

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

College Responsiveness

National Survey Report

February 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

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February 1996**

SUMMARY

This report considers the ways in which colleges in the further education sector in England respond to meeting the education and training needs of students, employers and the community. The assessment of college responsiveness and the range of provision is a key aspect of inspections. This report is in part based on an analysis of the inspection of those colleges on which reports had been published. Also detailed surveys were carried out between November 1994 and May 1995 of 15 training and enterprise councils, which provide an employer's view of college responsiveness, and of a further 27 colleges.

Published inspection reports show that colleges are successful in meeting their own aims and objectives for responsiveness: out of the 208 colleges so far inspected, 83 per cent were judged to have strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. Since colleges have become self-governing they have devised broad mission statements which aim to respond to the education and training needs of individuals, businesses and the wider community. Colleges provide a wide range of vocational and general education courses which successfully meet the needs of school leavers, adults and employers and contribute to the achievement of the national targets for education and training. They have responded to student demand for further education and this has resulted in increased numbers of students taking full-time courses. Colleges are increasing participation in further education by delivering courses in community centres and other locations separate and sometimes remote from their main sites. They have also been active in widening access to further education by introducing more flexible methods of delivering the curriculum.

However, colleges give a lower priority to meeting the needs of employers and the requirements of the local and national economies than to meeting the preferences of individual students. Short courses designed to meet the specific needs of employers are only a small element of the total provision in many institutions, especially sixth form colleges. Colleges have not revised arrangements for training the employed in response to the decline in part-time day-release enrolments. The extent to which open learning is taken up is limited in spite of the rapid expansion of resources and facilities. Few colleges conduct surveys of employers' views of their courses and only 10 per cent of colleges have developed an explicit employers' charter.

This report highlights and gives examples of good practice from some of the colleges which have responded well to the needs of industry, commerce and their students. However, few colleges have organised their courses into modules which can be delivered separately and flexibly; marketing policies and plans are often underdeveloped; the evaluation of marketing activities is rudimentary; labour market information, whilst illustrating general economic trends, is not detailed enough to support specific course planning; and most colleges do not publish comprehensive information on students' destinations to help those who follow them.

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INTRODUCTION

1 This national survey report is concerned with an evaluation of the responsiveness of colleges in the further education sector. The aims of the survey have been to determine how effectively colleges:

- respond to government policies and initiatives for further education
- identify the education and training needs of students and employers
- match courses and other provision to the needs of the local and wider community
- deliver a curriculum that meets the needs of students and employers
- communicate the education and training opportunities that are available
- respond to competition.

2 Published inspection reports show a good grading profile for responsiveness and range of provision. From 208 college reports published in the teaching years 1993-94 and 1994-95, 63 colleges were graded at grade 1, 109 at grade 2, 35 at grade 3 and one at grade 4. The grade descriptors used by the inspectorate are shown in annex A. The guidelines from the inspection framework, *Assessing Achievement*, which inspectors refer to when grading responsiveness and range of provision, are shown in annex B.

3 Each college inspection includes an evaluation of the institution's range of provision and responsiveness to its own community. This survey report considers the sector's responsiveness throughout England and, more specifically, its impact on education and training for employees in a changing labour market. Strategic factors that determine college responsiveness are considered, as are ways of measuring responsiveness and the assessment of employers' needs and the needs of the community. Some of the issues raised since the publication of *Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win* and *Competitiveness: Forging Ahead*, are addressed. Operational aspects of responsiveness are evaluated including competition and marketing, the management of curriculum change, and training that is designed to meet employers' needs. The final section of the report considers how factors that influence curriculum change affect the organisation and delivery of college programmes.

4 This report is based on an analysis of published inspection reports and on a survey of policy and practice of 27 colleges and 15 training and enterprise councils (TECs), carried out between November 1994 and May 1995. The TECs provided the employers' perspective on college responsiveness. Thirteen of the colleges were general further education colleges, six were sixth form colleges, four were tertiary colleges and the

remaining four, colleges of agriculture. In each college two curriculum areas were examined to assess responsiveness at course level. Meetings were held with college principals and senior managers, marketing and enterprise managers, course team leaders and TEC personnel, including chief executives and education managers. Documentary evidence came from college strategic and marketing plans, destinations data, college company business plans and TEC annual reports. Use has also been made of statistics on college enrolments and employment trends.

5 During its preparation, the report was discussed with the Confederation of British Industry, the Council for Industry and Higher Education, the former Departments for Education and for Employment, the Institute for Employment Studies and the TEC National Council. These bodies were also consulted on the final draft of the report.

BACKGROUND

6 General further education colleges and tertiary colleges offer a wide range of vocational and general education courses to meet the needs of school leavers, adults and employees. Most have courses extending from foundation level to higher education, although the majority of provision is at intermediate and advanced level. They also contract with their local TECs to provide youth and adult training and to act as managing agents placing trainees on programmes run by themselves and sometimes by other providers. Sixth form colleges have started to offer some vocational courses and, together with tertiary colleges, often have a high reputation for the range and quality of their general education courses leading to General Certificate of Education advanced levels (GCE A levels).

7 In April 1993 colleges in the further education sector moved from local education authority (LEA) control to become independent corporations. Their main source of income is the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Funding for further education courses is calculated on the basis of three phases of a student's involvement with the college: pre-enrolment guidance; support during the course; and the achievement of qualifications. The funding methodology is designed to encourage colleges to increase participation in post-compulsory education and to widen access to people who have not previously been involved in further education. The methodology also rewards colleges which recognise a demand for new courses; expand existing programmes in accordance with the preferences of their students; and help more students to complete their courses and achieve the qualifications they are working towards.

8 In 1994, *Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win* sought closer co-operation between the FEFC, colleges and TECs. Colleges were encouraged to work more closely with TECs on the preparation of their strategic plans and to take local labour market needs into consideration.

The improvement of labour market information, both nationally and locally, was seen as central to stimulating greater responsiveness on the part of colleges. A competitiveness fund of approximately £20 million a year was created to help colleges in England establish, develop or maintain further education provision in response to the priorities of local labour markets. This report examines the relationship between colleges and TECs at a local level, and the value of labour market information in supporting curriculum planning.

9 In 1995, new national targets for education and training were endorsed by the government and promulgated in *Competitiveness: Forging Ahead* (annex C). Significantly, achievement in core skills now features as a target, in recognition of the importance that basic transferable skills play in economic development. Both publications stress the importance of raising the skills of the population and matching the output of qualified students to the needs of the labour market. The emphasis on the availability of unbiased and informative careers guidance recognises that students need to make well-informed decisions about routes from school to college and into higher education and employment.

10 A major survey of the national labour market is being undertaken by the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick. Its *Review of the Economy and Employment 1994* studied future trends that might affect the structure of employment and its projections indicate increases in service sector employment and decreases in employment in the primary and manufacturing sectors. Manufacturing industry is expected to remain an important contributor to economic growth, but rapid productivity gains will mean that employment in this sector will probably fall. Employment in construction, however, is expected to increase as recovery from the recession continues. A summary of the main projected occupational changes anticipated between 1993 and 2001 is shown in annex D.

