

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Stockport College of Further and Higher Education

March 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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

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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 38/97

STOCKPORT COLLEGE OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected September-December 1996

Summary

Stockport College of Further and Higher Education offers a broad range of courses from basic education to degree level to meet the needs of students in Stockport and beyond. A notable feature of the college's provision is the range of flexible patterns of study and modes of attendance which are offered to students. The college has well-established links with employers, the local authority and organisations which provide advice and support to students. An improved management structure affords staff the opportunity to participate in decisions. A well-defined admissions policy and sound arrangements for induction provide students with a smooth transition into the college. The quality of teaching is good in several curriculum areas. Students' views on the quality of their experience are gained through questionnaires and student representation on course committees. Staff are well qualified. Students on the main site have easy access to information technology equipment. Plans to reshape the accommodation take into account course requirements. Weaknesses include: inadequate arrangements for reporting to the corporation on the achievements of students; poor examination and retention rates on some courses; poor punctuality and attendance by students which disrupt learning; inadequate computerised management information; little attention paid to the quality of teaching and learning in the arrangements for quality assurance; slow progress in staff appraisal; and some outdated industrial and commercial experience of staff.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		2
Governance and management		3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		2
Quality assurance		3
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	1
	accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Hairdressing and beauty therapy	1
Construction	3	Art and design	2
Engineering	4	Humanities	3
Business	3	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and basic education	3
Leisure and tourism	2		
Health and care	2		

INTRODUCTION

1 Stockport College of Further and Higher Education was inspected in November and December 1996. Enrolment and induction were inspected in September 1996. Twenty-four inspectors spent a total of 101 days in college. They visited 281 classes, scrutinised students' work and examined documentation on the college and its courses. Inspectors observed a meeting of the college corporation and met board members. Meetings were also held with college managers, teaching and support staff, local employers, and representatives of local schools and community groups, the University of Manchester, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, Lifetime Careers Stockport and High Peak, and Stockport and High Peak Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Stockport College of Further and Higher Education dates back to 1889, when it was opened as The Stockport Technical School. It operates from two sites. The main site is close to Stockport town centre; the Davenport Centre is 1.5 miles to the south. The college has broadened the range of its curriculum from basic education level to university degree level. Vocational and professional programmes of study continue to feature prominently in its curriculum portfolio.

3 At the time of inspection, 14,370 students were enrolled at the college. Of these 66 per cent were aged 19 and over; 3,500 were full-time students. Nineteen per cent of students are enrolled on courses of higher education. The college expects its enrolments to rise by approximately 30 per cent throughout the rest of the academic year. Minority ethnic groups comprise 8.5 per cent of the student population compared with less than 3 per cent in the local population. Student numbers, for the academic year 1995-96, by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. Approximately 73 per cent of local school-leavers continue in full-time education, one of the highest percentages in north-west England. The college has increased its share of school-leavers from 20 per cent in 1990-91 to 24.7 per cent in 1995-96.

4 The college has recently been reorganised into four faculties: design and visual arts; engineering and the built environment; management business and applied social sciences; and science and continuing education. The faculties are further organised into 16 schools. Four cross-college services support the work of the faculties; curriculum and students services; external services; internal services; and finance and human resources. The cross-college services are further organised into 15 sections. A special projects unit manages a range of research and development activities, including those related to collaborative off-site provision and overseas links. The college employs 718 staff, amounting to 628 full-time equivalents. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

5 Since the 1980s, the employment base of Stockport has changed. Traditional industries such as textiles and engineering remain and there is a relatively high proportion of employment in the manufacturing industries. The most significant growth in employment has been in services and electronics. Small and medium enterprises now make up 96 per cent of local employers. The current rate of unemployment is 4.4 per cent, which is below the national average.

6 The college operates in a very competitive environment. Within a 10-mile radius of Stockport there are approximately 20 further education sector colleges and four universities. Three sixth form colleges, two schools with sixth forms and more than 30 private and voluntary sector education and training providers are within the borough. The college is a university college of the University of Manchester.

7 The mission of the college is 'to be a leading provider in the north west of quality further and higher education and training for all'. To implement the mission the college aims to:

- work in close partnership with schools, TECs, employers and community groups to meet their needs and to develop the employment potential of students
- provide ladders of opportunity through varied routes and access to a wide range of programmes and services
- recognise that staff are at the centre of the college's reputation and to involve and develop them to ensure its success
- enhance links with schools, colleges, universities and the local community to support students' progression
- develop further partnerships in Europe and beyond.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The college offers an extensive range of courses and progression routes. There are gaps in the provision of foundation level courses, for example, in health and social care, business and art and design. Nine general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) are offered at advanced level, 10 at intermediate level, but none at foundation level. A programme of 72 national vocational qualifications (NVQs) is provided from levels 1 to 5, of which five are at level 1. The college has 11 programmes for adults with few formal qualifications (access courses) who wish to return to education. There are 34 general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects which can be studied full time or part time. In addition, 10 GCE A level subjects are available through a flexible learning programme to allow students choice over how and when they study. Two GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects are offered. General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) programmes in 24 subjects are available during the day or evening; a further nine can be studied at times of students' own choosing.

9 The college has always provided a wide range of higher education courses. Programmes funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) include: 20 higher national certificates, six NVQs at level 4, one NVQ at level 5 and four diploma courses. The Higher Education Funding Council for England supports 12 higher national diplomas and 14 degree courses. This broad provision has resulted in close links with a number of higher education institutions, including the universities of Manchester, Salford, University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology and the University of London's Birkbeck College. Some of the higher education programmes are offered on a '2+2' basis; the first two years lead to the award of a higher national diploma at Stockport College and the following years to the award of a university degree. The college designs its degree programmes to align with the needs of local industry. A steering group for higher education and professional qualifications effectively co-ordinates higher education programmes. The college has also been involved in other collaborative work with higher education institutions. The engineering and physical sciences research council awarded a £200,000 research grant to one of the college's engineering staff for a research project to be undertaken at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology. The college currently collaborates with the University of Manchester and the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology in a two-year project funded by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) for the development of career management skills in undergraduates.

10 The college is firmly committed to 'flexible learning'. It has developed a large programme of courses with patterns of study and modes of attendance which allow students to study at times of their own choosing and/or from home. Its flexible learning centre which was established in September 1987 has developed each year. Study programmes cover all levels from foundation to professional qualifications such as accountancy. New students enrol each week. In 1995-96, there were 4,000 enrolments; over 90 per cent of the students completed their courses. The college has taken part in a number of learning projects funded by the European Community which aim to extend the ways in which students may attend and study courses. Currently it is leading a project to help organisations in the five European Community countries to introduce more flexible patterns of learning and study. The college's flexible learning service provides managers and tutors for Avro International Aerospace for their 'on-site learning and development centre'. Five members of the team are based on the Avro site. Staff are providing an intensive French course for 200 Avro staff who are being relocated to Toulouse. The college is considering extending the use of information and communications technology in its flexible learning programmes, but little progress had been made to date.

11 An effective schools liaison strategy, which was introduced in 1994, included the appointment of a schools liaison officer. It has helped to

increase enrolments from the college's 20 partner schools. Some curriculum areas designate a tutor to take responsibility for school liaison in order to provide specialist advice on subjects and courses; others do not. Hairdressing and construction offer link courses for schools. Link courses in other areas are planned. A notable feature of the college's link programme is 'challenge week' which was successfully introduced in July 1995 and has been repeated every October and July since. The initiative is aimed at year 10 pupils. All the college's curriculum areas contribute to providing a 'challenge' for students to complete during their visit to the college. In October 1996, nine schools took part at college and 15 took part in an outdoor challenge in a local country park. To mark their achievements in these activities some pupils receive medals; all receive certificates. The college has introduced NVQs and GNVQs to year 10 pupils with the help of funds from the local TEC. On behalf of the British Association for the Advancement of Science the college organises an annual science and technology competition for local Stockport primary schools.

