

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Kidderminster College

March 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 18/95

KIDDERMINSTER COLLEGE
WEST MIDLANDS REGION
Inspected April - December 1994

Summary

Kidderminster College offers a wide range of vocational, GCE A level and GCSE courses to school leavers and adults in the North Worcestershire area. It has well-developed links with the Central England TEC. It is well regarded by its students. Members of the corporation show commitment to the college, and there is good communication between the corporation and the senior management team. There is a comprehensive strategic plan and annual report. Students benefit from good systems for guidance and support and from effective teaching in most areas of work. Examinations results at GCE A level and GCSE, and in many vocational areas, are good. Staff are appropriately qualified and many have up-to-date industrial experience. The college lacks an adequate quality assurance system and the present computerised information system meets only its basic administrative needs. The roles and responsibilities of some of its committees also require clarification. Other weaknesses are: the poor quality of work in art and design, and with students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities; the variable quality of tutorials; the inadequate publicity given to the student charter; deficiencies in the college-wide provision of information technology; and the slow progress in implementing staff appraisal.

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	4
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	3
accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science including mathematics	3	Art and design (pre degree)	4
Engineering	2	Performing arts	1
Business and finance	2	Humanities including languages	2
Office studies	3	Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	4
Health and social care	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1 Kidderminster College was inspected between April and December 1994. Specialist subject areas were inspected from 20 to 22 April, 20 to 21 September, 4 to 6 October and 11 to 13 October 1994. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected during August and September 1994. Aspects of cross-college provision were inspected during the week beginning 28 November 1994. In all, 14 inspectors visited the college, using 57 inspector days. Inspectors visited 124 classes and scrutinised samples of students' written and practical work. They held discussions with governors, staff, students, parents, local employers, local head teachers, and representatives of the community. Views were also obtained from the Central England Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Kidderminster College was founded in 1879 by amalgamating a school of art and a mechanics' institute, with the declared purpose of providing education for the 'artisan classes', who at that time worked mainly in the carpet industry. The college now serves a population of over 100,000 people living in the towns of Kidderminster, Stourport and Bewdley, and in a large rural area to the west as far as Tenbury. Its road and rail links are good. The area is west of the Midlands industrial conurbation and within convenient travelling distance of Birmingham, Worcester and Wolverhampton.

3 Kidderminster is still recognised as the centre of the British carpet industry, but in the last decade employment in carpet manufacturing has declined. The region has seen a growth in service industries including distribution, hotels and catering, transport and communications, banking, finance and insurance. There has been a marked decline in agriculture, energy and water supply, and minerals and ore extraction. The construction industry has remained stable. Manufacturing has fluctuated over the last 10 years but declined between 1989 to 1991, especially in the engineering, metal goods and vehicle industries. Unemployment is around 8.5 per cent.

4 In response to the changes in local industry and commerce, the college has changed its curriculum in recent years to provide courses in technology, management, humanities, art and design, caring and performing arts. It has specialisms in carpet, floor covering and interior textile design, performing arts, and management training. Its degree course in carpet design attracts students from throughout the country and from overseas, and performing arts courses attract students from the whole region.

5 The college is of medium size. At the time of the team inspection, it had approximately 1,500 full-time equivalent students. There were some 920 students attending full time and 3,723 attending part time during the day or in the evening. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. The college seeks to create a friendly atmosphere to bring the best out of students. It is organised into two teaching divisions:

business, general education and technology; and creative arts and community studies. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. There is a student services division concerned with admissions, student guidance and student support, a resource division, and a financial and administration division. The college employs 71 full-time equivalent teachers on full-time contracts, and 215 part-time teachers. There are 70 administrative, caretaking and technician support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents is given in figure 4.

6 The college is accommodated in relatively modern premises, consisting of one seven-storey and two three-storey blocks, and extensive workshops for engineering and art and design. These buildings are on one site, and the business administration and management building is nearby. There are some student social and leisure facilities: a theatre used by performing arts students, a refectory, student common rooms, a recently-extended library, music recording studios, dance studios, science laboratories, information technology workshops and hairdressing salons. The college has links with the local Rose Theatre which it has used for productions.

7 The nearest further education college is the Bromsgrove site of the North East Worcestershire College. There are three other further education colleges in Halesowen, Stourbridge and Worcester, each approximately 12 miles away. Traditionally the college's competition has been with Worcester College of Technology, which offers a comparable curriculum, and to a lesser degree with Stourbridge College of Technology. The King Edward VI Sixth Form College at Stourbridge and the Worcester Sixth Form College also compete to recruit students in the 16-19 age group.

8 School pupils in the Wyre Forest district are educated in first schools (pupils aged 5-9), middle schools (pupils aged 9-13) and high schools (pupils aged 13-18). This pattern makes it difficult for the college to recruit young people at the age of 16. Each of the seven high schools has its own sixth form, and is naturally reluctant to lose pupils to further education after only three years; the pupils themselves may also be less inclined to transfer than if they had come from a 11-16 or 11-18 school. In 1994, of the 1,230 students aged 16 plus in the Wyre Forest district, 637 stayed on in school, 248 entered further education, 33 entered sixth form colleges, 117 entered youth training, 95 were employed and the remainder were unemployed or not available for work.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 The national training and education targets are clearly reflected in the strategic plan. The college is committed to meeting them in Kidderminster and the neighbouring area, and is seeking to make all staff more conscious of them.

10 The strong competition for 16-19 year old students has naturally influenced the nature and scope of links with local schools. Heads of

schools and colleges meet to discuss matters of common interest, and there is some collaboration over equal opportunities issues. There are more fruitful links with some 11-16 schools outside Kidderminster: for example, joint development of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), some joint teaching, and links involving performing arts, and art and design. Some college students gain work experience in schools. College students' achievements are now reported back to the schools from which these students came.

11 The college has developed fruitful links with higher education. It offers a BA degree in the design of floor coverings and interior textiles, validated by the University of Wolverhampton. Links with Worcester College of Higher Education include the foundation year for the BA/BSc degree. Higher national diplomas in media studies and business studies are also linked to degree courses at Worcester.

12 Relationships with the TEC are well developed. There are regular meetings between senior managers and TEC representatives, and an annual review of performance on youth training and training for work programmes. The TEC is interested in developing with the college a more sophisticated analysis of the local labour market. Kidderminster College Training, which is part of the college, offers youth training and training for work across many vocational areas, particularly secretarial and office studies, and engineering. Kidderminster College Training has undergone a full quality audit following the publication of its own quality standards. The college has also successfully bid for the 'passport to guidance' scheme which offers an in-depth guidance interview to part-time workers and the unemployed. This initiative may provide opportunities for the college to increase students' access to the college's courses. The TEC scholarship scheme has been valuable in assisting some students to enrol on college courses. The college has not bid for other TEC schemes, for example, for funding for the accreditation of prior learning under the 'access to assessment' initiative. The TEC is satisfied with the quality of training proposed by the college, but there are some differences of emphasis. While the college's priority is the achievement of qualifications, the TEC is concerned that training should lead to employment.