COLLEGES' STRATEGIC PLANNING

11 Although there is some variation in the way colleges define responsiveness, there is a general consensus amongst them that a responsive institution is one which assesses and attempts to meet the needs of students, employers and the community. For general further education colleges, the community is defined widely to include both employed and unemployed people, young people and adults and, for some colleges, includes overseas students. Sixth form colleges define responsiveness more narrowly. They usually concentrate on high-quality academic and general education for 16 to 19 year-old students. The relatively high inspection grades awarded to sixth form colleges for responsiveness in published inspection reports reflect judgements made about the achievement of strategic aims in the context of this more restricted mission.

12 Colleges' mission statements provide the context for strategic planning. They take account of government and FEFC targets that are designed to increase participation in further education. Mission statements often refer to supporting the needs of the individual, businesses and the wider community in a caring environment. Some place an emphasis on providing a curriculum which is flexible, accessible and relevant to a variety of people. A minority of colleges commit themselves to being *the most* responsive provider of good-quality education and training in a particular area.

13 In their strategic plans, colleges recognise the need, arising from their individual targets, to extend the range of provision, improve access, and meet the education and training needs of school leavers, employed and unemployed adults, and the training requirements of employers. Colleges also identify the need to expand their vocational provision and to cater for adults who wish to return to education after a period in work or following changes in family circumstances. A major challenge facing colleges has been to maintain growth in enrolments within a competitive sector.

14 As part of their strategic planning, each college has to assess the demand for education and training by analysing the labour market. Most colleges refer to data on the regional labour market supplied by the TEC, although many supplement this with information on more local patterns of employment provided by local authority economic development units. They find the information from the TECs and development units useful in showing general trends although it is rarely detailed enough to use for planning specific courses. One problem faced by colleges which recruit students from a number of TEC regions is that occasionally they receive conflicting messages on the state of the labour market.

15 Many general further education and specialist colleges have forged close links with their TECs and this is reflected in their strategic plans. Sixth form colleges generally have a less close relationship. Their planning is more influenced by liaison with partner schools and the careers service.

16 Matching enrolments to projected patterns of future employment is complex. In the best cases, such analysis is regularly discussed and reviewed both in the college and with external bodies. In some colleges, a strategic planning group of governors is created to provide a corporate steer, whereas in other colleges, governors have made only a small contribution to outline planning. In one institution, the senior management team analysed the prospectuses of its competitors before discussing the development of its own provision. However, the analysis of education and training needs undertaken by some colleges is relatively limited. In certain cases, the relationship between the analysis and the operational objectives is weak. Few colleges analyse the extent to which enquiries from potential clients cannot be met from existing

programmes, and little use is made of job vacancy information. Such data could be used to help to shape the future curriculum. Example A illustrates how one college has successfully consulted on curriculum development.

Example A: An industrial and commercial advisory committee has been set up which aims to make sure that the college is taking all reasonable and practicable steps to identify and meet the training and educational needs of industry, commerce and the professions, locally, regionally and nationally. It is chaired by a business governor and has a membership drawn from senior industrialists in key local companies. The main functions of the committee are to advise and monitor. Two heads of school from the college provide the committee with information about the curriculum. The agenda for one meeting included arrangements with the TEC, open learning for industry, and a market sector survey.

17 Despite the attention paid to the needs of industry in strategic planning, colleges respond primarily to student demand for courses rather than servicing the specific needs of the local economy. If there is a conflict between student demand and industry's needs, colleges tend to resolve the issue in favour of meeting student demand. For example, it is unusual for colleges to restrict recruitment to courses because of a shortage of jobs in their area. The skills and knowledge acquired on many education and training programmes are regarded as transferable to a wide range of occupations. This is particularly true of GCE A level courses where employers often do not specify a particular subject as a condition of recruitment. Many GCE A level and advanced General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) students, particularly in sixth form colleges, move away from a locality to take up places in higher education. Whilst there are examples of courses being revised or replaced in response to changes in the labour market, the directions in which colleges have expanded have been dictated mainly by student demand.

18 Changes in LEA policies on transport and discretionary awards feature prominently in many colleges' risk analyses. Both are affecting the recruitment of some groups of students. Many colleges are providing free transport from outlying areas to try to maintain provision for rural communities. Increasingly, colleges are not charging fees for full-time students over the age of 18, and many have established hardship funds from their own resources to supplement the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) access fund. Where colleges have expanded their provision for adult students, most have made appropriate efforts to make sure that students know of the financial cost and the support they may get. However, colleges report that adult students often cite financial problems as the reason for leaving their courses before completion.

19 Projected enrolments for FEFC-funded programmes, based on college strategic plans, suggest a steady growth in all programme areas

(annex E). The programme area which attracts the highest level of enrolment is humanities. This programme area encompasses a wide range of disciplines including education, English, foreign languages, history, geography and the social sciences. In spite of uncertainties in the construction and engineering sectors, enrolments in these two programme areas are expected to grow nationally by between 10 and 15 per cent between 1994 and 1997. Significant growth is expected in the sciences (including mathematics and computing), art and design, hotel and catering, and health and community care.

MEASURES OF RESPONSIVENESS

20 The responsiveness of the sector can be judged by the degree to which it contributes to the achievement of the national targets for education and training (see annex C). To date, colleges have responded well to this challenge. There has been continued growth in National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and GNVQ provision, and an extension of the range of accredited courses to meet the targets for foundation learning. Most colleges realise that the achievement of the national targets for education and training will depend critically upon improving student levels of achievement. These targets are either specifically mentioned or implicit in most strategic plans.

21 A further indicator of the responsiveness of the further education sector is the significant number of colleges which is attempting to gain the Investors in People award. This award emphasises the need for colleges to be responsive to the education and training needs of their own employees. Approximately 10 per cent of colleges have achieved the lifetime learning target of becoming Investors in People and a further 50 per cent are working towards the standard.

22 TECs judge college responsiveness by examining strategic plans and monitoring their implementation. When a TEC is considering approval of training provision for young people and adults, it assesses the degree to which a college's plan matches the needs of the local labour market. It also considers the college's past performance by looking at the courses available, the numbers of students obtaining employment or qualifications, and the retention rates on training-for-work programmes.

23 TECs fund substantial amounts of youth training and training-for-work courses in further education colleges. The range of opportunities for adults has expanded significantly over the last few years in response to the demand for training for new job opportunities. However, a recent survey of nine TECs found that students trained in colleges performed less well than those trained by employers and private training organisations.

24 Colleges employ a variety of methods to measure their own responsiveness. These include the use of the FEFC performance indicators described in Council Circular 94/31, *Measuring Achievement*.

The first performance indicator assesses a college's effectiveness by comparing actual funding earned relative to target; the second assesses responsiveness by measuring the percentage change in enrolments compared with the previous year. The effectiveness indicator is used by all colleges as part of the information required by the FEFC to determine actual funding allocations. The responsiveness indicator is used to illustrate growth over a period of time.

25 Colleges make little use of the data on student destinations to measure their responsiveness or to inform their strategic planning. They also fail to analyse the routes by which students progress. This would allow them to assess the relevance of the courses studied to subsequent employment. Whilst many vocational course teams attempt to track student destinations, these are rarely analysed at both course and college level. Data are only rarely comprehensive on the employment destinations of students. This can stem from the low level of return from surveys of students once they have left a college. Sixth form colleges usually publish aggregate destinations data to illustrate the proportion of students that progress to higher education. Students would benefit from the inclusion of destinations data in college prospectuses.

