is nearing completion. This centre will bring together many resources, including 100 computers.

Accommodation

81 The college is situated close to the town centre and it is easily accessible by rail and bus. On-site car parking is limited. The accommodation strategy has been updated periodically and much of it has been successfully implemented. Significant improvements have been made to the external and internal fabric and appearance in many parts of the estate. The Pennington building provides an excellent facility. The college is generally clean and free from graffiti. Attention has been paid to providing access to all areas for students with mobility problems. Signposting is generally effective.

82 With few exceptions, rooms are of a good size to accommodate learning activities. In beauty and hairdressing, there is a good suite of salons providing a realistic working environment. There are suitable areas for performing arts students who also benefit from using the facilities at the nearby Southport arts centre. The travel agency provides an effective environment but is not well located on the campus. In science there are good subject base rooms. Work areas for GCE A level and GNVQ students are well designed and decorated. There are only 70 study places in the library but this is supplemented by spaces in the work areas. The opening of the learning resource centre will increase study facilities. Changing rooms in catering are inadequate. The college recognises that there is insufficient provision of social and recreational areas. Sporting facilities are also inadequate but the college makes use of outside facilities nearby. There are attractive areas in many parts of the college. Some other areas are poorly decorated, and often have no display materials and a pervading atmosphere of neglect.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

83 The particular strengths of the college include:

- the range of courses for school-leavers
- the arrangements for strategic planning and market research
- provision at an increasing number of outreach and franchise centres
- effective arrangements for the enrolment and induction of students
- good links with schools and the local community
- active governors who use their experience for the benefit of the college
- well-established systems to assure quality
- a well-managed accommodation strategy
- the developing arrangements to assure the quality of franchised provision
- some dynamic service areas.

84 If the college is to build upon its strengths, it should:

- develop opportunities for open and distance learning
- improve the management of some curriculum areas
- improve arrangements for the identification and provision of support for basic skills
- address variations in the tutorial support experienced by students
- improve the teaching and learning in some curriculum areas
- improve retention rates and levels of achievement on some courses
- improve the links between service areas and curriculum teams
- ensure full implementation of quality assurance processes
- develop effective links between observation of teaching, appraisal and the professional development of staff
- seek to improve continuity of the staffing of courses
- strengthen the morale of all staff up to the level of the best.

FIGURES

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

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

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

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at February 1997)

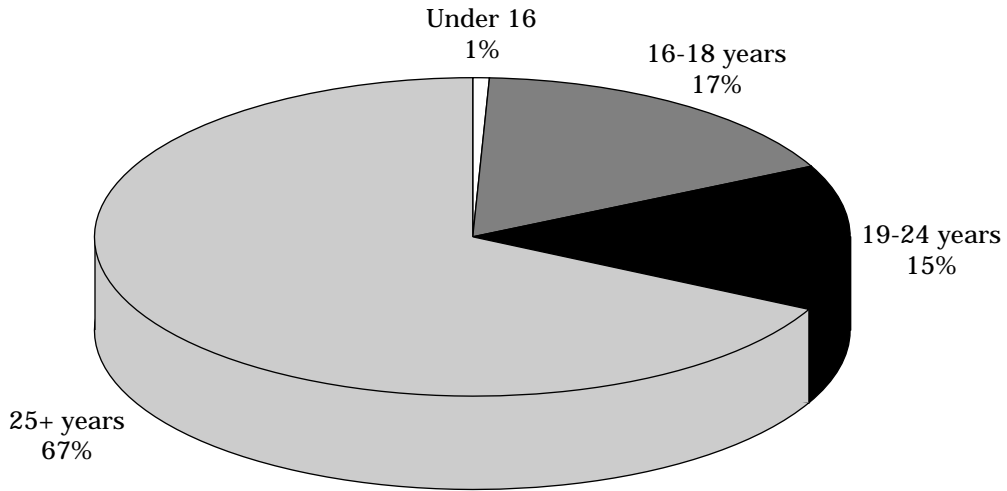
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