13 The college is a member of the local education business partnership which promotes relationships between education and industry. The partnership is seeking to develop work experience standards and practices common both to educational institutions and to industry, and has also established a joint working group on GNVQs.

14 Many corporation members are drawn from local industry, and the college works actively with the local chamber of commerce. Relations with employers are uneven, although there have been a number of useful initiatives. For example, college staff have worked closely with a local engineering firm to assist its recruitment programme, and local employers have been involved with the evaluation of the quality and relevance of management courses. The short-course programme is another useful

source of contacts. Nevertheless, the college lacks an overall view of its relations with employers. There is no central intelligence network to pull together the substantial information on the broad range of contacts with employers held by some divisions and the thorough and detailed database developed by Kidderminster College Training. There has been no co-ordinated and comprehensive market research to identify employers' training needs, and find out what they think of the college's present performance in relation to those needs.

15 The college offers a wide range of full-time, part-time day and evening courses from foundation level upwards. It is the college's policy not to charge most full-time students fees. Those who are unemployed or on benefit generally have fees remitted. The substantial General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) programme offers a wide range of subjects, including some GCE A levels not generally available in schools. Vocational courses include business studies, office and secretarial studies with a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) workshop, modern languages, leisure and tourism, science and technology, performing arts, art and design, and hair and beauty. There has been a rapid and successful development of management courses over the last five years. In caring, there is a range of programmes well designed for different client groups. There are access courses and other courses both full time and part time designed for the needs or circumstances of mature students. Courses have been developed for women wishing to return to work, most of them related to occupations traditionally associated with women. The college has introduced NVQs and GNVQs at intermediate and advanced level. There are also some degree, higher national diploma and higher national certificate programmes. Special course provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is limited. Many part-time evening courses, both vocational and non-vocational, are offered in the college and in neighbouring towns and villages. In a few areas, the college has been slow to respond to needs: for example, it has only recently offered evening study for NVQs, and there is little provision on Saturdays.

16 The college has appointed an experienced marketing officer. There is a marketing plan and a budget. A thorough survey of students' perceptions of the college, and of the effectiveness of various forms of advertising offers a good basis for future marketing and recruitment policies. Responses from 16-19 year old students, mature students and women returners were analysed and firm conclusions drawn about the advertising strategy, the curriculum offer and students' perceptions of the college and its facilities. The analysis of the results of the survey has resulted in clear recommendations for curriculum development. A useful section on students' perceptions of courses was excluded at the request of trade union representatives.

17 Marketing is supported by a marketing matters group, broadly representative of curriculum areas. This has stimulated interest and

brought teaching staff to a closer involvement with marketing. Promotional activities have included presentations to the press and regional careers officers. There are good links with careers officers, who have agreed to provide full information about the college's offerings in their individual guidance interviews with pupils in their final year of compulsory schooling. The college has a clear policy on public relations and provides regular information on educational matters to the community. The marketing officer advises college staff on the preparation of press releases and helps them prepare for radio interviews.

18 There is a full-time and part-time prospectus and about 140 curriculum area leaflets, written by staff to a common format. These are well designed, give clear and accurate information about courses, and give interesting examples of past students' achievements. Students commented on the usefulness of information they had received from the college. The printed materials do not include a welcome to people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although some brochures mention facilities which can be made available to students who need special support.

19 The college is at an early stage in the implementation of an equal opportunities policy. A statement of intent was issued in August 1993 and a draft policy document was developed in June 1994. A training and vocational education initiative with local schools has sought to raise awareness of equal opportunities issues, and develop materials for use in teaching. Except in caring courses, there is no explicit monitoring of ethnicity, although some information is collected. The number of minority ethnic students is very small, as is their proportion in the local community. A study has begun on the relationship between achievement and gender. The college has carried out a survey of wheelchair access and identified scope for further improvement. The college creche takes children from the age of two. It has 15 places at morning sessions and 10 in the afternoon: opening hours are from 09.00 to 15.00. The creche is free to full-time students; part-time students pay £1 per hour. Students reported that they found the creche helpful in enabling them to study, but some would have liked it to be open for longer hours, especially in the afternoons. There is a waiting list for the college creche, and students are given information about a private creche located nearby.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 The corporation has 11 members, including the principal and an elected staff member. The background of the other members includes politics, business, finance, law, manufacturing, and trade union work. Members are deployed on subcommittees so as to make the best use of their expertise. The corporation and its finance and strategic planning committee meet regularly. Other committees are responsible for audit, finance and strategic planning, remuneration, and special needs. Attendance at these meetings is generally good. The TEC nominee is chair

of one of the subcommittees and is regularly briefed by TEC officers about TEC policies and initiatives. There are no women on the corporation board.

21 The corporation members take their responsibilities seriously and have questioned the principal on many issues. Vigorous debate has taken place on several occasions. Governors have evaluated the strategic plan, the college charter and the contract of employment. The principal and senior managers keep them well provided with necessary information about the work of the college. They receive monthly financial statements, examination results, academic board and quality committee minutes, as well as the college's annual report. Senior managers make presentations to the corporation's committees, and are present as observers at their meetings. The corporation and senior management team also meet out of college to discuss strategic items and issues. Corporation members take a close interest in the college and visit it regularly. Some have helpfully contributed their expertise in assessing students' presentations in the areas of business and management.

22 The corporation has taken a particular interest in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and made it the responsibility of a committee on which outside special interest groups are represented. On many occasions, there have been frank exchanges of opinion on this issue. The college has provided a service which is only partly funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college is now rationalising this provision and sees its primary role to enrol students who are able to progress as outlined in the FEFC publications. Some students who have attended the college or have been associated with the college in other institutions do not fall within this category. Negotiations are taking place with other bodies to evaluate the best support for this group.

23 There are five divisions within the college: finance and administration; resources; student services; and two teaching divisions. The heads of divisions constitute the college senior management team, which meets weekly and makes many of the day-to-day decisions. There is a college academic board, which meets at least once a term, and comprises both nominated and elected members. It does not reflect the present curriculum structure of the college. It cannot respond rapidly to events, and is therefore seen as a ratifying rather than executive body. The quality committee, which was established in September 1994, now takes the lead on many academic issues. The roles and responsibilities of these committees may need to be clarified to reflect the changing nature of the college. Committee minutes are clear and concise, but consideration should be given to the clearer identification of actions arising.

24 The college strategic plan and annual report, which have been presented to the college staff and governors for the last eight years, are the principal means of communicating information about the plans and

achievements of the college. The strategic plan outlines the college's ethos, aims, objectives and targets. Staff at all levels of the college contribute to and receive these documents.

25 There are good lines of communication between the corporation and senior managers, but those from the academic divisions to course teams and individual staff are variable. Documentation is generally concise and well presented. There is a good staff handbook and staff personnel handbook. Policies for equal opportunities and health and safety are defined in the staff handbook, and the staff responsible are also identified. However, health and safety advice was not given to many students during induction, and safety was an issue in some practical sessions.