12 Marketing is generally effective. However, the marketing policy is, as yet, insufficiently comprehensive to ensure it is implemented consistently by faculties across the college. Market research, which has included a needs analysis, a review of existing customers, research into small and medium enterprises and a detailed analysis of the needs of employers to inform course planning, has been productive. There are gaps in the college's market research into the needs of the community.

13 The college has made little progress in reviewing the implementation of its equal opportunities policy which is now six years old. An action plan was developed in 1993 but the college recognises that there is still much to achieve. An equal opportunities co-ordinator has recently been appointed. In some subjects such as engineering and computing there are few women students and students from a minority ethnic background. The proportion of women joining sports science courses has increased to 25 per cent and there is good participation in science GNVQ programmes from minority ethnic groups. Staff incorporate equal opportunities issues successfully into the health and social care curriculum.

14 Part of the college's mission is 'to develop further partnerships in Europe and beyond'. In 1990, a newly-appointed European officer led the development of staff/student exchanges and initiatives in other European countries. The college established partnerships with education and training organisations in member states of the European Union, and obtained European funding for several projects. Countries involved included France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. The pace of development slowed in 1994 when the European officer left to take another job and the post was temporarily suspended. Some programmes, including health and social care and art and design, have maintained and increased their links. Every year, art and design students are invited to participate in an exhibition in New York. The newly-appointed officer is responsible for regaining the momentum on overseas links and increasing the recruitment of overseas students.

15 The progress made by the college to widen access to adults has been uneven. Progress has been limited because the college has no outreach centres and no established programme of non-vocational courses. The college is reviewing ways in which to tailor provision more closely to the needs of adults. It is working closely with the local education authority to develop outreach work, and has entered into a service level agreement to provide adult education classes. Some innovatory projects, such as the 'parents as Stockport students network' have established closer links with local schools. Public houses have been surveyed as possible outreach sites, and signing courses which teach signing for the deaf have already taken place in one of them. Enrolments to courses which provide access to higher education for adults with few formal qualifications have increased significantly. Students can attend further education courses full time, part time in the evenings and through summer school programmes. The college has established a steering group which is responsible for developing community education.

16 The college is active in the local business community. The Business Development Service unit co-ordinates liaison with employers and provides a single point of contact for employers who wish to use the college's services and facilities. The unit maintains an employer database of 14,500 contacts. It circulates a quarterly business newsletter to 3,000 employers and a monthly employers newsletter to college faculties to help with curriculum planning. Staff visit the 23 'key account' employers, that is, those which regularly have more than 10 students in the college. The college has conducted extensive research into the education and training needs of employers and this has resulted in a successful programme of income generation. Major programmes have been provided for Avro and McVitie. There are five effective industrial liaison committees, three of which are in the faculty of engineering and the built environment. The college has made the best of the limited opportunities offered by the local TEC. Relationships have developed further since the establishment in college of careership and modern apprenticeship programmes. Currently, 193 students are on youth credit schemes from the local TEC. The college also works with two other TECs.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

17 In the last two years the college has gone through a period of significant change. It has reduced the number of teaching posts by 28 per cent and introduced new contracts across the college. The reduction in staff has formed the major part of the college's strategy to cut costs in order to recover a substantial budget deficit and to ensure solvency for the immediate future. The board of corporation has vigorously supported the principal in this strategy, but the attention they have paid to the college's finances has diverted them from fulfilling their other duties satisfactorily. Arrangements for reporting to the corporation on areas other than finance are weak. Governors do not have the information they need to monitor the performance of the college against its strategic goals. They take a

strong interest in health and safety matters, but do not monitor the implementation of significant policies, such as those relating to equality of opportunity and quality assurance. Governors are in the early stages of exploring how they might assess their own performance.

18 The range of governors' expertise is wide and appropriate to the needs of a large college. The board has 17 members. The nine independent or business governors have backgrounds in industry, the professions and education. A further three are co-opted. There is a student representative and two governors elected from the college staff. One governor is nominated by Stockport and High Peak TEC; the principal is also a member. Thirteen of the governors are male and four are female. The clerk to the governors is a senior manager of the college and has long experience in the role. His duties as clerk are clearly defined and separated from his role as a college manager. A number of committees support the work of the board. The employment/finance and general purposes committee and the audit committee meet regularly. Other committees meet as required. There has been a high turnover of governors since incorporation, with 12 new appointments to date. A number of strategies have been adopted to help governors to become familiar with the college and to inform them of developments in further education. New members take part in an induction programme. All governors regularly receive written information on developments in further education and can attend training sessions organised by the college twice a year. An 'adoption' system encourages them to take an interest in the working of the college's faculties and service divisions. Business commitments prevent some from taking up these opportunities.

19 The college's average level of funding was £24.15 per unit in 1995-96. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges was £18.13 per unit. The college has the fourth highest average level of funding of all colleges in the north-west region, and the twenty-fifth highest of all colleges in England. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1997 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

20 The reduction in staffing has been accompanied by a reorganisation of the college's management structure, based on widespread consultation and identified need. One of the main principles underlying the reorganisation was the promotion of an open and participative style of management, with a consequent delegation of responsibility. Staff generally have a clear idea of their new roles and responsibilities and are committed to the new structure, despite workloads at the moment being unevenly spread. The college is addressing this problem. Heads of school and section are generally seen as effective and supportive by the programme leaders and other staff who work for them. The reduction in staffing has led to a loss both of subject and managerial expertise that has affected provision in some areas. Managers at all levels have received training to support them in their new roles, but further direction and training is needed to make faculty, school and programme managers fully

effective and to counter a lack of consistency in the way they approach their jobs. For example, although many school and programme teams meet regularly, record minutes and action points to improve course and school management, some do not. Weak management of one programme has led to the temporary withdrawal of centre approval by the validating body.

21 An extensive structure of strategic committees, steering groups and task groups provides opportunities for staff at various levels to exchange information and participate in curriculum development across the college. Not all staff are able to participate as fully as they would wish because of teaching commitments. Variations in reporting to staff mean that not all staff are well informed on what happens in these groups. The new committee structure has led to a sharper focus on the college's strategic planning activities. A group of three senior managers, together with the principal, co-ordinates the preparation of the college's strategic plan. The group has been able to involve governors in the process earlier than in previous years. Middle managers have also been more involved in planning. Their involvement has improved the strategic plan and given them a greater understanding of the plan at an operational level.

22 The college's computerised management information system is fragmented and inadequate. It has three separate systems for personnel management, financial management, and the recording and analysis of student data. The central student records system supplies programme teams, schools and faculties with a good deal of data. The data are unreliable because staff do not rigorously comply with systems for updating centrally held records with the information they have gathered. Some staff have developed their own record-keeping systems, which only adds to the confusion. Managers receive financial information on a regular basis. Since August 1995, budgets for staffing and consumables have been delegated to faculties and schools, in line with new responsibilities. Not all staff who handle budgets are fully competent to do so. Unit costing is not yet in place but a group of senior and middle managers is actively exploring its introduction for August 1997. The management information that is available is not used to its fullest extent to improve efficiency and effectiveness. In particular, information on students' retention rates, achievements and destinations is not used to bring about continuous improvement. The production and use of a full range of performance indicators have yet to be achieved.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

23 The student services team co-ordinates guidance, advice, additional learning support, tutorial support and counselling services. The students services centre is housed in a well-appointed building opposite the main college site. It includes offices, interview rooms and an open plan careers and information bureau. It is open Monday to Friday 09.00 to 17.00 hours throughout the year. The TEC programmes office is situated alongside

student services. This arrangement further improves the range and availability of advice for students. Students have access to an effective network of support. Surveys of students' views indicate a high level of satisfaction with the services provided.

24 The college helps school-leavers to make a smooth transfer from school to college. Its admission policy and procedures are clear. College staff regularly attend parents evenings and careers events at schools, and pupils are given the opportunity to sample college courses. Schools welcome the impartial advice the college provides.