26 Colleges increasingly use retention rates to show whether courses are meeting the needs of their students, but few have set benchmarks for course retention. Students withdraw from courses for a variety of reasons including personal and financial difficulties as well as dissatisfaction with the course or the college. Most colleges use questionnaires to gauge student levels of satisfaction with their courses but the questionnaires are rarely designed to gather students' views on how relevant their courses are to their intended study or employment routes. Example B illustrates the approach one college has taken to analysing data on retention and destinations to help with planning.

Example B: One large college holds regular meetings with employers to obtain feedback on their requirements for students' education and training and the level of skills they require. The college uses the outcome of these meetings with employers when making decisions on course development. The college reports that 95 per cent of employers say their needs are satisfied. The popularity of courses is also judged by analysing the number of applications, withdrawals and completions. The retention rate of students has improved recently and is another factor along with student destinations which helps to determine whether or not a course continues.

ASSESSING THE NEEDS OF EMPLOYERS AND THE COMMUNITY

27 Some colleges have strong links with employers and community groups at both strategic and course team levels. These links are used

effectively to support the development of the college and its curriculum. The instrument of government for incorporated colleges determines that at least half the members of the governing body must be 'independent members'; that is to say members who are, or have been, engaged or employed in business, industry or any profession. Many of the independent members of college boards are senior executives in their companies, and some have specialist expertise in finance or law. The instrument of government also allows for two community representatives on the governing bodies of general further education colleges. Where such people have been appointed, they have increased the awareness of all governors of the need for responsiveness by the college to the whole community. Female governors and governors drawn from minority ethnic groups are usually under-represented. Example C illustrates the contribution that can be made to the development of a college by well-informed members of college corporations.

Example C: *The search for a college governor through local newspaper advertising resulted in the appointment of a business governor with expertise in a local employment growth area related to biosciences. His expertise was used to plan courses to meet the skills demanded at technician level. A successful bid to the competitiveness fund was also supported. New science laboratories will now be built and additional staff employed to deliver these new programmes both at the college and in the workplace.*

28 The arrangements for liaison with employers vary both within and between colleges. Many colleges have long-standing advisory groups which include employers. Some colleges require all faculties to convene advisory committees, and many of these are chaired by a governor. However, often they are not well attended and colleges have turned to alternative methods of involving employers. For example, some colleges have established a governor liaison panel which has responsibility for setting up task groups of staff, corporation members and industry representatives to address specific issues. In many colleges, the links between industry, the community and the college stem from the initiatives of individual teachers rather than from institutional structures. Only a third of colleges have co-ordinated college-wide policies and procedures for liaison with employers. Liaison with external groups would benefit from clearer policies and improved co-ordination.

29 Often the principal of a college assumes a prominent role in external liaison. In some colleges, staff have been appointed with a specific brief for industry, community or school liaison. In others, there have been organisational changes aimed specifically at improving community and employer liaison. In one college, senior management roles were redefined resulting in the appointment of four curriculum directors who have responsibility for improving links with the community. Where colleges have enterprise units, these usually have well-established links with employers.

30 TECs have brought together groups of local colleges to collaborate in identifying and addressing skill-development needs within the local community, including those of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Strategic forums exist in most TEC regions involving college principals, the TEC executive and the LEA. These meetings are designed to formulate shared responses to government initiatives and to plan curriculum provision that will meet local needs. TECs have also provided funds for colleges to develop their marketing, improve pre-entry guidance, and develop provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. General further education colleges have close relationships with, and are usually well regarded by, their local TECs. They liaise closely over work-related further education funding, youth and adult training contracts, and the appointment of TEC representatives to college boards. A small number of colleges also provides active support for schools involved in TEC-supported education business partnerships.

31 The competitiveness fund provides an opportunity for further initiatives linking curriculum development to anticipated changes in the labour market. Without such a capital injection, colleges state that it would be difficult for them to afford the investment in high-cost advanced technologies.

32 Validating bodies require course teams to consult with employers when proposing and designing vocational courses. It is rare for employers not to have been involved at the design stage. However, few colleges require course teams to assess the views of employers formally as part of their procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of courses. This tends to be done informally and involves the team's perception of what employers think, rather than a systematic gathering of their views. Only a few colleges use questionnaires to identify the extent to which courses are meeting the needs of employers. Response rates are poor, usually well below 50 per cent, although responses that are received are often positive, particularly on the organisation of work experience and work shadowing schemes. Nevertheless, there is little evidence that the views expressed by employers have much influence on the way that most colleges organise and deliver courses.

COMPETING AND COLLABORATING WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS

33 The creation of incorporated colleges in 1993 and the financial incentive to achieve growth have led to an increase in competition in the sector. In some areas of the country several institutions are now targeting the same student groups in an attempt to achieve growth and provide courses for a wider cross-section of students. The perception of a number of colleges is that some of their courses are threatened by differences between LEA and FEFC funding, and between the historic

funding levels of individual colleges although these are fast converging under the FEFC's funding methodology. Colleges believe that a common funding system would increase their ability to compete on equal terms.

34 Many institutions experience intense competition from schools, other colleges and private training providers. The effectiveness of liaison between colleges and schools often depends on whether the schools have sixth forms. Sixth form colleges have well-established and effective arrangements for liaison with schools where students transfer at age 16. Few general further education colleges have school liaison staff or clear policies for dealing with the increased competition for students. In some colleges, the co-operative arrangements with schools which existed under LEA control have now broken down as institutions compete for the same students. Competition has further intensified with the introduction into schools of GNVQ programmes in business, health and social care, and leisure and tourism. Colleges attempt to define the distinctiveness of their courses by emphasising the wide range of optional and additional units available to support GNVQ programmes. Many colleges find it difficult to gain access to schools with sixth forms and there is concern that pupils at age 16 do not always receive disinterested advice from such schools, though advice from the careers service aims to be informed and impartial.

35 Competition between further education institutions is at its most intense in large conurbations where there are several colleges offering similar provision. City centre colleges define their catchment areas widely so there may be several institutions marketing courses to the same people. Before 1993, the policy of some LEAs was to allocate courses among the colleges to reduce the pressures of competition and guarantee viable provision. In the current climate of demand-led funding, most colleges are now broadening provision to cover more programme areas. Partnerships between further education institutions occur most frequently where sixth form and general further education colleges are neighbours. Tacit agreements not to compete on day-time GCE A level provision, NVQ and adult part-time programmes are common. Colleges generally have close links with at least one higher education institution and, in some cases, they enter into co-operative agreements with other further education colleges to develop courses which provide increased opportunities for progression to higher education. There is scope for neighbouring colleges to collaborate in providing courses to meet their local education and training needs. Example D illustrates one such approach.

Example D: *The provision of further and higher education in one area is shared between two further education colleges and one higher education institution. A 'compact' was launched in November 1993 when the three institutions agreed to establish a joint policy and planning board. The three colleges now see themselves as being complementary in their provision. They aim to present an unbiased*

picture to the community of the full range of provision and the potential pathways for progression. The founding principle of the compact is that the range of further and higher education available locally should be co-ordinated as a single offering, and that unnecessary duplication and competition should be eliminated. The compact means that the colleges have provided a collaborative response to the needs of members of the community for access to higher education.