26 The college has partly met the requirement to produce a self-assessment report in preparation for the quadrennial inspection. There is no separate document. The college has changed parts of the annual report to reflect the format of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The annual report lists the strategic and operational objectives achieved during the previous year. The 1994-95 strategic plan sets objectives for next year, and identifies the strengths and weaknesses in 11 areas of provision which need to be addressed. Several of the strengths and weaknesses identified in these documents reflect the findings of specialist and cross-college inspections.

27 The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is £17.87 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £18.17. The college's estimated income and expenditure for 1994-95 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Around 65 per cent of the college budget is allocated to staffing costs. Divisional and course team budgets are allocated on the basis of a response to bids which also takes account of student enrolment and historic information. This allocation process is well developed at divisional level, but less well so at course team level. Most course teams have responsibility for their delegated budgets. To date only an interim budget has been allocated and procedures are in place for teams to spend an appropriate proportion of their budget on a term-by-term basis. There are additional procedures for the funding of new initiatives and capital equipment. Staff have contributed to the determination of these objectives.

28 Only a small number of courses have been costed at divisional level because the college is experimenting with different methods of calculation. The college intends to test the cost effectiveness of its present courses, and the scope for improving them through possible changes in methods of delivery. Enrolment targets for courses are set and monitored and recorded in the strategic plan. They are based upon historic information and market analysis. Although many enrolments were at or above predicted levels there were some significant variations.

29 The information system originally in use failed to provide useful management information, so the college has made a thorough study of its information needs and selected a new system to meet them. The new

system has recently been installed, data is being fed into it, and staff are being trained. The absence of an effective system over the years means that staff will require considerable training to appreciate the potential benefits of management information systems, and to be able themselves to realise those benefits.

30 The college failed to meet its FEFC enrolment growth target by 3 per cent in the last year. The full-time student numbers were maintained but those for part-time students declined. The college student to staff ratio of around 14:1 has improved from 12:1 in 1993-94.

31 The college collects and publishes accurate information about the destinations of students progressing to higher education. Last year, about 170 students, or 65 per cent of those eligible, entered higher education. In art and design, the figure was 90 per cent. The college does not systematically collect and analyse course retention rates.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

32 Last year, the college set up a centralised student services division which has cross-college responsibility for applications, guidance, the tutorial system, records of achievement, student welfare and support, and marketing. Previously these functions and services were fragmented. Centralising their management is intended to help the college reach its targets for growth in student numbers, and to provide students with the support they need to achieve their potential. The student services information centre in the college main foyer is a new initiative. It handles a wide range of inquiries about courses from the public and from existing students. Staff in the centre give advice on careers, opportunities in higher education and welfare matters, and enquirers are referred to specialist staff in the college as necessary. The centre is working effectively, but it is closed during lunch times and in the early evening when many would find it convenient to visit.

33 During the course of the year, the college runs a series of information events for mature students and 16-19 year olds. Some events focus on particular programmes such as NVQs and GNVQs, and have proved particularly effective for mature students. These events gave helpful advice about the range of courses on offer and addressed some of the financial issues facing prospective students.

34 Inquiries about college provision are received throughout the year. Last year there were over 8,000 enquiries. The college usually responds promptly to enquiries, but on some recent occasions it has been caught out by the large response to its own advertising, and has not been able to deal with enquiries as efficiently as it might have done. There is a need for better co-ordination and communication between marketing, administrative, reception and teaching staff. Occasionally, enquiries are not, as intended, referred to specialist staff prior to recruitment; for example in engineering and in languages. The central student services

information office is increasingly handling enquiries directly and has received about 500 of these in its first month of operation. There is a centralised system for recording enquiries, and the subsequent stages leading to enrolment. Reasons for applicants not attending interview are sometimes pursued. Students reported favourably upon the college's handling of applications and interviews. Procedures were felt to be better than those they experienced elsewhere. The paper-based monitoring system is effective, but analysis is time consuming. Currently, marketing staff carry out some analysis of enquiries, for example numbers, gender and age bands of people attending open days and their interests in different courses, and this is used to guide future planning of events and courses offered. Analysis has identified a broadening of adults' interests from specific courses designed for them, such as access to higher education and the women returners course, to other subjects and qualifications. There are plans to computerise the admissions system to make it more efficient.

35 The college aims to acknowledge all applications for courses within five working days and to notify applicants of interview dates within the following 10 working days. Spot sampling conducted by inspectors suggests that these targets are met for about half of the applications, with the other half taking on average an additional week to process. The college has not yet monitored applications against its target timescales in a systematic way. The college application form is more appropriate for school leavers than adults, even though over half of the full-time students are 19 or over. All applicants for full-time courses, and for part-time courses of over 15 hours a week, are invited for an interview which is carried out by subject specialist staff. There are draft interview guidelines for staff to help ensure that practice is consistent, but these make no reference to equal opportunities or ways of avoiding bias in interviews. If applicants have indicated on the application form that they may need additional support for the course, the learning support co-ordinator is also involved in the interview. This works well.

36 The college has an effective system for identifying applicants who would like a general guidance interview, and all who have expressed an interest are offered an interview with the college guidance worker. Requests for guidance have grown over the last two years, particularly from adults, and this is placing heavy demands on the guidance worker. The college provides guidance, through its TEC-funded 'passport to guidance' scheme, for those who are unemployed, those working part time or under notice of redundancy, and women seeking to return to study. Over 130 adults received guidance through this scheme last year. The college supplements the scheme so that the service is offered throughout the year. Guidance is offered more systematically to applicants for full-time courses, although on part-time courses the first teaching session includes discussion about the requirements of the course and offers a chance for students to consider its suitability. Enrolment events run smoothly and are well organised. The series of enrolment sessions gives students a good choice of times and days on which to attend.

37 After enrolment, there is an initial assessment of students studying mathematics in order to assign them to appropriate groups. There is some accreditation of prior learning on courses in performing arts, management and business administration.

38 The centrally-organised two-day induction programme for full-time students is thorough and effective. There is a useful student handbook and some course handbooks, given to all full-time students, including those studying GCSE and GCE A level subjects. The student handbook advises students of their rights and responsibilities and students sign a form to confirm that they understand them. Several students spoke clearly about their responsibilities for their own study and for their achievements. Induction for part-time students is conducted by the teaching divisions. Provision ranges from no induction to a comprehensive induction for students on the women returners course. Tutors on part-time courses have a copy of the student handbook and are asked to explain the contents of the handbook to their students.

39 A good range of practical support is offered to students. It includes financial support from access funds and from a TEC scholarship fund. Students are given advice on charities and trusts, and staff help students with applications for student loans and grants. The college has a creche. Information and advice is given to students on accommodation, and there is a confidential counselling service which deals with a wide range of difficulties faced by students. Student services has good liaison with other agencies, so that students, where necessary, can be referred for more specialist advice; for example to hospitals and social services. The lack of sports facilities has been partially overcome by providing students with subsidised passes to the local leisure centre.

40 A cross-college learning support post was created in the college restructuring. The holder is located in the student services division and is responsible for organising support for literacy, numeracy, English for speakers of other languages and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is an effective system for identifying full-time students who have additional support needs, and for assessing their needs, and the college keeps thorough records. The system is less well developed for part-time students. Most learning support is offered in small classes arranged for this purpose rather than as an integral part of mainstream work.