25 Adults receive comprehensive guidance before they enrol. Guidance is impartial; alternative institutions are recommended, where appropriate. Each year the college arranges an international women's week programme. In 1996, over 300 women took part in 39 free 'taster' sessions which allowed them to sample courses in all the college's vocational areas. A similar venture in adult learners' week attracted 70 students. Guidance leaflets are written in five languages. College guidance advisers visit groups of adults in community centres and in programmes run by the local authority. The local authority and the college work closely together. Regular guidance sessions are provided to clients of the probation service. The college has contracts with the employment service to manage job club, job search and workwise programmes in the town centre. Their success rates are above those for the region. Guidance advisers contribute regularly to these schemes in order to raise participants' awareness of the opportunities the college provides. Many subsequently join college courses. Local companies also invite college advisers to give advice to employees facing redundancy.

26 Prospective students receive clear information about the college's provision in well-designed and attractive prospectuses. Procedures for dealing with enquiries, and the selection and enrolment of students, are well considered and mostly effective. The college recognises problems which have arisen in the past from variations in practice, and is taking action to ensure greater co-operation and consistency at enrolment. There is a detailed enrolment procedures handbook and briefing sessions are held during the summer to update all staff on enrolment procedures. Students attending the college for the first time are met by helpful and well-informed reception staff. All enquiries and applications are recorded. Information on enquiry and enrolment trends is available on the college information system. Additional interviews with guidance staff are available to applicants who are still unsure about their studies. Students speak positively about their experiences. Students are asked to bring records of achievement with them to their college interview but most students report that staff make little use of them during the interview process.

27 The college has a policy for the accreditation of students' prior learning. Progress across the college is uneven. In the better practice, students who apply for a course are given credit for their previous

knowledge and experience, and are not required to repeat parts of courses which cover skills and knowledge they already possess. Those without formal qualifications are helped by advisers to assemble portfolios to demonstrate their prior achievements. These are used in their interviews with admissions tutors and later as evidence for credit towards their awards.

28 Most students receive a successful induction to the college and their course. Results of surveys show that students have a high level of satisfaction with the process. The induction policy sets out procedures to be followed, and tutors have received training and written guidance to ensure that all students receive the information and advice they need. Student services co-ordinate college-wide induction sessions which provide information on matters like support services and college facilities. In the autumn of 1996, 3,535 students took part. Many schools supplemented the induction provided by student services with additional activities such as initial assignments designed to introduce students to their courses. Most induction sessions were well prepared and effective, although some activities did not motivate students. The quality of induction between faculties, and between full-time and part-time programmes, varies significantly. The experience for part-time students is least consistent, and some part-time students do not take part. Students receive a course handbook which contains a summary of the student charter, an outline of rights and responsibilities, information on college services and information about their course. Many of the handbooks are of high quality. The attention given to the college charter during induction varies widely between programme areas. Many students are unaware of their rights in respect of key services.

29 The college has attempted to define the tutorial entitlement for students. Tutors receive a useful handbook and resource file for reference. The quality and availability of tutorials varies between schools, especially for part-time students. Tutorials are used mainly for course administration and to review and record the progress of individual students. Students are not encouraged to maintain their national records of achievement. The statement of entitlement in the learning agreement does not include topics such as health education nor the discussion of social or personal issues. A drugs policy has been recently developed but the college has no health education policy. Student surveys show that most are content with the level of support they receive.

30 The college is committed to providing additional support for those students who need it. The additional support section, within student services, provides support for basic literacy, numeracy and dyslexia. There is a service level agreement between the college and the local authority for the college to provide support for students whose first language is not English. During the inspection 61 students were being supported. This provision has received the Basic Skills Agency quality mark. However, the college has no systematic procedures for identifying and meeting the

additional support needs of students. In 1995-96, 44 full-time and 151 part-time students received support from classroom assistants. Twelve students with hearing impairment and nine visually-impaired students received extra help. At the time of inspection, 200 students were being supported on mainstream courses. The college is reviewing ways of developing its basic skills support. Links with faculties are being improved to co-ordinate the support that schools provide; tutors are being trained. The college has close liaison with the local authority's support services to ensure that specialist equipment is made available for students who need it. A student handbook is available in Braille, enlarged print, and recorded on disc. Staff-development sessions have been held to cover the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*.

31 A well-qualified team of advisers provides effective careers and higher education advice. Students have access to a comprehensive careers library which has information in printed format and on computer. There are confidential interview facilities. The college has a good relationship with the local careers service, Lifetime Careers, from which they receive an agreed level of support. Specialist careers officers are in the college daily. They undertake both individual and group sessions. There is close liaison between tutors and careers officers who are keen to use the specialist knowledge of tutors. The services available are advertised extensively to students. Those who use the service value the support received.

32 Guidance services on careers, student welfare, counselling and study skills are effective. Students can book individual sessions with guidance tutors on a range of topics such as preparing a curriculum vitae and searching for jobs. At the time of the inspection, 700 students had received support. Group work sessions are increasingly used. Stronger links with the youth service are being developed, particularly in relation to the local minority ethnic communities. The counselling service, which is used by students and staff, is helpful, responsive and valued by students and their tutors. The college employs a full-time senior advisory officer together with three part-time counsellors. Confidentiality is respected and safeguarded. Students can normally have an appointment within seven days but, in an emergency, within 24 hours or less. Over 900 sessions were run in 1995-96 for more than 160 students, double that of the previous year. In addition, guidance tutors provide lunchtime sessions such as 'help with examination nerves'. The welfare officer advises students on grants and financial questions and the college has set aside funds to support students in acute financial difficulty. An extensive programme of briefings ensures that personal tutors and students are informed on matters such as the job seekers' allowance. In 1995-96, 1,309 students used the welfare service; 775 were over the age of 19. Over 31 per cent of students made use of the service prior to enrolment. The course has good liaison with external agencies such as social services, local churches and health agencies. The college provides a nursery for 19 places for children aged two to five. It also has an agreement with the

local authority for an additional 20 places in a local nursery. Both full-time and part-time students make use of the nurseries.

33 Tutors are responsible for monitoring students' attendance. Attendance levels were poor in many of the teaching sessions inspected. In the best practice, tutors follow up absences with a telephone call and letters to students. Many lecturers do not deal effectively with student absence or poor punctuality. Employer surveys indicate some concern at the effectiveness of reporting arrangements for their employees' attendance at college courses. Hairdressing tutors deal with poor timekeeping well; they require students who arrive more than 15 minutes late to sign in before being directed to the library to study on their own.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

34 Strengths outweighed weaknesses in 60 per cent of the 281 sessions inspected. Weaknesses outweighed strengths in 9 per cent of sessions. These percentages compare with 63 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1995-96, according to figures published in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. The average attendance in the sessions inspected was 74 per cent. On average just over 10 students were present in the classes inspected. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		3	9	12	4	0	28
GCSE		0	4	4	1	0	9
GNVQ		11	15	10	7	2	45
NVQ		16	30	19	0	0	65
Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and basic education		1	7	11	1	0	20
Other vocational		18	24	24	6	0	72
Higher education		4	7	2	2	0	15
Other*		7	14	5	1	0	27
Total		60	110	87	22	2	281

* includes access to further and higher education.

35 In science lessons, learning materials such as handouts and worksheets were of good quality, and students used them alongside relevant specialist equipment. On the GCE A level and GCSE science courses teachers were beginning to use a broader range of methods to promote learning. Lecturers provided students with detailed feedback on

their work and often took the opportunity during practical sessions to discuss with students their performance in assignments. In some classes, lecturers missed opportunities to illustrate the relevance of the theory being taught with the use of appropriate exemplars. Part-time students benefited from the involvement of industrial supervisors in their project work. In a number of science sessions the pace of work was slow and often dictated by the rate at which the slowest writer could copy from the board or overhead transparency.

