

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

West Herts College

September 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

By June 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-95

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 107/96

WEST HERTS COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected March 1995-May 1996

Summary

West Herts College offers a wide range of vocational provision from foundation to postgraduate level. It has productive links with schools, higher education, industry and the community. Governors are committed and enthusiastic and bring a range of appropriate expertise. Teaching is generally satisfactory. Students are supported by a comprehensive range of central services. The arrangements for monitoring courses are effective. The college has extensive resources to support learning, including a well-stocked library and modern computer facilities. The college needs to address the following issues: the variation in practice and standards of achievement between and within teaching faculties; the lack of arrangements to monitor teaching quality; the varied success of students in achieving vocational and general education qualifications; the lack of effective methods for evaluating the academic performance of the college; the procedures for monitoring attendance; the lack of performance targets, standards and indicators; and the poor standard of some accommodation.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Computing, mathematics and science	3	Health and community care, hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Engineering	3	Art and design	3
Business studies and administration	3	Media production	3
Management and professional studies	2	Humanities	2
Hotel and catering	3	Basic education	3
Leisure and tourism	2		

INTRODUCTION

1 West Herts College was inspected between March 1995 and May 1996. A team of nine inspectors spent a week in the college from 29 April to 3 May 1996. A further 68 inspector days were used to inspect specialist aspects of college provision. Inspectors visited 303 classes, examined students' work and held discussions with governors, staff and students. They also met representatives of the community, including local employers, the Hertfordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and schools and higher education.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 The college was formed on 1 April 1991, as part of the reorganisation of further education in Hertfordshire, by the merger of Cassio College and Watford College, both in Watford, and Dacorum College about 10 miles away in Hemel Hempstead. It is a large general college of further education. Over 70 per cent of its students come from south-west Hertfordshire. About 12 per cent of students are also recruited from north London. There are three other general further education colleges in Hertfordshire.

3 There are 21 local education authorities (LEAs) or grant-maintained secondary schools, all with sixth forms, in the college's catchment area. The proportion of young people staying on in education in Hertfordshire beyond 16 years of age has fallen from 78 per cent in 1993 to 72.5 per cent in 1995. About 25 per cent of school leavers go on to further education. The major provider of higher education in Hertfordshire is the University of Hertfordshire.

4 In the 1991 census, the population of Hertfordshire was recorded as nearly 976,000 and in the Hertfordshire districts of Dacorum and Watford it was 79,326 and 83,376, respectively. The resident minority ethnic population in Watford was about 10 per cent and in Hemel Hempstead it was less than 3 per cent. The largest area of employment within the county is distribution and other services. About a quarter of the population commute to work in London. Manufacturing industries, mainly in aerospace and defence, were major sources of employment in the area but they have recently declined. The forecast for the region suggests a continued move away from manufacturing towards service industries such as business services, finance, media services and telecommunications. Unemployment in Hertfordshire has fallen from its highest level of 9 per cent in 1993 to a figure of 5.4 per cent in February 1996. In Watford the proportion is 5.8 per cent and in Hemel Hempstead it is 4.3 per cent.

5 In the academic year 1995-96, the college estimates that it will achieve about 28,000 enrolments. Of these, 4,600 are full-time students and 23,400 are part-time students. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3 respectively. The curriculum of the college is managed through five faculties: access, science and humanities; business and administration; service industries; technology and computing; and visual communication.

A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The college's mission focuses on developing the potential of individual students.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

6 West Herts College provides a wide range of general education, vocational and recreational courses. It is a responsive college which effectively meets the needs of school leavers, adults and corporate clients drawn from a wide catchment area. National targets for education and training are set out in the strategic plan and communicated to staff through briefings and newsletters. Vocational programmes are offered in all 10 of the Council's programme areas though the numbers of students are small in agriculture and construction. In some areas, for example in advertising, art and design, and publishing and printing, the college's reputation and specialist provision attract students from outside the region and from overseas. Programmes range from foundation level to higher education. There is a wide choice of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) at intermediate and advanced level. At foundation level there is provision in five vocational areas. Currently, there are no foundation courses in health and social care or in art or design.