41 All full-time students have a one-hour weekly tutorial with one of their subject tutors. There is no tutorial system for part-time students. The effectiveness of tutorials varies, and there are no cross-college procedures for ensuring the quality and relevance of this work. However, well-structured and supportive tutorials were seen in social care, particularly GNVQ courses in social care, in humanities and social studies, on the women returners course, and in the performing arts. The tutorials for some GCSE and GCE A levels were less satisfactory. There is a

cross-college tutorial co-ordinator who supports the 52 tutorial groups and provides information packs, possible speakers on issues such as health education and applications for higher education, and a suggested calendar for tutorials. All personal tutors are required to keep registers of attendance at tutorials, monitor and follow up absences, provide pastoral and study support, and carry out the termly reviews of students' progress. The tutorial system provides procedures for enabling full-time students to transfer between programmes, although records show that only a few students have done this. The tutorial system is also used to follow up students' absence from classes.

42 All full-time students are developing a record of achievement this year, and reviews of progress are fed into these. Many students spoke positively about their records of achievement, although some found them time consuming and of little benefit. Students are given guidance on how to use records of achievement during interviews for jobs or for entry to higher education, and the format of the records has been adapted to meet the needs of adult students.

43 Work experience is an integral part of the course in most vocational areas. It is not offered to students on GCSE or GCE A level programmes. Individual teaching divisions organise and assess work experience, and over 150 different employers are used. Some students spoke positively about work experience and there were examples of placements leading to students being offered jobs. The college pays careful attention to health, safety and insurance requirements in the conduct of work experience.

44 Students taking humanities, social science and performing arts courses received good advice on careers. Limited advice on opportunities for progression was given to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is a reasonably-stocked careers library and computerised guidance packages are available at several points within the college. The college has a contract with the careers service which includes a specialist careers adviser who contributes to college information events, parents' evenings and tutorials. The careers adviser also gives individual guidance interviews to students. The college guidance worker provides more general and vocational guidance. The services are used most by full-time and younger students. Advice and support on entry to higher education is provided, mainly through the tutorial system. Effective support for students applying for higher education was seen in tutorials for GCE A level and on other humanities and social studies courses. The college invites visiting speakers from higher education and organises trips to careers and higher education conventions. The college celebrates the success of its students by organising an awards ceremony in the town to which a keynote speaker is invited.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

45 Approximately 45 per cent of the sessions inspected had more strengths than weaknesses. Some of the best-quality work was in performing arts and humanities. A significant number of art and design sessions were graded 3 or 4. The following table shows the grades given during the inspection.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Access/higher education		0	2	0	2	0	4
GCE AS/A level		4	6	11	1	0	22
GCSE		0	7	11	1	0	19
GNVQ		0	5	8	3	0	16
NVQ		1	4	4	0	0	9
Basic education		0	1	0	0	0	1
Other: vocational		8	12	17	3	0	40
Total		13	37	51	10	0	111

46 In the best sessions, there were well-developed schemes of work which enabled teaching and learning to be clearly focused. These were supplemented by well-structured assessment schedules, student handbooks and guides. Most students, including the increasing number of mature students, were enthusiastic about their studies, particularly where staff had shared schemes of work with them. In office studies, art and design, the humanities, performing arts and social care, the use of assessment sheets for project briefs helped to involve students in the learning process and also gave them regular information on how they were progressing with their studies.

47 In most areas of work, the quality of teaching was at least satisfactory and there was evidence of a wide variety of teaching methods. However, there were few examples of imaginative work except in performing arts. In science and caring, the teaching was competent but the methods employed made the sessions slow. Some teachers made effective use of audio-visual aids. Others struggled to make best use of poor-quality whiteboards.

48 In secretarial and office studies, there were well-organised programmes of study which largely met the requirements of the awarding bodies. In the stronger sessions students were regularly informed of their progress and schemes of work were shared with them. Classroom relations between staff and students were good. Some of the work in office studies consisted of students listening to teachers and taking notes. Flexible forms of learning included the use of an open office and an NVQ workshop. The workshop did not provide a sufficiently realistic simulated work environment and the college is addressing this.

49 In business studies, the teaching was well prepared and well organised. Staff were preparing new materials for work in GNVQ, in some cases without adequate support. Question and answer techniques were used extensively and successfully in many sessions. Generally, teaching and the promotion of learning was effective, and there were examples of the use of innovative and up-to-date teaching materials.

50 In art and design, the quality of learning was constrained by some inadequate teaching and ineffective management. Studio work on a one-to-one basis was generally relevant and effective, but staff failed to recognise that some students were unfamiliar with studio teaching conventions. These difficulties were further compounded by combining groups of different levels without any clearly-defined lesson structure. An example was observed of a combined GNVQ/foundation lesson where students were briefed on a design project. The studio accommodation did not provide an appropriate setting for the work; the presentation lacked structure and failed to hold students' attention.

51 Teaching and the promotion of learning in the performing arts was of high quality. A wide variety of stimulating and innovative work generated interest and enthusiasm. Large group productions used individual skills in an integrated way, building naturally through the life of the courses. There was a clear link between art and society in many of the projects, productions and assignments chosen, and many provided opportunities for students to develop core skills. All assignments and projects had clear aims and objectives which students understood and were able to relate to outcomes and forms of assessment. In many cases, students played a leading role in the learning sessions. For example, in one session, two students were leading group activities while others acted as 'shadow' directors to the tutor in preparation for a simulated audition.

52 The quality of teaching in science was generally satisfactory, although teachers employed a limited range of teaching styles and there was little use of teaching aids. Students appeared to enjoy their work and relationships between staff and students were good. The standard of work was modest and the pace of many lessons was slow and undemanding. A major strength was the production of GCE A level modular science booklets and good GCSE handouts. Students were encouraged to keep up to date through the use of science journals which teachers provided for them, and there were good examples of students referring to topical events.

53 Mathematics teaching was appropriate in the majority of GCSE classes. Students received high-quality, paper-based materials, but there was a lack of variety in methods of teaching and learning. GCE A level students suffered from the lack of opportunity to work together in small groups. There were instances of the effective teaching of core skills, particularly the teaching of numeracy on GNVQ courses.

54 Most students of modern languages were adults. They enjoyed a wide variety of classroom activities, mainly focused on oral skills, which

included working in pairs and in small groups, and taking part in competitions and chorus work. They worked well together in the supportive atmosphere created by teachers. Every class demonstrated a sense of group identity and a willingness to learn. In the more advanced classes, interesting and intellectually-challenging discussions and presentations took place. In one class, role play in German was focused on business activities. In another, students with learning difficulties exchanged telephone numbers in a foreign language. Insufficient use was made of audio-visual facilities such as video, overhead projectors, satellite television, laboratories and information technology.

55 In engineering, teachers provided students with a well-structured and disciplined framework for learning. Lecturers used a variety of techniques to reinforce well-produced, printed materials. Samples and models were used in classes and good use was made of overhead projectors. Class feedback was encouraged and the interest of students was maintained. Students spoke highly of the teachers.