36 In the better mathematics and computing classes, lively and interesting presentations by the lecturer encouraged students to contribute to the lesson and ask questions. In one GNVQ information technology class the lecturer presented the group with a range of situations which required the students to identify the most appropriate software tools to apply. The lesson had been well planned and high-quality overhead transparencies were used. This lesson, however, along with several others, was disrupted by students arriving late. In one GCSE mathematics class, students were involved in a range of activities relating to number patterns. The pace of work was slow. Many students were absent from the class and several of those present had little to do for relatively long periods after completing their tasks.

37 The construction craft courses are designed so that students can start and finish their studies at different points in the year. This arrangement caters well for the needs of mature students. In the better lessons, lecturers used their industrial knowledge and experience well and taught in a caring and enthusiastic manner. They set realistic assignments, and encouraged students to review their own achievements before they assessed the work. Resources to support learning, many of which are produced in the college, were of a high standard. Most practical teaching was good and staff made every effort to check students' learning and understanding. In craft courses, opportunities for students to undertake integrated project work were sometimes missed. In theory sessions, lecturers made insufficient use of materials and teaching aids; in some sessions, poor-quality handouts and overhead transparencies were used. In the weaker lessons, teaching lacked variety. The work was not challenging enough to develop students' knowledge and skills. Some schemes of work were unclear and not updated as the course proceeded. Some students' work in construction receives insufficient comment from staff to indicate where errors have been made.

38 In most engineering lessons, schemes of work and lesson plans were shared with students. The various modules of the GNVQ programme were co-ordinated well to provide an integrated and coherent programme. Lecturers integrated key skills effectively with GNVQ and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses. They provided clear, written instructions for written and project work and specified the assessment criteria. In most practical sessions students worked purposefully and with interest. However, in many theory lessons, students were passive participants either reading handouts, listening to an

exposition, or copying material from the board or overhead transparency. Lecturers did little to encourage students to participate in the work or to stimulate discussion. Such lessons provided a dull learning experience for students. The teaching on technician courses in mechanical/manufacturing and electrical/electronic areas often lacked variety. Teachers did not deal effectively with students who arrived late and disrupted the learning of others. In one lesson the lecturer worked through a number of examples on the whiteboard. Although he succeeded in displaying to the class his subject knowledge, he did not ensure that students had learned from the exercise. This contrasted with another lesson in which the group worked through a well-designed learning package, produced by the lecturer, who made sure that individual students were learning.

39 In business studies, most lecturers established good professional relationships with students and encouraged them to contribute ideas and ask for help when required. Case studies and learning materials, some of which contained a distinct local business dimension, were well produced. Lecturers' subject knowledge was up to date. On some professional courses, part-time specialist staff were particularly adept at placing theory into a current business context. Lecturers encouraged part-time students to relate their experience of work to the issues studied. Although group work was a feature of most courses, in many lessons students received little guidance on how to develop teamworking skills. In several lessons lecturers relied on dictating notes or getting students to copy from overhead transparencies. Too often they questioned the whole class to check learning and failed to identify individuals who needed attention. In more than one lesson, students were required to copy notes from an overhead transparency projected onto a wall which only half the class was facing. In a minority of lessons the pace and content of the work was not rigorous enough for the level of the course.

40 Teaching in leisure and tourism was well planned and effectively managed. Courses were carefully structured so that students could obtain both vocational and academic qualifications appropriate to their career aims. In designing courses, lecturers had paid careful attention to the needs of industry and of higher education. Lecturers taught key skills well and assessed them within the assignment programme. They used question and answer sessions effectively to check that each individual student was learning. Students were encouraged to identify the action needed to improve their performance on the course and could refer to a comprehensive handbook to identify the support available to them. The study skills programme was not well adapted to help students succeed on leisure courses. The structure of each lesson in the programme formed a similar pattern and this led to lack of variety in the student day. Information technology was underused and few assignments were wordprocessed.

41 Health and care staff provided good professional role models for students. They had produced detailed handbooks which outlined each

programme and made clear to students the work expected from them. On most courses there was an assessment calendar which set out the dates for students to hand in their work. Placements and college courses were closely linked, and students were encouraged to keep detailed records of their placement experience in log books or handbooks. Staff kept records of students' progress but the quality of records varied between courses. Teaching was of a high standard. Staff were well qualified and used illustrations from their own experience of working in the caring services. They prepared classes well and taught to levels appropriate to the course requirements. Students received a clear indication of the aims of lessons and what they were expected to achieve. Teaching aids were carefully selected to provide insights into the topic being considered. In the GNVQ course, some assessment and grading opportunities were missed. Lecturers' comments on students' written work sometimes did not make clear the basis of the grade awarded.

42 The standard of teaching in hair and beauty was particularly high. Staff showed sound technical knowledge, had relevant experience of the industry, and were skilled at communicating it to students. The aims and objectives of lessons were shared with students at the beginning of sessions and reviewed and summarised at the end. All course units had accompanying workbooks, produced by college staff, which served to reinforce the students' learning. A variety of teaching aids was used. Students were encouraged to make links between theory and practice which were subsequently used to good effect in their work experience placements. The organisation of work experience was thorough and accompanied by documentation of a high standard. There was some scope for the further use of information technology. In one evening class, students were inappropriately dressed to work with clients.

43 In art and design, the management of courses was well supported by extensive course documentation. Schemes of work, assessment schedules, and student handbooks were readily available. Students were able to identify the links between one area of the course and another and could identify the skills they were developing. In GNVQ art and design, unit handbooks made clear the criteria for assessment. In GNVQ advanced media studies, an effective system for tracking achievement in assignments had been introduced. Individuals were not always well informed about their progress or about the criteria used to make assessments. International links are used to enhance the curriculum. Students on the BTEC national diploma in graphics had links with a Dutch college. They had produced a bilingual calendar one year and a diary the next. These assignments were skilfully designed and allowed students to develop creativity and language competence as well as technical and information technology skills.

44 In humanities, the quality of teaching and learning was uneven. In many social science and teacher education classes a good combination of whole class and group work took place. The quality of teaching on the

City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 7307 was particularly high. Lecturers often displayed an enthusiasm for their subject which encouraged students to participate in discussion. In the better lessons, lecturers taught at a brisk pace which challenged the students while, at the same time, checking through question and answer sessions, that students were learning. In the poorer lessons, there was a preponderance of copying from overhead transparencies. One class contained students who were particularly inattentive. The lecturer provided information in a haphazard way which left students confused about the connections between the various ideas and illustrations used. In English, most students took part in well-informed classroom discussion and debate. Modern foreign language teachers did not use teaching resources sufficiently to ensure that they were catering adequately for the needs of students with different abilities.

45 In adult basic education, and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, most sessions were well planned. Relationships between students and staff were supportive and effective. Tutors were committed to their work and enthusiastic in encouraging students to learn. In basic education, tutors set challenging work and devised appropriate assessments. Classroom management within the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was good, especially in dealing with students with behavioural problems. Teaching improved the confidence of students for whom personal development was a high priority. However, in many sessions, activities did not cater effectively for the wide range of student abilities in the groups. Insufficient use was made of information technology to assist learning. Some of the learning material used was narrow in focus and did not take account of the prior experience of students. Opportunities were sometimes missed for students to demonstrate what they had learned. There were no performance criteria by which individual achievement could be judged.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

46 Most students work diligently and show commitment to their courses. Adults, who form the majority of the students at the college, are usually motivated and make good progress in their studies. High rates of absenteeism and low retention on a wide range of courses limit students' achievements. On a minority of courses, for example the full-time GNVQ intermediate course in engineering, a lack of motivation by some students adversely affects their achievement.

47 Many courses are organised to provide flexibility for students to achieve at their own pace and in accordance with their differing abilities and needs. Some programmes allow students to obtain partial awards or to extend their period of study. College systems to monitor students' progress and to record data that readily portrays the achievement of students enrolled on flexible programmes are at an early stage of development.