7 The college offers an extensive range of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects. Most GCE A level subjects are available at the Cassio campus. A more limited choice of subjects is available on other sites. Students on GNVQ advanced programmes have the opportunity to take GCE A levels in addition to their GNVQ programme. Few choose to do so. All full-time students also have the opportunity to retake GCSE English and mathematics. The college has a wide range of provision in modern foreign languages. In addition to languages offered at GCSE and GCE A level, and English as a foreign language, the college offers courses at NVQ levels 1 to 3 in four languages. This provision is available to all students.

8 The college provides for students with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, the specially designed courses for some of these students do not provide sufficient training in vocational areas to enable them to progress to other courses or employment. In some vocational areas, the lack of pre-foundation level provision also limits progression opportunities for these students. There are good links with special schools, social services, private care providers and voluntary services. Work in the local community is developing. It includes literacy programmes for parents in one secondary and three primary schools. There is extensive basic skills and English as a second language provision, involving about 700 students. This provision includes some home based individual tuition. The college has a substantial contract with the LEA to provide leisure learning courses in over 75 centres and has attracted over 14,000 enrolments in 1995-96.

9 Higher education provision includes eight degree courses and nine courses for graduates. Over 200 adult students are enrolled on a full-time access to higher education course which is provided at three of the four main campuses. This course is offered on a part-time basis and it leads to a wide variety of higher education opportunities. There are also specialist access courses in social work, business professions, and art and design. The college is an associate college of the University of Hertfordshire and enjoys a fruitful relationship with the university.

10 The college has not fully met its strategic objective to increase the number of opportunities for students to study when and as they choose. Distance learning is well developed in printing and publishing. About 500 students from the United Kingdom and overseas study a wide range of printing and publishing courses. However, in other curriculum areas there is little distance or open learning. The college has made good progress on a project with a computing company to develop compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database learning resources for NVQ programmes. Such materials have been developed in catering, hairdressing, retailing and motor vehicle engineering.

11 Hertfordshire TEC regards the college as a responsive and effective partner that provides training of a consistently high standard. This year, over 750 students are following TEC-funded programmes, some of which are subcontracted to other colleges. Over 550 young people and 150 adults are being trained in a wide range of vocational areas, including hairdressing, engineering and leisure. There are also about 60 modern apprenticeship trainees. The four Hertfordshire further education colleges co-operate in their dealings with the TEC. In the last two years, the four colleges working as a consortium were awarded nearly £1.1 million from the government's competitiveness fund. This significantly improved computing facilities and other learning resources at the college.

12 There is no central strategy or co-ordination of links with employers and the extent of links with industry is dependent upon faculty or course level initiatives. In most curriculum areas links are effective. Employers provide work experience placements and some have helped to develop new courses, for example, a printing and publishing course for graduates. The college has a significant amount of enterprise work including NVQ management training, short courses for industry, and computer training delivered at four sites outside the region under franchise to other providers.

13 The college has a good knowledge of its local and wider markets and it employs an appropriate range of marketing activities. The college holds open events and taster days. Recently, letters were sent to the homes of 6,800 local school pupils inviting them to sample college courses during the half-term holiday. Over 700 took the opportunity to do so. Overseas marketing is conducted through overseas agents, all of whom are past students. The leisure learning brochure is delivered to 130,000 homes and a quarterly newsletter is sent to local employers. A bus network has

been established which provides free transport for about 1,000 students. Most publicity material is attractively produced, but the full-time course brochure contains little information about life at college and only brief details of each course. On occasions, the college marketing organisation is slow to respond to faculty needs and some faculties take action without central approval or co-ordination. The college lacks a detailed marketing plan linked to strategic objectives.

14 The college generally enjoys good relationships with local schools. The college has some active curriculum links. For example, 40 pupils following GNVQ intermediate courses at school take part of their programme at college. The college also has an innovative link with Francis Combe School involving adult students who join school pupils in their academic classes at the school.

15 International links exist in many vocational areas. This has resulted in some interesting initiatives: for example, the college and Negocia, an educational establishment of the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry, jointly certificate a work experience exchange.

16 A programme of enrichment activities is scheduled for Wednesday afternoons. This offers full-time students an opportunity to participate in a range of sports and other activities. Take up is relatively low. Some students use the programme to achieve additional awards, for example, coaching and sports leaders awards for leisure students. In some curriculum areas, students organise events for the community as part of their course. For example, a World War Two memorabilia exhibition arranged by health and social care students was attended by over 100 elderly people.