56 In health and social care, there were many examples of effective teaching which included opportunities for individual and group work. Students of all ages responded well. In one outstanding session, the teacher used group activities with particular success to engage students' enthusiasm in exploring disability. In other sessions teachers played too dominant a role or the pace of work was too slow. Generally, relationships between staff and students were good and this helped to motivate students. The courses were supported by well-organised work experience.

57 Humanities sessions were well planned, well taught and challenging. Teachers used a good range of teaching techniques. Classes were lively and enthusiastic. The work was paced effectively and guided by well-developed schemes which allowed for different learning needs and different forms of course delivery. Good use was made of audio-visual aids, question and answer techniques, and group work. The teaching of some part-time staff was less effective. Students were not given as much opportunity to contribute to classes or to engage in discussion and this adversely affected standards of achievement.

58 Support for students with learning difficulties was provided in separate classes. The quality of teaching and learning in many of these classes was unsatisfactory because little or no account was taken of different levels of ability within the group. Materials were often found to be inappropriate to the learning needs of students. The styles of teaching encouraged dependence on the teacher. There was no work in pairs or in small groups and opportunities for students to work on their own were limited. Interaction between students was minimal, and some of the concepts introduced by teachers were inappropriate given students' levels of understanding. The emphasis on writing and drawing had many students in difficulties. Many sessions lacked clear aims and focus and teachers were easily sidetracked. Some of the teaching of students with

learning difficulties and/or disabilities in mainstream classes in languages and performing arts was more effective. Students' needs were assessed effectively and the quality of support was good.

59 The quality of teachers' marking of students' work varied from subject to subject. Written work in humanities was thoroughly marked and the comments made by tutors were good at showing students where they were making relevant points, where spelling or syntax was poor, and how the assignment could be improved. Marking in business studies was also good at pointing out strengths and weaknesses: students found tutors' comments useful and constructive, and they appreciated the quick return of their work. In contrast there were deficiencies in the marking of work in science subjects. There was no agreed policy on setting and returning work, and there were wide variations in the practice of individual tutors, some of whom offered few comments on students' work.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

60 Most students enjoyed their studies and many felt they were making good progress. The college had the distinction of producing the BTEC student of the year for 1993. Over 85 per cent of the students who responded to a recent student-satisfaction survey said they would recommend the college to their friends. However, a significant number of students taking art and design expressed reservations about their experience.

61 In most curriculum areas, students were acquiring relevant skills and developing a thorough understanding of their subjects. The skills and techniques used by students in performing arts closely approached professional standards. They tackled with enthusiasm such diverse activities as performing modern dance, interpreting Shakespeare's sonnets, and imitating the movements of insects. They had highly-developed communication and teamwork skills. They were articulate and eager to share their successes and problems with each other. In the field of social care there was some outstanding project work for the BTEC national diploma in health and social care. In business studies, students showed that they had developed a thorough understanding of their subjects. They produced excellent portfolios. In modern languages, students worked well together to practise and improve their command of the languages they were learning.

62 There was some evidence of less satisfactory achievement. Most art and design students had poorly-developed spoken language skills and in some humanities assignments students' general writing skills were not up to standard.

63 Practical work was generally sound. There was some variation in the attention paid to health and safety. In engineering, workshops were well conducted with a great emphasis on safety and good practice. In science, students did not have copies of the safety policy or of safety procedure; and in GCE A level classes few students wore laboratory coats.

64 The college has good success rates for students entered in vocational course examinations. The college failed to submit data for the 1994 national tables prepared by the Department for Education. Information provided by the college at the time of the inspection indicated that, in 1994, 87 per cent of the 54 students aged 16-18 in their final year of BTEC national courses achieved their qualification. This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the sector on this performance measure.

65 In business studies there was a 97 per cent pass rate for the 31 students studying for the full-time BTEC national diploma in business and finance, and 96 per cent for the 24 part-time students on the national certificate course. In the office studies courses, there were also high pass rates. In almost all the typewriting and wordprocessing courses, 85 per cent or more of the entrants achieved a pass, and a high proportion achieved a distinction. The 10 students on the BTEC national diploma in care and all 16 students on the first year of the new GNVQ course in health and social care passed their courses. On some engineering courses, all the students sitting the examinations passed, though in most courses the numbers were small. Long-term unemployed students on welding courses regularly achieved standards higher than those required for their NVQs. Few of the part-time students of modern languages entered for an examination. The college should review the opportunities available for such students to gain an external qualification.

66 There has been a steady improvement in GCE A level performance over the last three years. In 1994, there were good results in many of the subjects. Students aged 16-18 entered for GCE A/AS level examinations in 1993-94 scored, on average, 4.4 points per entry. This places the college among the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. The overall pass rate for students of all ages at the college in 1994 was 82 per cent which is well above the provisional pass rate of 68 per cent for all general further education and tertiary colleges. Over the last three years, an 80 per cent pass rate or higher has been achieved by students at the college in an increasing number of subjects.

67 Analysis by the Advanced Level Information System shows that students at the college are achieving good GCE A level results in relation to their entry qualifications in English, psychology, government and politics, law, and geography. Results in sociology and business studies were at a lower level than was predicted by the students' performance on their GCSE courses.

68 The pass rate in some GCE A level subjects was low. In 1994, only three of the eight candidates for chemistry passed their examination. In sociology, 22 of 41 candidates passed, and in business studies 12 of the 22 candidates.

69 GCSE examinations results in 1994 were good, and better than in previous years. The overall pass rate for the college was 65 per cent. This compares with a 1993 average pass rate of about 50 per cent for all general further education and tertiary colleges. Seventy-eight per cent of the 85 psychology students passed the examinations. In English, there were 93 entrants and a 68 per cent pass rate; in mathematics, 98 candidates and a 58 per cent pass rate. Less satisfactory results were obtained in biology where 11 candidates entered the examination and only five passed.

70 The recording of students' progress was of variable quality. In the caring courses, achievement was well documented, but in science, there were many gaps in some of the records of students' marks. The recording of the progress of students with learning difficulties was poor. In art and design, and in performing arts, staff did not take the opportunity to make visual records of the achievements of students. The recording of students' work on slides or video would help in monitoring progress. Lasting collections of practical work would prove useful aids for teaching and learning in the future.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

71 Staff are strongly committed to ensuring quality in all aspects of work. However, the college's strategy for setting standards and targets and for monitoring them is only partly formed. There has been a healthy and vigorous debate about the level at which standards and targets should be pitched. A set of college-wide standards has been published and small groups have started to adopt these to their own areas. Little thought has yet been given to procedures for overall monitoring and co-ordination of standards.

72 Quality monitoring involves the use of a variety of performance indicators. Corporation members receive statistics on examination pass rates. The academic board also receives and discusses examination results. The criteria used to evaluate the level of examination success have not been formally agreed, though national figures are increasingly being used as benchmarks. The college has information on student destinations for all its courses. A student-satisfaction survey was undertaken last year to elicit students' perceptions of quality. However, the results were of limited value because the questions were badly framed and the response rate was only 22 per cent.