36 The competition that colleges face from private training providers varies a good deal. There are cases where the TEC has awarded managing agency status to private training providers rather than the colleges. Some colleges are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain provision of training for work because of increased competition from other training providers and their own low levels of performance in terms of length of training and NVQs achieved. Some colleges have looked for gaps in the market for training provision and offered programmes, for example in sport and childcare, where private training providers have not been active. In one region, however, there was evidence of considerable collaboration between training providers and colleges. The challenge for colleges is to be able to compete both on the quality of provision and the outcomes when making bids for contracts in the youth and adult training market.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

37 Marketing is now a key factor supporting the responsiveness of a college. It has been given a higher priority since colleges became self-governing corporations and tends to have greater prominence where competition from other institutions is intense. General further education colleges have taken the opportunity provided by incorporation and the changes to funding arrangements to create stronger marketing teams. They have modified their organisational structures to enable them to relate quickly and easily to their students. A senior member of staff, sometimes the principal, oversees marketing activities and public relations. One college has established a trained public relations team. However, few colleges have a team to co-ordinate both internal and external communications. In sixth form colleges, because post-16 school leavers constitute by far the largest group of students, the marketing function is more narrowly defined. Dedicated school liaison teams, in which a member of staff is assigned to each partner school, maintain formal and informal links and co-ordinate promotional activities.

38 Nevertheless, marketing policies and plans in colleges are generally underdeveloped. Often college marketing officers see their brief as being to co-ordinate the production of publicity materials rather than develop policy or strategy. The identification of new groups of students and the development of suitable marketing policies are both at an early stage. The amount that colleges spend on marketing varies between less than

0.5 per cent of the total budget to over 5 per cent. Some college managers considered 0.75 per cent adequate, and expressed a reluctance to divert resources from other areas directly related to teaching. The largest item of the marketing budget comprises publicity materials. Many colleges also spend significant sums on public relations advice, including graphic design services.

39 Some colleges (see example E) have responded vigorously to markets overseas and have a good range of links, although these are often not organised and developed systematically.

Example E: In 1993-94, one college recruited 80 students from abroad, including 40 from Europe, to an 'English for International Students' course. Subsequently, about 100 students from other countries studied on GCE A level and vocational courses. Students have come from Hong Kong and Malaysia and more recently contracts have been obtained for groups of students from Indonesia, Venezuela and Oman. Special programmes were provided for trainees from Oman and Nepal. Consultancy services have been provided in partnership with the British Council, the British Steel Corporation and the Overseas Development Administration. An income of at least £460,000 has been generated. This is greater than the income from the entire short course training unit and is the largest source of income to the college after the FEFC allocation.

40 Market research does not generally form a key part of college marketing strategies. It is often obtained from secondary sources, based mainly on TEC local market information. Some colleges monitor the characteristics of those who make use of pre-enrolment information services, leading to a more focused approach to course promotion. However, strategies to research new and potential markets remain underdeveloped. Colleges recognise that where their traditional markets fail to produce growth, market intelligence will become more important, but their capability to conduct their own market research is limited. Failure to research new markets may be critical for colleges with a limited range of students. Example F gives an indication of the results of market research in one specialist college.

Example F: One agricultural college conducted market research and held interviews with 12 local poultry producers in preparation for developing poultry provision. The research identified a range of training needs, including management, marketing and personnel skills as well as stockmanship. Poultry provision began in 1991 with six part-time students. Good links with industry enabled the college to use practical facilities owned by major companies. However, the lack of such facilities on-site was a limiting factor, and the college corporation decided to build a specialist poultry unit using industrial sponsorship. Over the next three years, a total of 45 industrial sponsors provided cash or equipment, allowing the college to build a modern facility costing £45,000. The unit, which includes

a classroom, houses 1, 600 birds in four rooms, each equipped with different up-to-date feeding systems. It is run as a business partnership with industry, and now provides central training for large national poultry firms.

41 Colleges are developing a more sophisticated approach to publicity and promotion. Since incorporation, most have new logos, some have changed their names, and many have standardised their publicity materials. It is not uncommon for larger colleges to distribute such materials to over 250,000 homes. Promotional materials and activities are varied and in some cases innovative. For example, in addition to prospectuses and open evenings, colleges are experimenting with advertising on public transport and local television and radio stations. Display stands at careers fairs, fashion shows and supermarkets give additional opportunities to promote courses. A number of colleges now have shop fronts in town centres to promote their services and some engage in collaborative ventures with the TEC. The shops are usually open six days each week all the year round meaning that students can enrol on courses without any delay. Colleges report that such shops have been successful in attracting new groups of students who have previously been reluctant to take up further education courses. This has contributed to the growth in enrolments, particularly for part-time courses. One college 'shop' reported a 25 per cent growth in enquiries a year after it was established.

42 Colleges measure the success of their marketing activities through changes in student numbers. More sophisticated evaluation of the effectiveness of marketing activities is rare. Few colleges are able to track an initial enquiry through to application and enrolment or to identify how applicants found out about the college. Some colleges are starting to face this issue, recognising the contribution that such evaluation can make to effective marketing. For example, some use response sheets to gauge the impact and cost-effectiveness of advertisements. Research, which was carried out by one college to identify the effectiveness and use of its full-time prospectus, influenced the updating of the design of the following year's prospectus. Colleges are starting to monitor the impact of promotional events, such as open days and presentations to groups within the community. However, their evaluation of how such events shape people's perceptions of what colleges have to offer is, at best, rudimentary.

CURRICULUM CHANGE AND RESPONSIVENESS

43 Colleges are making some progress in matching their courses to the changing needs of the community, industry and commerce. There has been significant development in full-time vocational programmes leading to GNVQs, and this has resulted in a broadening of the traditional

courses of some sixth form colleges. In general, colleges have been slow to develop alternative modes of attendance and appropriate patterns of training for those in work. There is little evidence of partnerships with employers to accredit the learning and skills that have already been gained by employees. Recognition of these attainments might make a significant contribution to the achievement of the national targets for education and training (see annex C). In some colleges, the limited provision at foundation level restricts opportunities, particularly for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and for students without basic skills in mathematics and English.

44 Colleges report that much of the growth in enrolments over the past three years has been on full-time courses. In many parts of the country, students see progression to further education as a necessary preparation for higher education and employment. In the last two years there has been an increase in full-time students in all FEFC programme areas. The growth has been most marked in courses in the humanities, business studies, health and community care, and leisure and tourism. Annex F shows an analysis of the growth in full-time student numbers in FEFC programme areas.

45 Changes in curricula have taken some account of demographic and occupational trends. Many colleges have responded to these trends, and to student demand, by a significant expansion of leisure, tourism, and health and social care courses. Colleges in rural areas, particularly colleges of agriculture, have diversified their provision in response to the significant decline in agricultural employment. Some colleges have responded to economic changes by discontinuing courses. Courses in construction have been curtailed by a number of colleges as a result of the decline in training requirements for the building industry. However, many colleges have taken a decision to maintain vocational provision, despite a decline in employment, in order to be in a position to respond to demand in the future.

46 Colleges taking part in this survey reported an increase in adult student numbers on further education courses over the last two years. Much of this increase derives from adults who do not have the traditional entry requirements and wish to progress to higher education. Although many colleges run courses leading to higher national diplomas or have established franchise or associate college agreements with universities to provide foundation or first-year degree courses, changes to the funding of higher education have limited the expansion of these courses. Accordingly, there has been a widespread development of 'access to higher education' programmes in a variety of subjects, including business, humanities, sciences, social sciences and education.