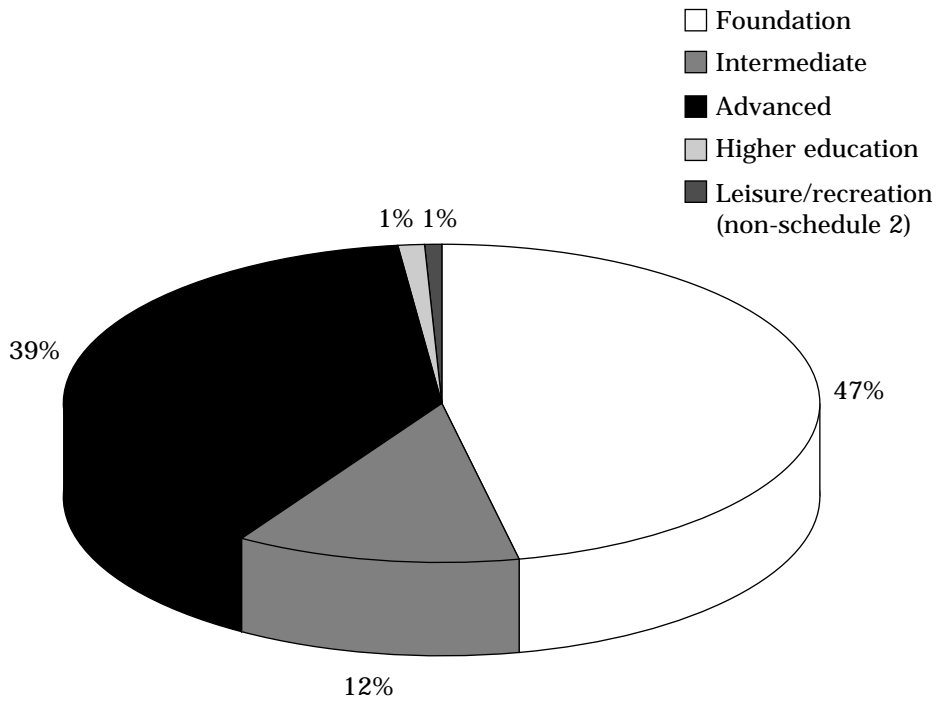
Southport College: percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 11,491

Figure 2

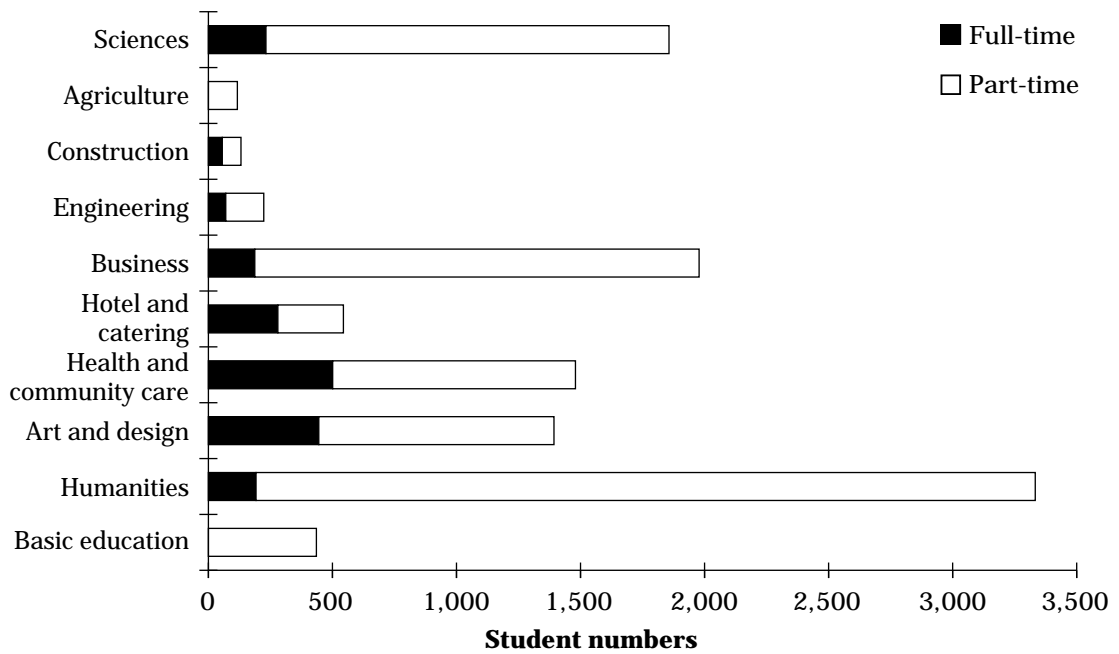
Southport College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 11,491

Figure 3

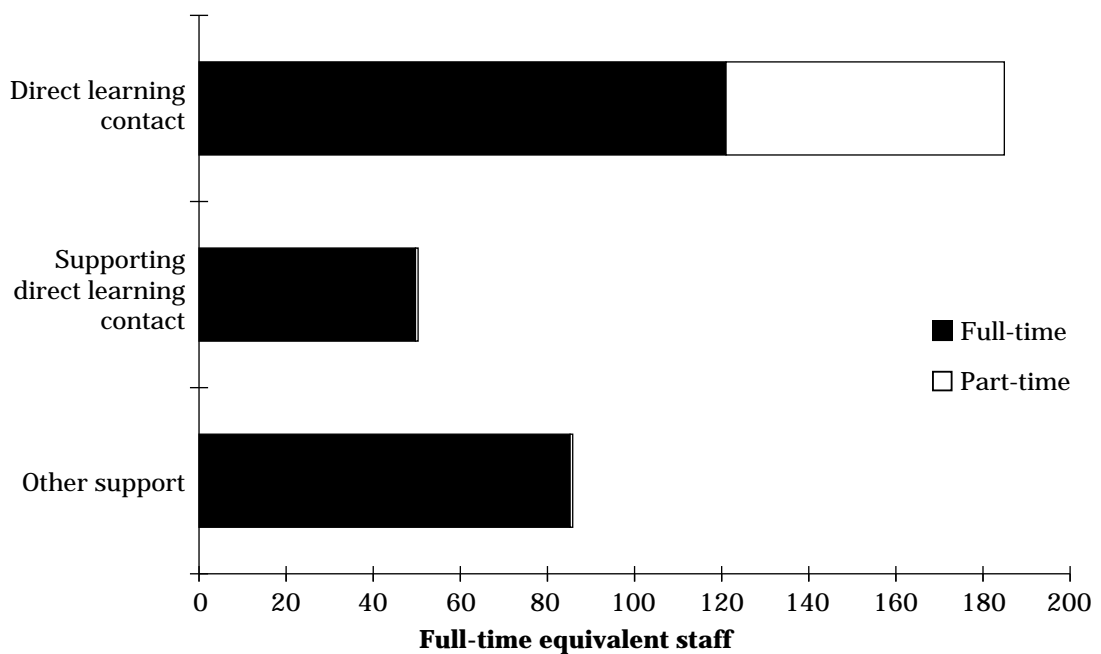
Southport College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 11,491