73 Quality monitoring at programme and course level varies in its extent and effectiveness. Course teams generally adopt their own approach to evaluating courses and monitoring students' progress and there is a lack of systematic quality assurance. Although teaching staff made it their business to monitor the performance of individual students, they rarely made regular attempts to find out their students' views of the course, or of the teaching they were receiving. The new quality policy addresses the need for more thorough and consistent procedures at course level.

74 Staff-development activities are clearly defined and records of the number of events attended by staff are given in the annual report on staff development. Priorities for staff development are not sufficiently linked to the college's strategic plan, to information from staff appraisal, to evaluation of the success of previous staff-development activities, or to the quality assurance process. Spending on staff development is approximately £36,500, which represents 0.7 per cent of the college budget. Staff appraisal has just been introduced at the level of deputy principal and head of division, and it is planned to extend the scheme to all staff by September 1995. Appraisal procedures and procedures for the induction of new staff are well documented.

75 The college charter is a substantial reference document incorporating a great deal of detailed information as well as the policies for health and safety and for equal opportunities. Two hundred copies have been produced, given to staff and sent to employers and to the public library. Copies are also held in the college library and in the student services unit, but they are not on display, and many students spoken to by inspectors were not aware of the charter. The college also publishes a student handbook which contains the college contract and sets out a number of college procedures.

RESOURCES

Staffing

76 Of the college's teaching staff about 71 are full time and about 215 part time. Full-time staff account for about 65 per cent of teaching hours. Teaching staff are appropriately qualified. Some 60 per cent of teachers have a teaching qualification. In art and design, this figure is about 40 per cent although many teachers are also part-time professionals. Many teachers, have recent professional experience in vocational areas such as caring, business studies, art and design, and science. About 55 staff are registered for Training and Development Lead Body awards, and over half of them have now completed the course.

77 Generally staff are keen and conscientious, have appropriate teaching skills, and are well prepared for classes. An overdependence on part-time staff in the areas of caring and business studies has led to difficulties in managing and integrating teaching teams, but the college has plans for full-time appointments in these areas.

78 Half the college's middle managers are women, but there are no full-time women science teachers, and there is no woman on the senior management team.

79 In most cases, learning is adequately supported by competent technical, administrative and clerical staff. Two exceptions to this are the inadequate support for information technology, and the lack of technical support available in the language laboratories during the evening.

80 The college has appointed educational administrative officers for each division in order to give teaching staff more time to teach. They relieve professionals of the routine chores of checking timetables, contracts and registers.

81 The head of resources has an overlapping role with the head of administration and finance in managing the support systems across the college. The two work together in providing college information services. They also have responsibility for the administration of examinations and a limited personnel function. Data on the age, gender and qualifications of staff are accessible from the newly-installed computerised record system. The college has a contract with the local education authority for the management of its payroll, and support for certain personnel functions.

Equipment/learning resources

82 The college's policy on the procurement of equipment requires heads of divisions to bid for resources as part of the strategic planning process. The annual report for 1993-94 details the range of purchases made in that year. All textbooks are ordered centrally through the library. There is tight control on consumables: for example, all paper is stored and issued centrally. Full-time students make a refundable deposit of £7.50 against library and text books, and a £10 charge is levied against consumables.

83 The quantity and quality of equipment, classroom furniture and teaching aids are generally satisfactory. The performing arts department has a well-equipped studio and theatre. In business and administration, there are new computers and electronic typewriters. For mathematics students there is a good supply of study guides, some produced within the college. However, the physics laboratory has dated equipment, and there is little new equipment in the mechanical workshops.

84 The college library has recently been expanded through the conversion of a former spinning shed. There is now sufficient space to cater for students' needs, including opportunities for group work, private study and the use of computers. However, the library staff have inadequate office and storage space. Library opening hours in term time are good, and the library is also open during the vacation. The newly-introduced computerised catalogue is easy to use, and to keep up to date. It is estimated to save about £2,000 per annum on the library budget. Staffing for the library is generally adequate, but the tutor librarian carries heavy responsibilities, which include information technology, audio-visual aids, and reprographics, as well as teaching duties. The library has a good range of periodicals but the quality of the bookstock is variable. It is good in politics and engineering, but improvements are needed in business studies, modern languages, and science, as well as in the general reference section. There is a good range of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases, and these are used effectively.

85 All full-time students are given the opportunity, as part of their optional studies, to become computer literate and to gain information technology qualifications. Students have access to information technology equipment in five rooms and the library. Over the whole college, the ratio of computer workstations to full-time students is about 20:1. Although many students have timetabled access to computers, this provision does not fully meet the requirements of all. Many of the rooms with computers are too heavily timetabled for students to drop in when they wish, and incompatibility between computer operating systems and packages further restricts the flexibility of use. The only genuinely open-access area for students is the library. The information technology technicians are too few to cope with both the academic and administrative systems, and some require further training. The college has recognised some of these deficiencies in its strategic plan.

Accommodation

86 The college's main accommodation consists of four blocks of buildings, built between 1956 and 1973, which stand on a compact freehold site. In addition the college leases another building 100 metres away, and owns a nearby house and a disused eight-acre quarry, which is partly used as a staff and student car park.

87 Since the spring of 1994, a new resources division, staffed by an enthusiastic management team, has been operating a fully-centralised system for the control of accommodation. The college's strategic and operational plans recognise the need to modify and improve accommodation in response to its changing markets. These plans are supported by an accommodation strategy document covering, for example, the suitability and condition of all buildings, space utilisation, running costs, and access for those with disabilities. In addition, since its incorporation, the college has progressively implemented a maintenance programme which is planned to run to 1998. For this the college contracts with the county council's property services department. The college has an effective policy for energy control.

88 Improvements indicated by the recent space-utilisation survey are now being systematically addressed by the resources division. Room-by-room schedules, held by the head of resources, document both occupancy and furniture, and these records are checked and updated three times a year. Staff are now using accommodation more flexibly.

89 The college has responded to the changing nature of its course provision over the past two years by making good use of areas previously underutilised or surplus to requirements. For example: the motor vehicle workshop has been converted to an electrical installation workshop; a mathematics workshop is now used for NVQs; three information technology workshops have been created from general purpose rooms; and a college theatre has been created from the main hall. The art and

design centre moved into an old carpet technology workshop in September 1994. However, despite the considerable efforts of all of the staff concerned, the accommodation was not fully ready for its new functions, and teaching and learning were adversely affected.

90 The size and layout of accommodation are generally appropriate for the courses and programmes of study. However, there is a lack of soundproofing in the music studio, inadequate facilities for design and set storage, and no group teaching area in the mathematics workshop. The needs of students with restricted mobility are not fully met. For example, there is no lift to the second floor of the block which houses science and mathematics. However, students with restricted mobility commented favourably on the positive and quick response of the college to suggestions they made for improvements.