47 There has been a marked increase in the number of programmes for unemployed adults. In some areas, colleges are extending the portfolio of management and marketing courses in response to a substantial increase in the number of unemployed adults from

professional occupations. In most colleges, there is a strong emphasis on encouraging mature students, both men and women, who wish to retrain and return to employment. One college runs a special 'job search' with career development options which enables unemployed people to select a study programme made up of modules suited to their needs. They are supported by regular job-search sessions. Those who gain employment before the end of the programme and leave the college still gain credit for study completed.

48 Most colleges commit themselves, in their mission and charter, to offering students equality of opportunity. Such policies have contributed to a substantial increase in the number of courses for adults without formal entry qualifications. In many colleges, the equal opportunities policy has meant increasing provision for members of minority ethnic groups. In many inner-city general further education colleges there has been a rapid expansion of courses for students for whom English is not their first language. For some inner-city colleges, the numbers of such students can be high. In one general further education college approximately 41 per cent of the students do not have English as their first language.

Example G: A college in one area has been successful in providing courses for the Sikh community at a local community centre, the local hospital, and an Asian women's group. As part of this programme, the college offers open learning workshops and a home-study service. The provision was effectively marketed to the local Punjabi-speaking community as a result of a bilingual advertising campaign on local radio. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds attending the college is actually higher than that represented in the local population.

49 Many colleges have developed a wide range of courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including courses for students with mental health difficulties. The introduction of pre-foundation level courses has helped students with low levels of attainment to enter further education. There has been an increase in courses leading to external awards. However, there are still few opportunities for students with profound and complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are also often not enough opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to learn alongside other students on vocational courses. Link courses between colleges and special schools enable tutors to assess the educational and social needs of students before they join the college. These, and the interchange of staff, have helped develop programmes which match the needs of individual students. However, the joint planning of student programmes with social and health service agencies is less developed.

50 The majority of further education colleges intend to play a continuing and significant role at the centre of their communities. Many

are increasing their enrolments by delivering courses in community centres and other locations separate and sometimes remote from their main sites. Some inner-city colleges have developed large community college networks. In a number of colleges, a community education manager has been appointed whose role is to develop and extend education programmes in the locality by setting up 'outreach' centres and approaching local community organisations. Some colleges have invested in community learning centres to provide more opportunities for rural communities to take up their courses. However, where rapid expansion of community provision has taken place across a wide geographical area, there has sometimes been a lack of effective management and control. For example, there has been insufficient support for unqualified teachers and inadequate provision of accommodation and resources.

51 In many areas, the LEA makes a contract with the college to provide adult leisure and recreational education for its locality. There has been an increase in the certification of such courses by national bodies. Consequently, more of these courses are now being funded by the FEFC and are contributing to the achievement of the national targets for education and training. It is unclear whether this has led to an increase in the level of participation in further education. Colleges have also tendered successfully to the Home Office to provide education programmes for the prison service.

52 Franchising arrangements, where a college makes an agreement with another organisation to deliver further education courses on its behalf, have increased. Colleges have developed a range of franchising arrangements with a variety of organisations, including other colleges, voluntary organisations, employers and private training providers. Curriculum links between colleges and schools have led to a number of joint or franchised courses. These mainly involve the introduction of GNVQ courses. Colleges also act as sponsors for schools and community centres in providing further education courses. These arrangements offer colleges opportunities to widen participation and establish links with local communities.

TRAINING TO MEET EMPLOYMENT NEEDS

53 Colleges offer a wide variety of subjects which can be studied part time. In some cases, there has been an increase in the range of courses offered in the evenings to cater for adults who wish to improve their qualifications and chances of employment. However the growth in full-time enrolments (see annex F) has been offset by declining enrolments on part-time courses (see annex G), particularly day-release programmes and those leading to professional qualifications. Colleges have not always analysed the reasons for this decline, nor have they explored alternative, more flexible ways of delivering education and training programmes to employees. Sixth form colleges have recognised

the importance of providing part-time opportunities, but the range of provision they offer, although showing a significant increase, remains small compared with that offered by other institutions in the sector.

54 Colleges also provide courses to meet the specific training requirements of local companies. The full cost of these courses is borne by the company. The range of full-cost activity includes consultancy contracts, professional and commercial updating in areas such as management, information technology, engineering, and basic skills, and language training. Full-cost courses are usually a small proportion of a college's work. However, general further education colleges regard commercial enterprise activities as a developing source of income. Sixth form colleges, which are generally almost entirely dependent on FEFC income, are starting to explore similar opportunities.

55 Some colleges have extensive contacts with prominent national and international firms, as illustrated by example H. They regard employers as customers and are often highly responsive to their requirements for delivering tailored and off-site training courses. Some colleges have been involved in innovative ventures including, in one college, a programme that leads to NVQ qualifications for funeral directors. Many colleges have established a sound reputation for commercial training against fierce competition from other colleges and private training providers. These colleges are demonstrating to the private sector their flexibility and willingness to meet a wide range of training requirements.

Example H: One college has a long-established record of providing satisfactory training for a local healthcare products company which is a major local employer. Training programmes were needed after the company bought new machines. This meant that college staff needed to gain detailed knowledge of complex machinery so that they could write training manuals before training company staff. In some cases, this training took place on Saturdays. The college has conducted an analysis of training needs for the company which led recently to training to NVQ level 2 in hydraulics and pneumatics. Teaching on this programme is by open learning, but staff from the college business development unit make fortnightly visits to the company to support trainees and to check on their progress. The entire programme is delivered on company premises where the college has provided and installed appropriate equipment. Students are assessed by company staff who have obtained Training and Development Lead Body assessor qualifications following training by the college. The college has trained over 200 company staff so far.

56 Colleges do not always market effectively their specialised training capacity. In one college, although full-cost work resulted in an annual income of over £500,000, much of it was generated after approaches by one major employer to the college rather than by the college marketing its consultancy to the local business community. Employers report that college staff rarely visit local companies in order to establish training

needs systematically. In rural areas, where the majority of businesses employ less than five staff, there is often a lack of full-cost or mainstream provision to meet their needs.

57 In college charters, obligations to employers are rarely spelt out fully. Some colleges refer to employers' rights, but only about 10 per cent have an explicit charter for employers, many of whom have little awareness that such charters might exist. Employers tend to rely on personal contact, contractual rights and the option to take their business elsewhere. Moreover, college charters which do refer to employers and the community often fail to indicate the standards that can be expected or how these are to be assured. Example I illustrates how a collaborative venture between a group of colleges and their TEC resulted in an explicit charter for employers.

Example I: A joint initiative has led to the development of an employers' charter which supports the delivery of a flexible training facility run collaboratively by four colleges and the TEC. The charter commits the consortium to responding to enquiries within 24 hours, providing initial free consultancy to identify training needs; customising the training to meet individual requirements; and delivering training to nationally-accredited standards. The charter also promises to identify the college contact, to provide a value for money package and to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the service provided.