Figure 4

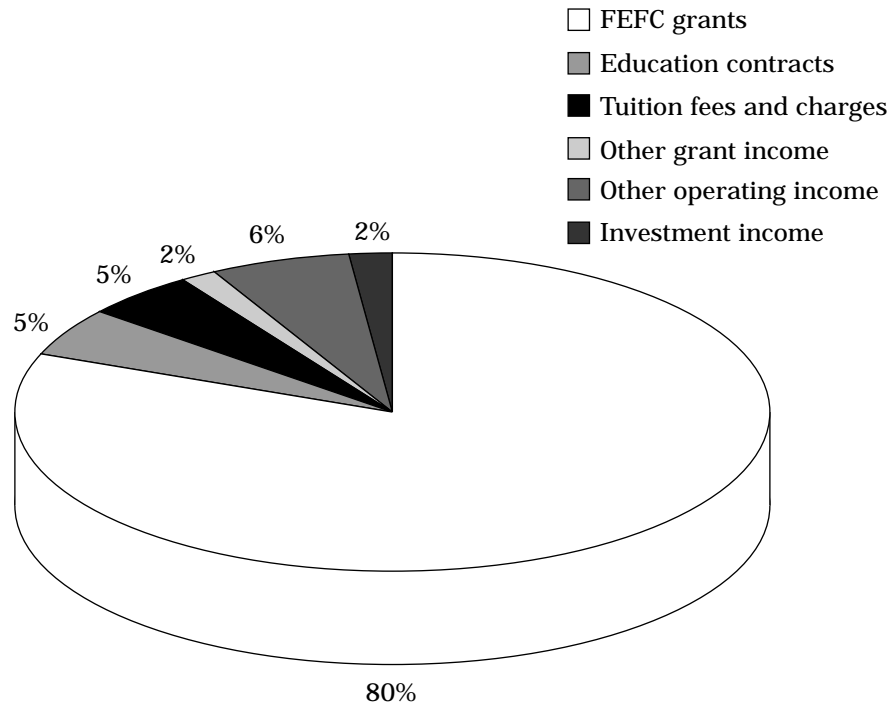
Southport College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at February 1997)



Full-time equivalent staff: 321

Figure 5

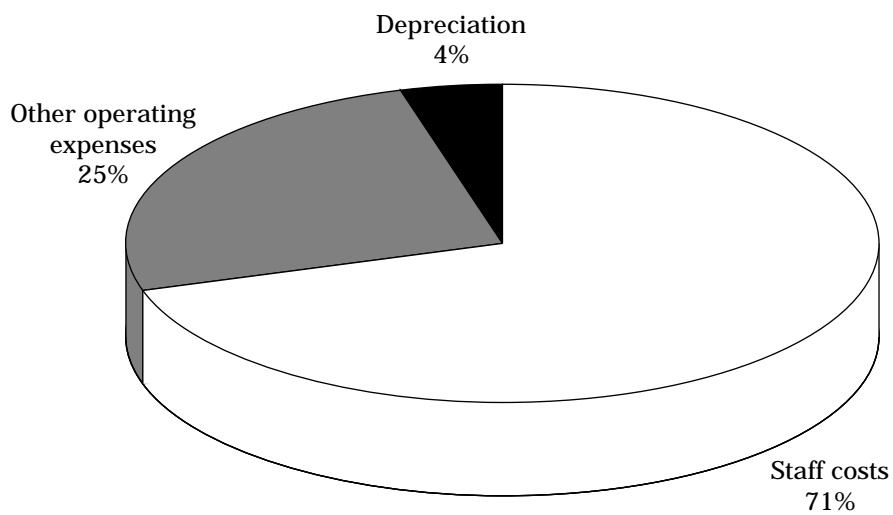
Southport College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £9,806,000

Figure 6

Southport College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £9,754,000

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