91 The external fabric of the building is generally satisfactory, subject to some necessary repairs to one block, planned for summer 1995. A rolling programme of internal refurbishment, including decoration and carpeting, is well under way, and some defects commented on at the beginning of the inspection, for example poorly-sited whiteboards, have been remedied. The college often uses its own staff for minor maintenance and refurbishment. Generally, the college is clean and tidy.

92 The college is aware of the demands which further planned growth will make on accommodation. It is considering the extension of refectory facilities and expansion of the creche, and has begun to consider its options for rationalisation or better long-term use of all its estate.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

93 The college is making good progress towards the achievement of its strategic priorities. The strengths of the college are:

- its popularity with students
- good examination results at GCE A level and GCSE and in many vocational areas
- the quality of the centralised student services and the general support for students
- effective teaching in most areas of work
- the commitment of members of the corporation
- the effective communication between the corporation and senior management team
- well-developed relations with the local TEC
- good marketing
- appropriately-qualified staff, many of whom have up-to-date industrial experience.

94 If the college is to continue to strengthen its provision and raise standards, it should:

- improve the quality of work in art and design and with students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- develop an effective quality assurance system
- improve the computerised information system
- clarify the roles and responsibilities of some of its committees
- ensure that tutorials are of a consistently high quality
- continue to develop its staff-appraisal programme
- increase the availability of the student charter and publicise it more widely
- improve the college-wide provision of information technology.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at November 1994)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (as at November 1994)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1994)

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

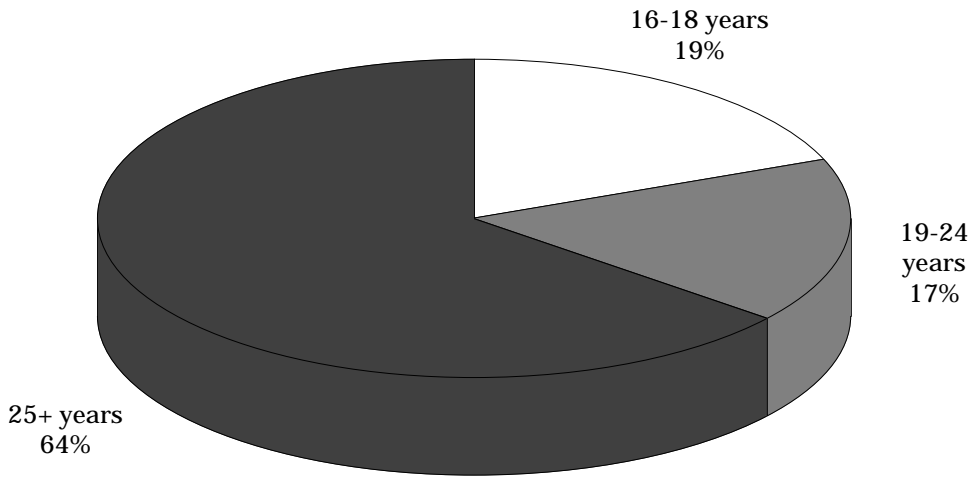
 - 5 Estimated income (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

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

Figure 1

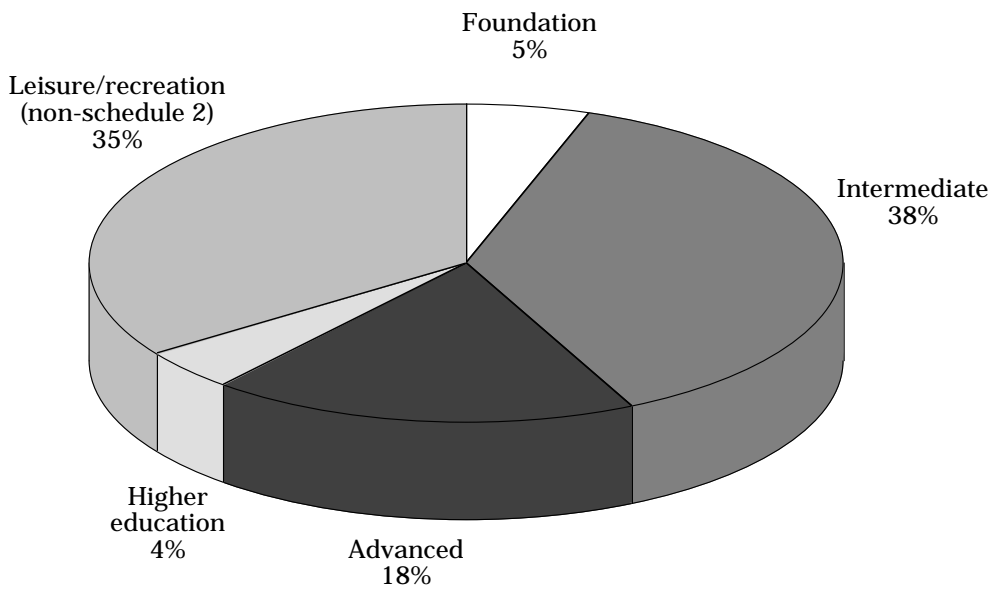
Kidderminster College: percentage enrolments by age (as at November 1994)



Enrolments: 4,643

Figure 2

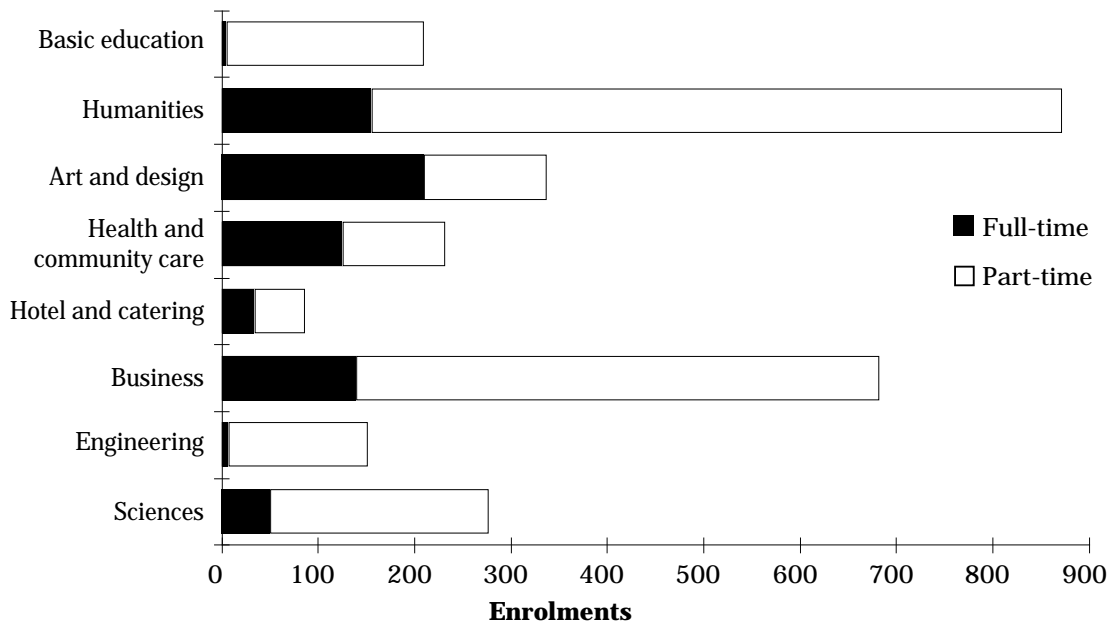
Kidderminster College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at November 1994)