17 The equal opportunities policy has recently been reviewed and updated. The post of equal opportunities co-ordinator has been discontinued and the revised policy will be monitored by an equal opportunities implementation group. Greater awareness has been achieved through staff development, newsletters and other staff communication. However, the college recognises that improvements can be made and will require faculties to prepare action plans for the promotion of equal opportunities in all aspects of their work.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

18 The college benefits from the expertise, commitment and enthusiasm of governors. There are currently fifteen corporation members including the principal. Seven are independent members, one is a nominee of Hertfordshire TEC, three are co-opted, and there are two staff members and one student member. Members have useful experience of business, personnel management, law, accountancy, higher education and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Members work effectively together and with senior management. The corporation has established a register of members' interests and agreed a code of conduct. Records of

the corporation's meetings are of a high standard. The effectiveness of the corporation has been improved by regular workshop meetings at which governors work with senior managers from the college.

19 The corporation has devoted much of its time to working through the changes arising from merger and incorporation. There has been little evaluation of the curriculum or students' achievements. The corporation is keen to establish effective methods for monitoring and evaluating the academic performance of the college. It has established a strategic working group, which includes senior managers, to consider the future direction of the college.

20 The college strategic plan is clearly presented and identifies tasks related to each strategic objective. The progress made towards the achievement of the strategic plan's objectives is reviewed annually by senior management. At faculty level, development plans record faculty strategic aims and objectives for the year. These contain clear targets for future student numbers and income but other objectives, for example, those on marketing and curriculum development, do not have well-developed criteria for measuring achievement. There is no clear relationship between the objectives and tasks in the faculty and college plans. The faculty development plans do not indicate how strategic objectives will be implemented.

21 The definition and use of common standards of performance and associated measures for assessing the success of the faculties and units in meeting targets is not well developed. Through an annual planning cycle targets for enrolment and growth are agreed for each faculty and unit, and subsequently, monitored by senior management. However, other measures of performance such as students' retention rates, attendance and students' destinations are not clearly defined or measured. At the time of the inspection, reliable data on these aspects of students' achievements were not available. The current system of appraisal does not include assessment of each manager's performance against measurable objectives to provide supporting evidence of how far organisational goals have been achieved. It is difficult, therefore, for governors and management to evaluate the success of the college in meeting its objectives.

22 Many teaching staff are unclear about the overall objectives of the college, its targets and the criteria for judging success. Senior management has recognised the difficulties of communicating decisions effectively in a large organisation with many managers, several campuses and many working groups and committees. In May 1995, the college commissioned The Industrial Society to survey the views of all full-time and part-time staff on internal communication. This provided substantial evidence which confirmed the perception of senior management that existing communication channels in the college were not working well. In response to this, a system of team briefings by senior managers to staff has been

introduced. This has been well received by some support staff. At campus level, internal newsletters have been developed to improve the flow of communication. Faculties have also reviewed their arrangements for briefing staff.

23 The arrangements for managing the curriculum and staff vary across five large faculties. Each faculty has considerable autonomy in how it manages the curriculum and resources. At the time of merger in 1991, broad terms of reference for senior faculty staff such as deans and associate deans were defined. Whilst some elements are common, each faculty has adapted the line management system to meet its own requirements. This has given faculties scope for curriculum innovation in meeting the needs of the different communities served by the college. However, in some cases, it has constrained the development of college policies and procedures to meet the needs of particular groups. For example, there is not yet an agreed college policy or set of strategic objectives for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

24 The success with which courses are managed varies across the faculties and divisions. In some areas, for example, health and social care, there is good teamwork across different campuses to ensure consistency in standards of teaching and assessment and effective deployment of teaching staff. Course tutors have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. In other curriculum areas, for example, some programmes in business and art and design, teams on different campuses teaching the same course or similar material work independently of each other. This has led to the use of different assessment materials with little attempt to share good practice or to ensure consistency of assessment standards.

25 There is a well-developed formal structure of committees, including the academic board, its subcommittees and the faculty boards, which facilitates critical debate. For example, the academic board has critically evaluated the college's equal opportunities policy and has taken an initiative in developing an environmental policy. The academic board has delegated its responsibility for the oversight of examinations and assessment to the faculty boards. The extent to which faculties have developed methods for presenting and analysing examination results and other aspects of students' achievements varies. In some faculties, there is little evidence of a close examination of pass and retention rates against either college or national standards.