DELIVERING THE CURRICULUM

58 The need for greater flexibility in delivering the curriculum, including meeting student requirements for a wider variety of modes of attendance, has led to the teaching of some courses as self-contained modules. There are many examples of modular provision in specific vocational areas. The introduction of NVQ courses for part-time study has been accompanied by the development of learning materials to match flexible attendance and study patterns, particularly in construction, business administration and office technology. However, few colleges have organised all their courses into free-standing modules which can be delivered separately. Example J illustrates the flexibility some colleges provide.

Example J: At one college, NVQ training in hospitality is organised into four-week modules that can be taken by either full-time or part-time students. On entry, each student is given a comprehensive information pack and is allocated a course tutor. The tutor and student agree a four-week schedule based on the student's choices and progress on the course. From these individual plans, the hospitality division devises its overall programme. Each student meets the tutor once a week to monitor progress. As students advance through their units, they may ask for assessment whenever

they are ready. This takes place in selected work placements as well as in the college. Assessment of prior learning is available on demand and the flexibility of the system lets students enrol at any time of year.

59 Many colleges organise and deliver GNVQ courses on a modular basis and modular schemes for a number of GCE A level courses have also been introduced. The timetables for GNVQ courses are usually organised in a way that enables students to take a complementary GCE A level or GCSEs. However, colleges rarely manage the curriculum in a way that enables students to choose units of vocational courses (GNVQ or NVQ) that complement their GCE A levels. Yet it is just this kind of mix that can provide a better understanding of the value of vocational education in preparing students for work.

60 Despite a rapid expansion in resources, and facilities that encourage students to study independently, the extent to which opportunities for open learning are taken up by students and employers is still severely limited. The proportion of college provision delivered through open learning is typically between 2 and 3 per cent of enrolments (see examples K and L). However, many colleges claim that more courses could be studied in part by open learning. Some colleges have recognised the need to develop open learning in order to become more cost effective in responding to minority and dispersed markets. The development of such flexible learning strategies in sixth form colleges is more limited than in general further education colleges.

Example K: A large college in a rural area, where transport to and from college is limited, has made extensive provision for open learning. Nearly 4 per cent of enrolments are through open learning. A wide range of courses is supported which includes GCE A level and GCSE, and courses in accountancy, childcare and information technology. Some areas of skill training, such as electrical installation, are provided by open learning combined with intensive workshop practice. Open learning in childcare has been developed to support outreach work on an isolated housing estate in response to a request from social services for help in supporting a group of young parents living there. Tutors meet weekly with the group at the local community centre and specialist workshops are provided both on the estate and at the college. The students use the college minibus to travel to the college and use its learning facilities. The college is modifying the course in the light of feedback from the students.

Example L: Open learning forms the biggest department at a large city college; in 1993-94 there were over 1,100 full-time equivalent enrolments. Students can enrol throughout the year to study programmes in college and at other locations. Vocational programmes for individuals and corporate clients include a carefully planned combination of resource materials, workshops and tutorial

support. Students who are unable to receive face-to-face support have telephone access to their tutors. A large range of programmes is available from NVQ level 2 to postgraduate level, including customer care, management, engineering and construction.

61 Some colleges, including sixth form colleges, have recognised that more adult students can be recruited by extending the working day and week. Saturday morning sessions have been introduced to provide recreational and taster courses as well as full-cost courses for those who wish to improve their workplace skills. On GNVQ programmes a number of colleges have two or three starting points during the year; at present, the take-up of places in January and April is small. There has been an extension of the teaching year in some colleges, but it is rare for colleges to offer full-time or part-time courses in July and August. Adult training programmes supported by TECs often require short programmes throughout the year. Although these are offered by some colleges using private training companies, colleges are generally not felt to be responsive in providing this type of programme.

62 The employment of teachers with current or recent experience in industry provides a valuable means of helping colleges develop their vocational courses in response to changing industrial practice. In some subjects, notably art and design, there is an active policy to make use of part-time teachers who can bring with them current practical knowledge. Full-time staff generally have appropriate commercial and industrial backgrounds, although most have been teaching continuously for more than five years. However, in many colleges, there is no detailed mapping of the industrial and commercial experience of staff. Policies on staff secondment to industry are rare, and industrial updating is usually left to individual teachers or their departmental managers. There is no national lecturer industrial placement scheme to mirror the teacher placement scheme operating in schools.

63 In many curriculum areas, collaboration with employers has contracted as a result of the decline in part-time day-release provision. Despite this, most colleges have maintained strong links with employers in areas such as engineering and construction. Work placements provide opportunities for employers to support the development of student skills in the workplace. Most colleges offer work experience opportunities to full-time students on vocational courses. In some colleges, mainly sixth form colleges, a programme of enrichment activities gives some GCE A level students the opportunity to work in industry, commerce or the public sector. In most cases, there are sound arrangements for briefing employers and students about work experience. The work that is undertaken develops aspects of core skills and relates appropriately to the student's course. Teachers gain valuable feedback from employers as a consequence of such work experience, contacts and reports.

64 In order to assess the performance of students in a working environment, which is a key element of NVQs, colleges have updated and extended the use of realistic working environments in areas such as construction, catering, hairdressing, and travel and tourism. In some cases, the assessment of students is conducted by employers in the workplace or forms part of a programme of work placement. Some colleges have substantial programmes of assessor training for supervisors in employment. However, the availability of work-based assessment is limited. Many employers are unable to provide the breadth of work required to assess competence and they prefer the colleges to undertake the assessment.

65 Employers can influence course delivery and organisation. For example, at some colleges, employers have been involved in designing and managing assessments. Example M illustrates a particularly effective partnership between a college and a company in designing and providing vocational training to support the establishment of a new enterprise.

Example M: A college responded enthusiastically to a Japanese electronics company which wanted to establish a European manufacturing base. The company urgently required a 'job-ready' workforce covering many occupations. The college set up a tailor-made training programme after extensive consultations with the company. Over 400 local unemployed people undertook the training programme, two-thirds of whom subsequently obtained full-time jobs with the company. A further 10 per cent found jobs with other local businesses. This initiative vividly illustrates the potential for responsiveness to industry that exists within the further education sector.

CONCLUSIONS

66 The key strengths of further education colleges in responding to the needs for education and training are summarised below:

- colleges have succeeded in devising broad mission statements which include in their aims meeting the education and training needs of individuals, businesses and the wider community
- the vocational and general education courses provided by colleges meet the needs of school leavers, adults and employers effectively
- by responding to student demand, colleges have been successful in widening access to, and increasing participation in, further education
- local businesses are well represented on governing bodies, and general further education colleges have close relationships with local TECs

-
- employers are involved in planning course specifications and there are examples of their direct involvement in course design and delivery
 - TECs fund substantial amounts of training in general further education colleges
 - a number of colleges have established a sound reputation for commercial training by responding to the training requirements of local companies
 - courses that were previously offered as part of adult leisure and recreational programmes are now delivered through the national qualifications framework, contributing to the achievement of the national targets for education and training
 - a college-wide approach to publicity is being adopted and there is some innovative promotion of courses.