Enrolments: 4,643

Figure 3

**Kidderminster College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area
(as at November 1994)**

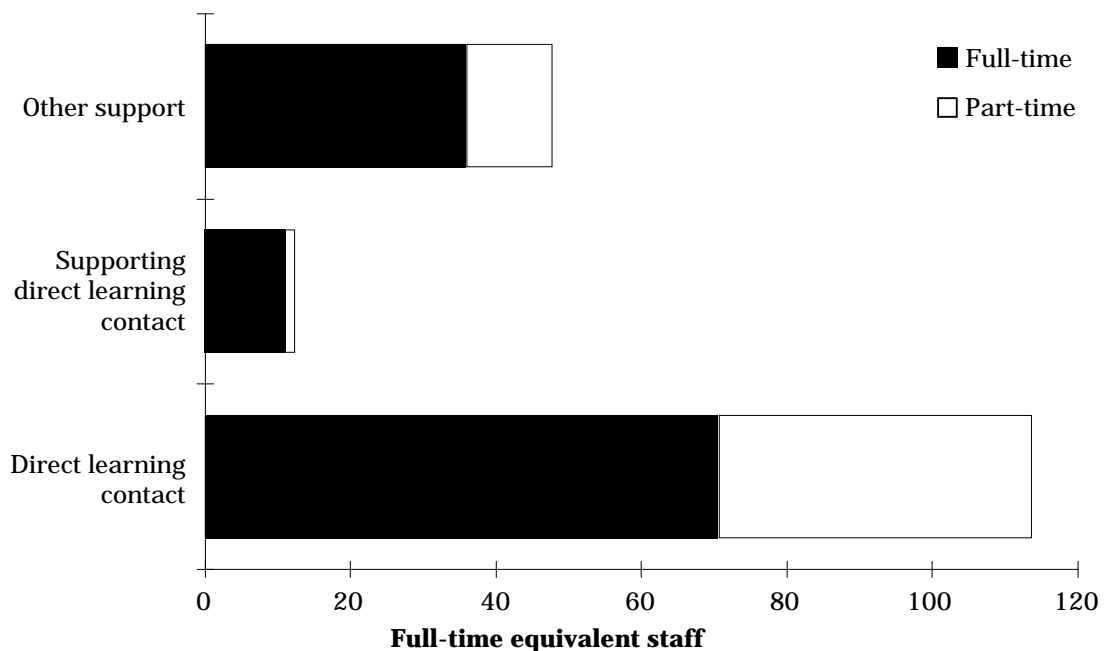


Enrolments: 2,850

Note: this figure excludes 1,773 higher education and recreation enrolments.

Figure 4

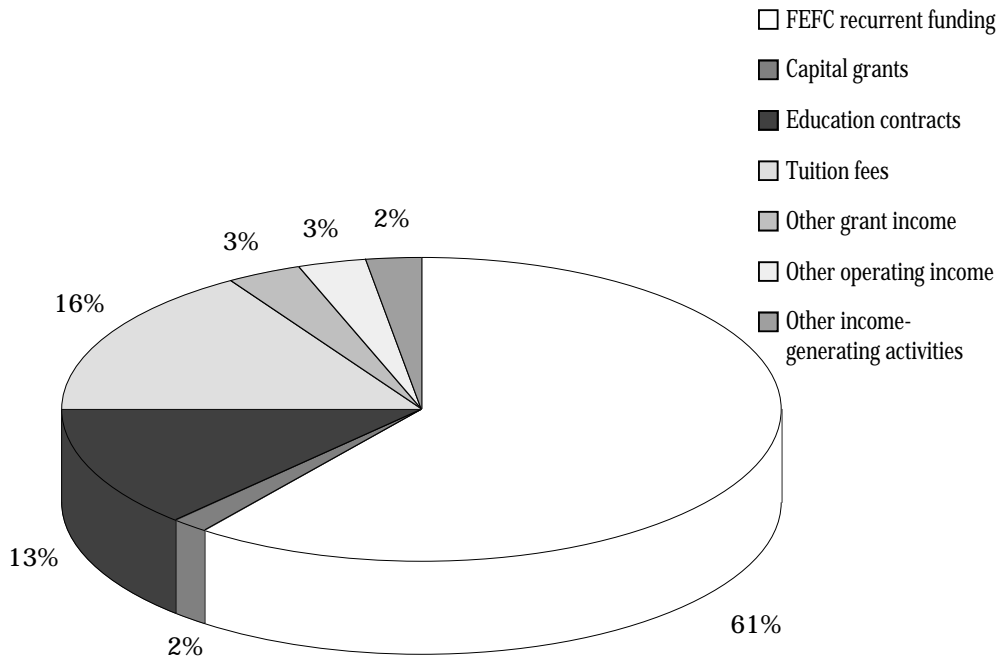
**Kidderminster College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents
(as at November 1994)**



Full-time equivalent staff: 174

Figure 5

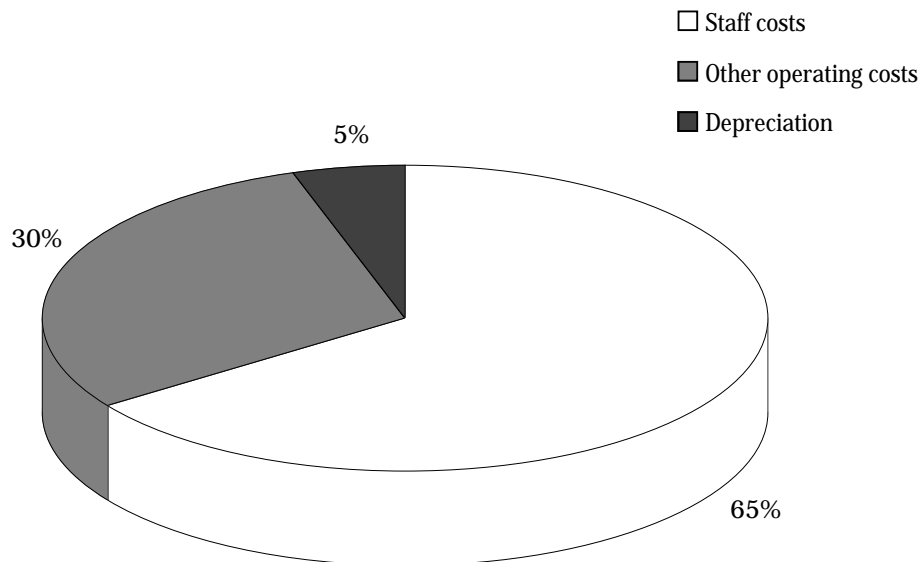
Kidderminster College: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Estimated income: £5,006,000

Figure 6

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



Estimated expenditure: £5,006,000

Note: excluded from the chart is £4,000 interest payable.

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