26 The college uses a range of central and faculty-based computer systems to support management information and administration. A central student records system is being developed. Currently, information on students' enrolments, withdrawal from courses, achievements and destinations are recorded. The quality and availability of information on retention, students' achievements and destinations is poor.

27 Summaries of the college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding per unit is £19.24 in 1995-96. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges in 1995-96 is £17.84 per unit. The corporation has a clear financial management strategy. The allocation of budgets for staffing and consumable items is based on a formula which takes account of the number of students. It is clearly understood by the appropriate staff. The college intends to extend the delegation of budgets to include income and staffing costs and to measure the performance of faculties in relation to the budget they receive. A training programme is planned to support the implementation of this new system.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

28 Most pre-course information for prospective students is informative and helpful. However, there are a few examples where the language used is difficult for 16 year olds to understand. Liaison with local schools is generally effective and successful. The marketing section responds promptly and helpfully to queries from schools but a minority of schools do not routinely invite the college to their careers events. Student services staff attend local careers conventions and the college holds well-attended open days and taster days to enable prospective students to receive full information about the college and its courses before making their choices.

29 Procedures for the admission of students are being reviewed. Currently, students make their initial application to a central admissions office and faculties are responsible for dealing with the applications. The new procedures are designed to ensure that students who are unsure about their choices are referred to guidance officers rather than to faculty staff. The majority of full-time students are interviewed before being offered a place on a course. Students find the interviews informative and helpful. For a minority of courses, instead of interviews, students are invited to attend information sessions. Students did not always find these provided them with sufficient information about the courses. A survey of students who left their courses early shows that the majority left because the course was not right for them. Procedures to enable students to review their choice of course and, following consultation, to change course are generally effective. Although accreditation of prior learning is underdeveloped in most curriculum areas, there is some good practice, for example, in the service industries faculty.

30 Enrolment runs smoothly for the majority of students. Induction is effective in introducing students to the college and their courses and in enabling them to get to know one another. An important part of induction is the introduction and discussion of the college charter and the learning agreement so that students are aware of their rights and responsibilities. There is no formal complaints procedure. An introduction to student services also forms part of induction. All full-time students are assessed to ascertain their literacy and numeracy needs. Students are receptive to the

assessment which is well adapted to each course and which is introduced sensitively. The assessment is also available to part-time students. Students have been given help with either communication or numeracy in response to identified needs.

31 Student services provides comprehensive and valued support to tutors and students. The director of student services co-ordinates a team comprising a co-ordinator for each campus, and staff specialising in course and careers guidance, counselling, accommodation, financial and medical advice. There are student services offices on each of the four main campuses which house all the services provided. The offices are not all well located; one is on the first floor and therefore difficult to reach for students who use wheelchairs. On two sites, there is inappropriate accommodation for the counsellor who has to share an office with guidance workers. There is insufficient administrative support to ensure that staff are always available to help students with their enquiries. Tutors can draw on the resources of student services to assist them in tutorials if they wish to do so. Student services have good links with a wide range of specialist external agencies. The counselling service is fully used and valued. Although established as a service for students, it is used by staff as well as students.

32 Students' experience of tutorials varies between and within faculties. There are no formal procedures for monitoring tutorials to ensure that students receive a consistent standard of support. The faculty of access, science and humanities has detailed tutorial recording and reporting procedures based on the college tutorial policy. Procedures in the other faculties are less comprehensive and less helpful to tutors. In all faculties, there is evidence of effective tutorial work; tutors are aware of students' needs, regularly monitor and review their progress, and organise relevant group activities, often drawing on the expertise of staff from student services. Tutorial support for access to higher education students is comprehensive, of a high standard and much appreciated by students. However, on some courses, there is no scheme of work for weekly tutorials and on other courses, where guidelines are not followed, tutorials are held irregularly or the time is used inappropriately.

33 Guidelines for monitoring attendance are inadequate and are not consistently followed. On some courses, attendance is carefully checked and procedures to follow up absences are clear to tutors as well as students and are enforced. There are many courses where registers are not checked regularly or sufficiently thoroughly and attendance problems are not addressed promptly. There are no procedures to monitor attendance centrally. Punctuality on some courses is also poor and tutors do not consistently address the problem with students.