48 Students on most academic, vocational and professional courses demonstrate knowledge and understanding appropriate to their level of study. The standards they attain in coursework are mainly consistent with the demands made by external awarding bodies. Students in art and design work through well-designed assignments which challenge and motivate. Part-time students on management and professional courses produce portfolios of high quality which demonstrate good application of problem-solving skills in relevant vocational contexts. In a minority of courses, assessment of students' achievements is unreliable because lecturers are reluctant to award lower than a pass grade. Some students' written work shows weaknesses of accuracy and expression which remain uncorrected. On GNVQ health care the oral work of students is of a considerably higher standard than written work.

49 Most students have adequate opportunities to develop key skills within their courses but achievement in information technology is not consistently evident on all programmes. In art and design and business studies, students' skills in information technology show clear development, whereas in leisure and in humanities, students have few opportunities to demonstrate or develop these skills. Most students are able to work collaboratively and purposefully in groups and to develop interpersonal skills. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities show an increased confidence in their learning and personal development, but they are given insufficient encouragement to develop the ability to study and learn on their own.

50 Much practical work is of a good standard and carried out safely. In hairdressing, students develop a good standard of practical skills and professional practices. In motor vehicle work appropriate attention is paid to health and safety.

51 According to data published in the DfEE's performance tables for 1996, 64 per cent of the 397 full-time 16 to 18 year old students in their final year of study for advanced GNVQ, BTEC national or C&G diplomas achieved their final qualifications. This is a similar percentage to that achieved in the previous year. The DfEE performance tables for 1996 also show that, in respect of the intermediate level courses at GNVQ, BTEC first or C&G, 40 per cent of the 182 full-time 16 to 18 year old students completing these courses were successful. On both measures, the figures place the college in the bottom third in the further education sector.

52 The main features of achievement in respect of full-time vocational courses at advanced level were:

- an overall pass rate of 65 per cent for GNVQ programmes for those students who completed their programmes within the standard timescale, though the pass rate falls to 42 per cent when measured against those initially enrolled, illustrating low rates of student retention over the two-year programmes

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- consistently high achievement across the GNVQ and BTEC national diploma programmes in art and design for those who completed their courses, with a good proportion gaining merit and distinction passes
 - results above national averages for students who completed GNVQ information technology
 - good results obtained on BTEC national diploma programmes in science (health studies), nursery nursing, beauty therapy and computer studies; weaker results were obtained on the national diploma in electronics which has now been discontinued
 - results at or near national averages on GNVQ built environment and GNVQ social care programmes
 - results below national averages in GNVQ leisure and tourism and some decline in achievement on GNVQ business studies
 - pass rates on two-year advanced full-time courses in engineering are on average 33 per cent below the national figures published in the FEFC curriculum area survey, *Engineering*.

53 At intermediate level, results are mixed for those students completing their GNVQs within the standard timescale. The overall percentage of students who achieved their full awards in 1996 was 46 per cent which was below the national average of 52 per cent. Above average results were obtained on GNVQ intermediate level in information technology and art and design; weaker results were obtained on leisure and tourism, health and social care, and engineering and the built environment. Excellent results were achieved by the NVQ level 2 hairdressing students who for the past two years have achieved 100 per cent pass rates.

54 There is a wide range of students achievements across the differing vocational provision offered to part-time and evening students:

- pass rates on the BTEC higher national certificate programmes were generally good in areas such as mechanical/manufacturing engineering, motor vehicles and in applied biology but pass rates were lower in civil engineering building services and business studies
- at BTEC national level, high pass rates were attained by students on computing, science and nursery nursing courses but the proportion of students successfully completing their courses on national certificates in business, electronics, motor vehicles and mechanical/manufacturing was below the national average
- on the Institute of Personnel and Development certificate in personnel practice and the Institute of Management and the Chartered Institute of Marketing courses students' achievements compared favourably with national averages; in 1996, the college was awarded the Institute of Management award for the best student performance achieved at NVQ level 4 and was runner up in the award for NVQ level 3

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- on the Association of Accounting Technicians programmes, 50 per cent of those on the final level have progressed through from the foundation programme at the college; some individual results on Association of Accounting Technicians central assessments are above national averages but relatively few achieved the full awards
 - achievements on the C&G 7307 course were good; 88 per cent of the 164 students who started successfully completed the course.

55 Of the 487 candidates entered for GCE A level in 1995-96, 267 succeeded in gaining passes at grades A to E. This percentage pass of 55 per cent was below the college average in 1994-95 of 60 per cent. The colleges' overall success rate at GCE A level is substantially below the average pass rate in further education sector colleges for students of all ages in 1995 of 69 per cent. In 1995-96, the 106 full-time students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE AS/A level examinations scored, on average, 2.9 points per entry showing a small gain on the previous year's figure of 2.5. This places the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure based on the data in the 1996 performance tables published by the DfEE.

56 For those subjects with 10 or more entries the main features of the results in GCE A level for those students who completed their courses were:

- above national average results in English, government and politics, art and design, and law
- results which were near national averages in biology, English language, and communication studies
- results below national averages in history, psychology, sociology, chemistry, geography, mathematics (methods and applied), computing and business studies.

57 In 1995-96, of the 699 GCSE entries, 333 students (47.6 per cent) obtained passes at grades A* to C. This represents an improvement on the previous year's average of 44 per cent. The overall further education sector average for 1996 was 49.9 per cent (all ages). The largest single group of entries was in mathematics where 35 per cent of students achieved grades A* to C, compared with 24 per cent in the previous year. In English, 68 per cent achieved A* to C compared with 42 per cent in the previous year. In other subjects with 10 or more entries, results were well above national averages in sociology, French and chemistry (intermediate), close to national averages in physics, European studies and history, but below national averages in psychology, accounting and human physiology.

58 College data on students' destinations show that of the 211 full-time students aged 16 to 18 who completed their studies in 1995-96, 28 per cent progressed to higher education, 25 per cent continued in further education, 15 per cent gained employment, 5 per cent went to other destinations and 27 per cent were unknown. Fifty-five per cent of the students on GNVQ and BTEC national diploma courses went on to higher

education. There are high rates of progression to higher education from the art and design courses and from the health care national diploma. Of the 2,666 full-time students aged 19 and over, records show that 22 per cent progressed to higher education, 13 per cent to further education, 33 per cent secured employment, 6 per cent went to other destinations, and 26 per cent were not known. On the full-time access to higher education course, 90 per cent of the 68 students successfully completed their course and 72 per cent proceeded to relevant higher education courses. A high proportion of the successful students on the higher national certificate course in chemistry returned to the college to undertake part-time degrees. In recent years, about 75 per cent of the biology higher national certificate students have progressed to a part-time degree at a local university.

59 The narrow range of opportunities at foundation level restricts the progression routes available to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Only 21 per cent of students who attended programmes catering for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities gained any nationally-recognised accreditation for their work. The range of certificates available is limited to C&G wordpower and numberpower and a miscellaneous selection of certificates in first aid and information technology at a very basic level.

60 Student retention rates are a cause for concern on many courses. On the two-year GNVQ advanced courses, the average retention rate over the two years is 65 per cent but rates on individual courses vary from 76 per cent in art and design to 38 per cent in science. On two-year GCE A level programmes, overall retention averages only 40 per cent. Retention rates on the wide range of part-time courses vary. On BTEC higher national certificate programmes, retention on individual courses ranges from 100 per cent to 37 per cent, with an overall average of 71 per cent; on national certificate courses the proportion of students who still attend at the end of two-year courses averages 64 per cent but with some courses as low as 30 per cent. Retention on two-year advanced engineering courses was poor, at least 10 per cent, and up to 35 per cent below national figures published in the FEFC national survey. The college has identified poor student retention as an issue of concern and the strategic curriculum group intends to scrutinise instances where drop out from courses exceeds 20 per cent.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

61 The college has developed its quality assurance system over a number of years. It has begun to extend it to include college service areas as well as academic programmes. A well-defined calendar identifies deadlines when tasks are to be completed. A detailed guidance handbook sets out for managers and teams the processes to follow and the documentation to complete. Surveys of students' opinions are undertaken three times during the year to measure students' satisfaction on a sample, approximately

25 per cent, of courses. The outcomes of surveys of students' views are passed on to managers at all levels to inform their action plans. Such surveys provide a generalised picture of the levels of satisfaction of students with college services and programmes. Some programme teams administer their own questionnaires. In several schools, students are included on programme teams and they welcome the opportunity to make a contribution to course review. Views of employers are sought through advisory committees and questionnaires.