67 If colleges are to meet the government's recommendations in *Competitiveness: Forging Ahead and Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win*, the following issues should be considered:

- labour market information is not sufficiently detailed to help in planning specific programmes or courses
- there is little systematic analysis of student destinations as a means of informing curriculum planning or guiding applicants in their choice of courses
- sixth form colleges adopt a more restricted definition of responsiveness than tertiary and general further education colleges
- colleges have made only limited responses to the need for alternatives to traditional day-release education for those in employment
- in some colleges a lack of provision at foundation level restricts progression, particularly for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- there is only a small take-up by students of open learning opportunities, despite a rapid expansion of programmes, resources and facilities
- few colleges conduct surveys of employers' views about their courses and only 10 per cent of colleges have developed an explicit employers' charter
- college marketing policies and plans are often underdeveloped and the evaluation of marketing activities is rudimentary.

INSPECTION GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The grades used by the Council's inspectorate 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.

INSPECTION FRAMEWORK

Guidelines on responsiveness and range of provision are set out in the inspection framework, *Assessing Achievement* (Circular 93/28). Inspectors should enquire whether:

- the staff are aware of and respond to the government's aims and policies for further education, the national targets for education and training, and the requirements of the FEFC
- there is effective liaison with local schools, LEAs, other further and higher education institutions, TECs, employers, parents, community representatives and the FEFC's regional office
- there are arrangements for identifying local employment and other needs and for monitoring the satisfaction with the service of those who use it
- there is a range of programmes and services which meets the needs of potential clients, for example:
 - school leavers and mature students
 - students whose attendance patterns necessitate open learning
 - students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
 - employers, including those seeking full-cost courses, assessment services and consultancy
- programmes are effectively marketed and those which are no longer demonstrably meeting a need are revised or replaced
- there is access to, and participation in, post-compulsory education by groups traditionally under-represented in further education
- equality of opportunity is promoted and discriminatory practices avoided.

NATIONAL TARGETS FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING

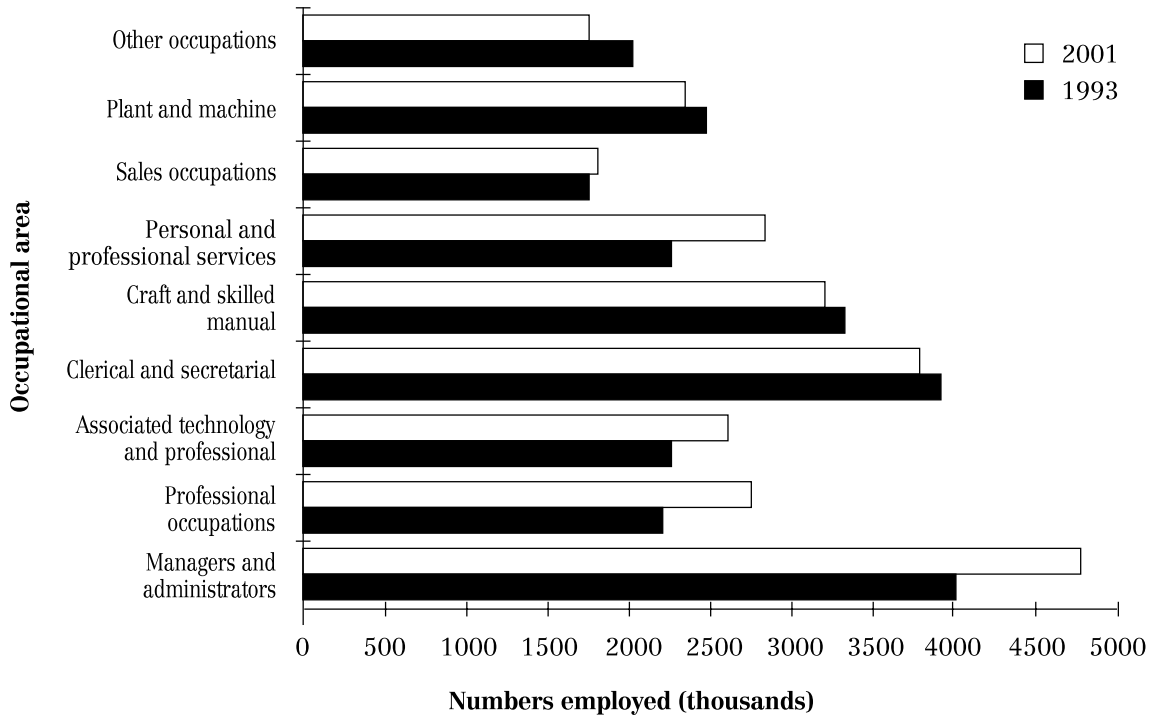
Foundation Learning

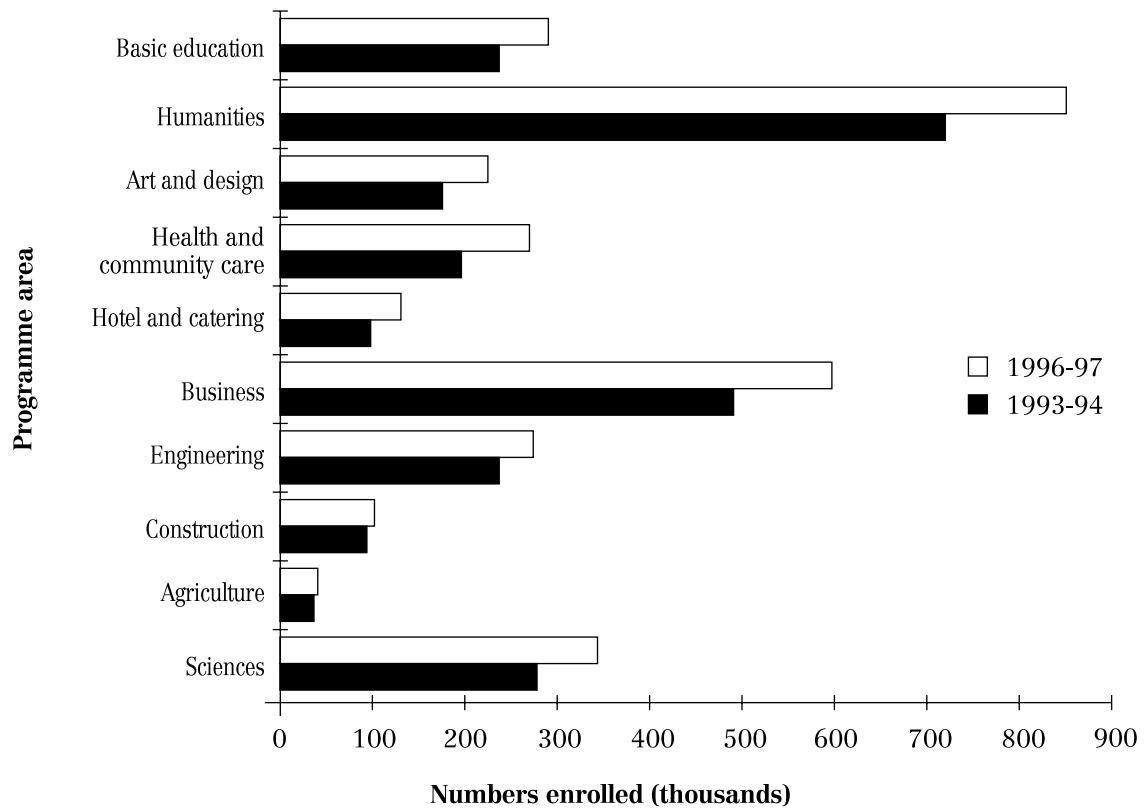
- 1 By age 19, **85 per cent** of young people to achieve five GCSEs at grade C or above, an intermediate GNVQ or NVQ level 2.
- 2 **75 per cent** of young people to achieve level 2 competence in communication, numeracy and information technology by age 19; and **35 per cent** to achieve level 3 competence in these core skills by age 21.
- 3 By age 21, **60 per cent** of young people to achieve 2 GCE A levels, and advanced GNVQ or an NVQ level 3.