62 Programme teams are required to produce action plans twice a year, once in the autumn and once in the spring terms, as well as an annual programme review at the end of the summer term. Faculties and schools produce action plans which are used to inform the college management team's own plans. They are produced to a common format which allows teams to identify targets for improvement and to review progress made. The quality of the action plans and programme reviews varies considerably. Few identify action needed to improve the quality of teaching and learning, student retention or achievement rates. In only a minority of reviews is there evidence that action identified in previous reviews is followed through or progress recorded. Members of the senior management team produce reviews of their action plans but too little feedback is given to programme teams on the management response to issues identified at course level. At senior management and governing body level, a more comprehensive compilation of reports on progress on quality issues, including student achievements, is needed.

63 The first objective in the college's strategic plan commits the college to demonstrate continuous improvement through the planned implementation of the quality assurance policy. Each faculty and service has prioritised targets for the next two years to implement this strategic objective. The quality assurance policy required the college to develop a range of standards against which progress towards improving quality might be measured. Progress has been slow in identifying these standards; the need for improvements in quality is more often identified in response to issues raised in the feedback from questionnaires to students. There are numerous examples of where the college has introduced quality improvements in response to issues raised by students. Library facilities have been extended, refectory services have been improved and resources to improve induction have been increased. Examples of improvements to the quality of teaching and learning are more difficult to identify. College managers regard the recent reduction in the college's full-time staff establishment and the consequent effect on staff morale as inhibiting progress on developing a concern for quality assurance in the college.

64 Programme teams, and more recently service areas, are required to compile portfolios relating to quality assurance. The college handbook on quality assurance contains guidance to teams on the range of documentation and records to be included. The majority of portfolios contain useful and relevant information which assists the management of

the programme area. The college has begun a process of auditing the portfolios to identify good practice in content and presentation.

65 Appraisal for teaching staff was introduced in the academic year 1992-93, based on the national agreement between unions and college management. The procedure was designed to identify staff-development needs and did not address performance issues. At the time of the inspection, the appraisal process had not been completed. Classroom observation, an optional component of the appraisal process, has only rarely been undertaken. Part-time staff have not been included in the process and the opportunity for support staff to volunteer for appraisal has had only limited take up. The appraisal steering group has not met since the summer of 1995. A review of the appraisal training in February 1995 identified the time lag between training for appraisal and appraisal itself as a source of frustration to staff. Even in schools where appraisal has been undertaken, surprisingly few returns have been made to the human resource development unit to identify staff-development needs. The college has postponed its target date for the achievement of the Investor in People award to the summer of 1997.

66 The staff-development budget is well managed. The allocation of £100,000 in 1996-97 represents just under 1 per cent of the college's payroll budget. Approximately half of the budget is delegated to faculties and services to meet their priorities. In 1994 the human resource development unit introduced a system to record and evaluate staff-development activities. The data are being used to build up a comprehensive record of staff development. Opportunities for training and development are well publicised throughout the college by the human resource development unit. The strategic planning and quality assurance processes identify staff-development requirements arising from new courses or plans for improvement. Staff volunteer to take up staff-development opportunities. In the academic year 1995-96, 67 per cent of staff attended at least one staff-development event, but there is no effective means of identifying the needs of individuals or of monitoring whether these needs are being met. Too few staff make use of opportunities to update their industrial and commercial experience.

67 Induction for new staff is well planned and documented. New staff appreciated the opportunity to meet with other new teaching and support staff and the introduction they were given to the support arrangements available in the college to assist them in their early days in the college. Teaching and support staff have clearly identified mentors to whom they can turn for guidance and support. Staff were given the opportunity to evaluate their experience of the induction process and to make suggestions for improvement.

68 Students are given a summary of the college charter during their induction. The charter is well publicised throughout the college. A management matrix identifies the commitments in the charter, the

managers responsible and the documentation related to the elements of the charter. The college has not yet produced a report on progress towards meeting charter commitments nor has it established clear links between the charter and other quality monitoring activities. A leaflet outlining the complaints procedure is widely publicised to students. A directory identifies who is responsible for dealing with complaints but there is no system to monitor adequately the complaints received or acted upon.

69 The college produced a self-assessment report using the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Reports using the same format were produced by programme areas and college services. Judgements were not made about overall performance in a programme area nor in relation to the headings of the Circular. Six of the 10 grades awarded by the inspectorate for programme areas were below college expectations. The college has benefited from the process of self-assessment and plans to link the process more closely with other elements of its quality assurance strategy.

RESOURCES

Staffing

70 The college is in the process of developing comprehensive arrangements for staff management. A review is under way to match teaching and support posts to present and future needs. Staff have access to an occupational health advisory service and an employee assistance programme to provide them with impartial counselling and advice at a time of great change. An audit of staff skills has begun but has not yet been completed. There are more women than men amongst clerical and administrative grades, but there is a more equal gender balance amongst teaching staff. The age profile of both teaching and support staff shows a clustering round the 40 to 49 age range.

71 Staff establish sound professional relationships with students. The recent reductions in posts has led to some imbalance in staffing across programme areas. In basic education, the high proportion of full-time staff limits flexibility. In automobile engineering and the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the reliance on part-time and fractional appointments causes difficulties. In mathematics, changes in part-time staff have disrupted students' learning. Staff in some programme areas are responding well to the challenges provided by the restructuring of the staffing establishment. Arrangements for managing part-time staff are mixed. In construction, part-time staff do not participate in faculty activities and team meetings and seldom attend staff-development events.

72 Staff are well qualified in their subject areas. Sixty-seven per cent of staff are graduates and 11 per cent have higher national diplomas. Sixty-six per cent of staff are teacher trained. In some areas, especially those providing higher education such as science, a number of staff possess

higher degrees. Seventy-five per cent of staff in construction are teacher trained, and 100 per cent of staff in hairdressing and auto-engineering hold teaching qualifications, have commercial experience and have achieved assessor awards. Over half the staff who had achieved training and development lead body awards have left the college in the last two years. Of those now in post, 34 per cent possess assessor awards. Achievement of the internal verifier award and the accreditation of prior learning award is low against the targets which have been set to secure an adequate base of internal verifiers.

Equipment/learning resources

73 General teaching areas and classrooms are well equipped. Most rooms have blackout facilities, whiteboards and overhead projection facilities. Most furniture is in good condition and, in the majority of cases, is adaptable enough to meet different teaching requirements. In all curriculum areas, teaching materials such as handouts and overhead transparencies are of a high standard. A variety of software applications is used, but many staff require further training and development to make full use of the resources available. Specialist equipment across the college is generally of a high standard, and is well maintained and managed. In construction, although some of the tools are old, the manner in which they are stored and kept instills a sense of professionalism in students. In engineering, the equipment is mostly of high quality, and appropriate for higher education work. There are sufficient tools and basic equipment, but there is some ageing workshop machinery. The college has established a central capital bidding system for equipment purchases which can be augmented from faculty revenue. Some faculties have a financial plan for the systematic replacement and upgrading of equipment.

74 The college has a total of 455 computer workstations for students' use, of which 426 are of a modern specification. The overall ratio of students to workstations is 12:1. The majority of computers are located either in the information technology centre or in specialist working areas where they make for better integration of theory with practical work. Students' use of computers in the information technology centre is monitored and data fed back to course and programme level. Students at the Davenport Centre have only limited access to computers. Most staff rooms are equipped with computers and staff increasingly use the internal electronic mail system.