Lifetime Learning

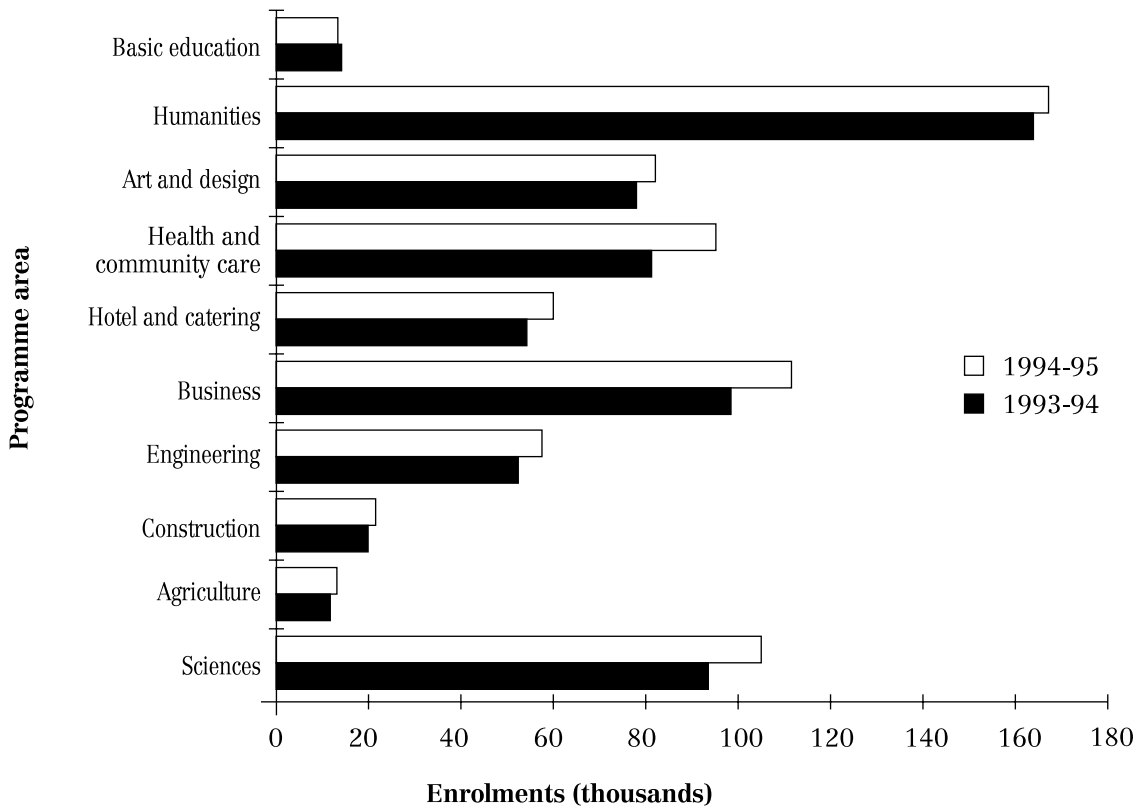
- 1 **60 per cent** of the workforce to be qualified to NVQ level 3, advanced GNVQ or two GCE A levels standard.
- 2 **30 per cent** of the workforce to have a vocational, professional, management or academic qualification at NVQ level 4 or above.
- 3 **70 per cent** of all organisations employing 200 or more employees, and 35 per cent of those employing 50 or more, to be recognised as Investors in People.

ACTUAL AND PROJECTED EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATIONAL AREA, 1993-2001

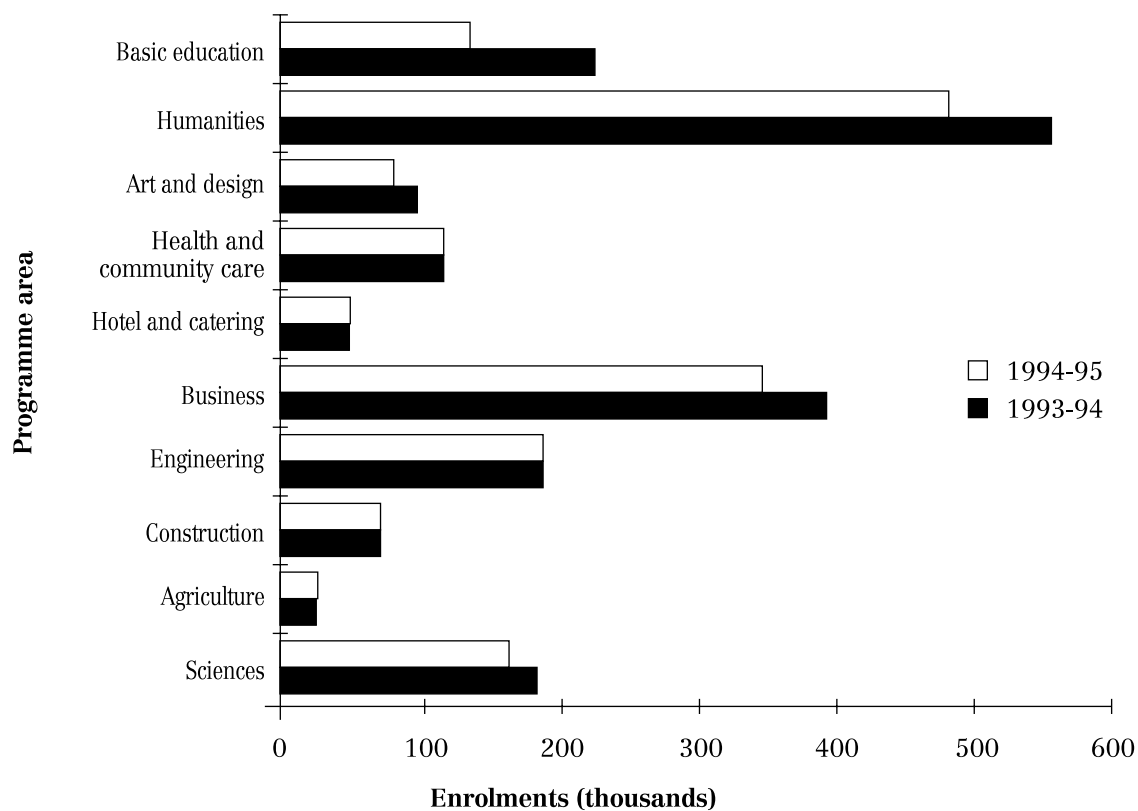


**FEFC-FUNDED ACTUAL AND PROJECTED
ENROLMENTS, 1993-94 AND 1996-97**

CHANGES IN FULL-TIME FEFC-FUNDED ENROLMENTS, 1993-94 AND 1994-95 (ACTUALS)



CHANGES IN PART-TIME FEFC-FUNDED ENROLMENTS, 1993-94 AND 1994-95 (ACTUALS)



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