75 The library and learning resource centre has recently been extended and provides a calm and productive environment for study. It contains a wide range of print-based, audio and visual information resources in addition to the computer network. It houses good facilities for students with disabilities, such as adjustable tables, a Braille embosser and magnified reading screen. The library is well equipped with a comprehensive range of current journals and reference materials. There is an adequate stock of specialist and subject books to support courses and programmes across the college. A considerable investment in bookstock

has been made to support the introduction of GNVQ courses. The stock of specialist books at the Davenport Centre is small, but the library operates a well-used loan system. The flexible learning centre provides an extensive range of materials and learning packages, much of them produced by college staff.

Accommodation

76 The college's main campus is located on a town centre site which has restricted space for development. Other sites include a leased property adjacent to the main site which is used for administrative purposes, and the Davenport Centre, an old school building some 1.5 miles away, which is in poor structural condition. The main site also includes a student union building which provides a social and cultural centre for students. It contains a snack bar, licensed bar, and other social facilities. The college is developing an accommodation strategy and has brought together finance, estates, health and safety and personnel specialists together in an accommodation strategy group. It is consulting staff across the college on options available, including the relocation of the work at Davenport to the main college site.

77 The college seeks to match the learning environment to curriculum requirements. As a result, many students work in rooms which are well matched to their area of study. The quality of accommodation across the sites varies considerably. The large and disparate Wellington Road site has a large number of external doors. These provide easy access for students but present a security problem for the building and its contents. A number of measures have been put in place to tackle vandalism and increase security, including more security officers, stringent identity systems and concealed closed-circuit television cameras. The general facilities of the college such as its reception area, shop, travel shop, refectories, medical centre and learning resources areas are clean, attractive and welcoming. Some of the improvements have been made in response to comments by students. Some corridors are narrow and crowded at busy times. Some areas are shabby and worn. There are uncomfortable variations in heating throughout the building. There is a shortage of car parking spaces. Some signposting, especially in the interior of the building, is poor. The dining areas are crowded and students tend to linger there as there is no nearby provision for common rooms or social spaces.

78 Specialist accommodation is generally good. Most rooms are clean, well lit, and appropriately equipped. Some are carpeted and well decorated, providing a pleasant working environment. Rooms are generally well matched to group size. Access on the main site for students with restricted mobility is adequate. Ramps and lifts have been installed and there are signs and lift controls in Braille in the main site. At the Davenport Centre there is no wheelchair access to the upper storey where the library is located.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

79 The college has been through a period of significant change. Its main strengths are:

- the new management structure with improved opportunities for staff to participate in decisions
- a broad range of courses from basic education to degree level
- extensive opportunities for students to attend courses and study at times of their own choosing
- productive links with the business community
- enthusiastic middle managers who approach their roles with vigour
- staff who are well qualified in their subject areas
- good teaching in some curriculum areas
- well-organised admission and induction arrangements
- high-quality specialist equipment which is well maintained and managed.

80 If it is to build on these strengths, the college should:

- ensure that the corporation receives sufficient information to monitor the achievements of students
- provide managers with further training and direction to help them understand and perform their roles
- improve the quality of students' achievements
- give the quality of teaching and learning the focus it requires in the quality assurance system
- introduce an effective system for monitoring the performance of staff and identify those who need further support
- introduce a coherent programme of study at foundation level
- improve the quality and reliability of the computerised management information system
- take action to improve student retention and attendance rates
- ensure that staff update their industrial and commercial experience.

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 September 1996)

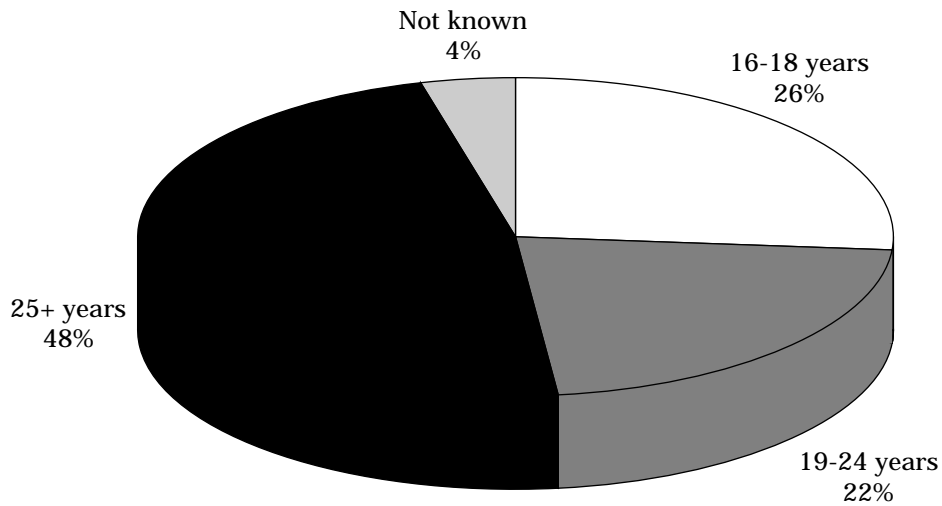
 - 5 Estimated income (for 12 months to July 1997)

 - 6 Estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1997)

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

Figure 1

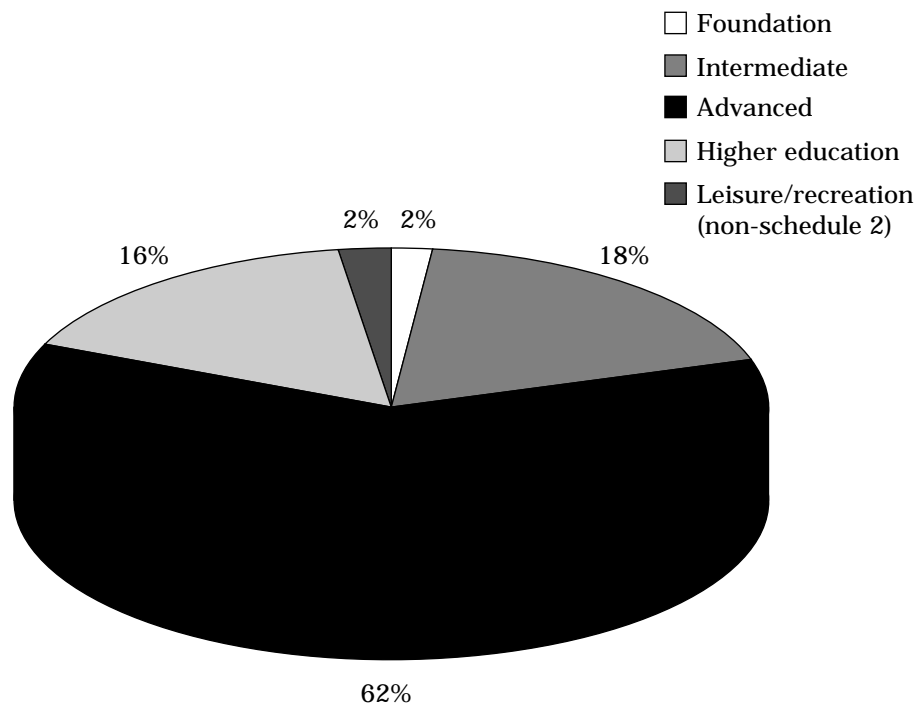
Stockport College of Further and Higher Education: percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 19,008

Figure 2

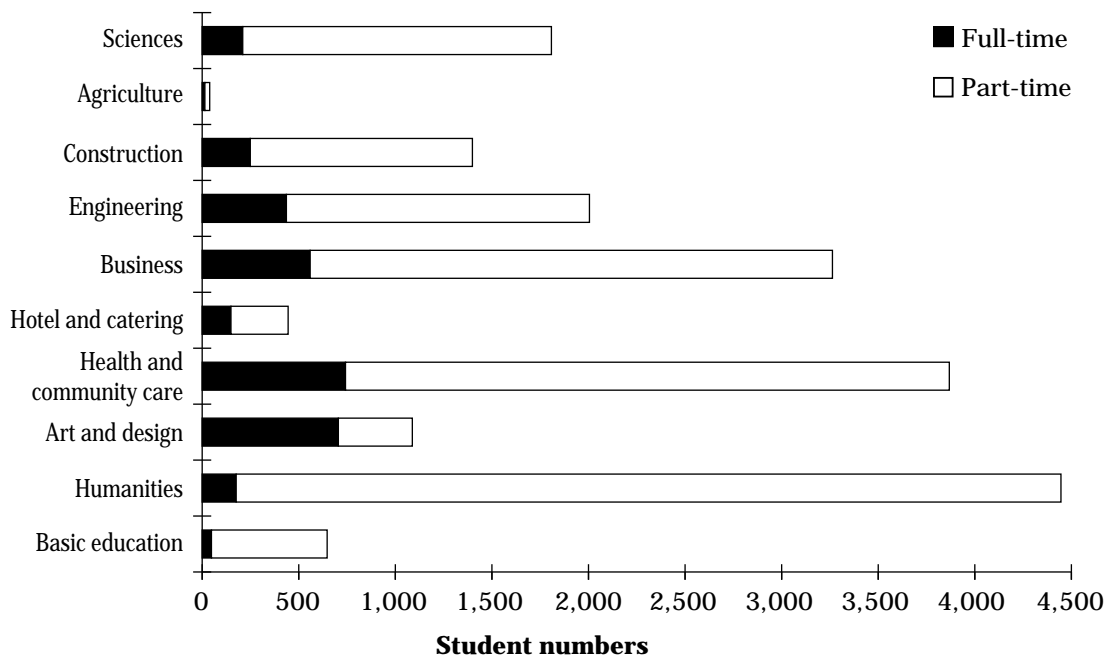
Stockport College of Further and Higher Education: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 19,008

Figure 3

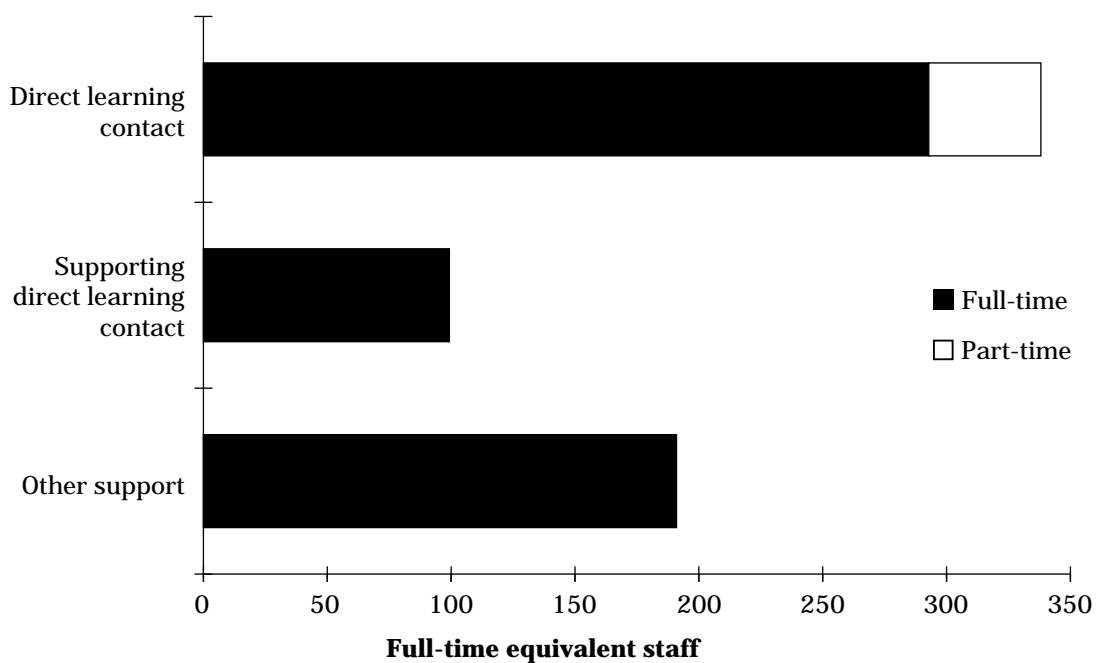
Stockport College of Further and Higher Education: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 19,008

Figure 4

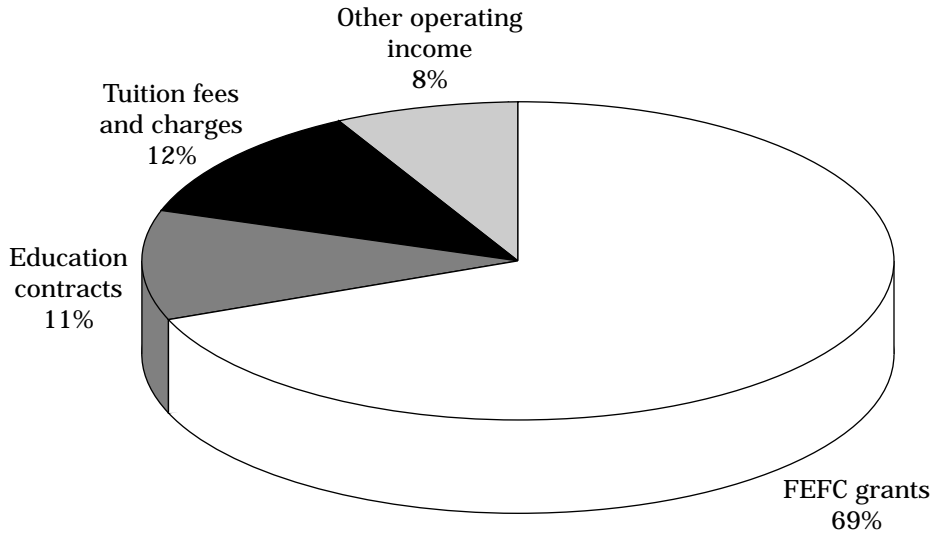
Stockport College of Further and Higher Education: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at September 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 628

Figure 5

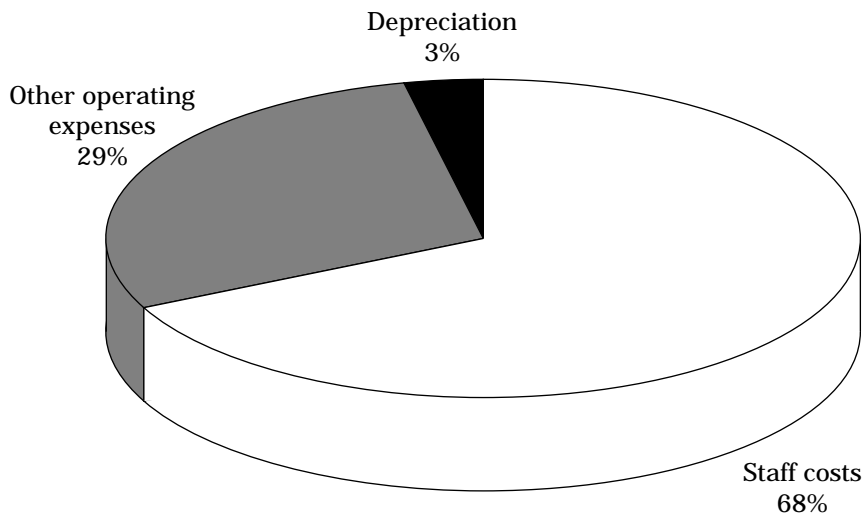
**Stockport College of Further and Higher Education: estimated income
(for 12 months to July 1997)**



Estimated income: £19,843,000

Figure 6

**Stockport College of Further and Higher Education: estimated expenditure
(for 12 months to July 1997)**



Estimated expenditure: £19,304,000

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