34 Reporting procedures vary between courses. Parents of 16 to 19 year olds on some courses receive helpful regular reports and are invited to parents' evenings. On other courses parents are only contacted when a

problem arises. Employers generally receive useful reports on students, though again practice varies between courses. Tutors monitor students' progress and, in general, maintain records carefully. Students on many courses are involved in setting and reviewing their own objectives. Each faculty has participated in a pilot scheme to enable students to maintain or begin a national record of achievement. This was successful for the majority of 16 to 19 year olds but not for a group of older students. Other reporting procedures vary between courses.

35 Liaison with students' previous schools and colleges identified over 300 students in need of specialist or individual support. The college has provided a broad range of support linked to students' academic or vocational programmes. Students appreciate the help that is provided.

36 Students benefit from good careers guidance. They receive help through written guidance leaflets and a series of presentations by guidance advisers and careers officers in preparing curricula vitae and applications for higher education or employment and in developing interview skills. A wide range of careers information is available in student services offices and in the library. College information on destinations of previous students is insufficient to enable current students to use it to inform their own choices. Students on higher education courses benefit from the specialist knowledge of their course tutors.

37 The students' union is well supported by the college. There are three sabbatical officers who meet weekly with student services co-ordinators. The union president represents student opinion as a member of the corporation and academic board. Evening social activities featuring rock bands are organised on one site. A thriving International Friendship Society organises weekly theme evenings which regularly attract over 80 students, a third of whom are from the United Kingdom. The union sponsors clubs in response to suggestions from the student body, including the Christian union, a Muslim group, dramatic and photographic groups and a women's discussion forum. The college employs youth workers on one site and liaises with the county youth service on other sites to provide lunchtime activities and facilities for students.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

38 Of the 303 sessions inspected, 56 per cent had strengths which outweighed the weaknesses. Under 10 per cent of the sessions had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. The grades awarded to the sessions inspected are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		2	16	9	7	1	35
GCSE		1	5	4	2	0	12
GNVQ		7	21	20	4	0	52
NVQ		11	30	20	7	0	68
Other*		21	56	52	7	0	136
Total		42	128	105	27	1	303

* includes other vocational, such as basic design, copywriting, wordprocessing and professional courses, access to further education and higher education, and basic education.

39 The average level of attendance observed at the sessions inspected was 68 per cent. The average attendance on individual programmes varied and the attendance in the GCSE classes observed was very low.

40 In science, the quality of teaching is varied. In the better lessons, teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching methods and students are given sufficient opportunity to work by themselves. In the poorer lessons, teachers fail to check that students understand what they are being taught. A significant proportion of mathematics teaching takes place in workshops where students work on their own using specially designed resources. This approach suits access to higher education students and GCE A level students respond well to this method of teaching but the work is not always appropriately demanding for all students. Some GCSE students do not have enough opportunity to work with other students in groups. Computing students do not always have sufficient time to work on their own. Teachers of computing communicate clearly to students the deadlines for submitting assignments and the criteria for assessment.

41 In engineering, some schemes of work are not sufficiently detailed. Teachers do not always use a suitable variety of teaching methods. In theory classes, students spend too much time taking dictated notes or copying from the board. Teachers do not make enough use of visual aids to engage students' interest in their learning. Students show more enthusiasm for their studies in practical classes, but, in general, insufficient use is made of practical facilities to illustrate theory. In one practical electronics class students were engaged in a variety of exercises that allowed them to acquire skills in assembling and testing electronic circuits. Each student worked at an appropriate pace and produced a written report on the exercise they had undertaken. In some cases, teachers do not provide enough comments on students' marked work to help them improve their performance. There is insufficient use of information technology in the teaching of engineering.

42 Business studies programmes are generally well planned. Visiting speakers and visits to external organisations are used effectively to provide

students with relevant examples of vocational practice. In some lessons teachers do not check that students understand the subject being studied. Students are not always told clearly the criteria which are used for grading work but students' work is marked thoroughly and teachers provide helpful comments on how students can improve their work. Teachers of business administration use appropriate teaching methods. Students have opportunities to work on their own, using well-produced packs of resource materials. In some business administration lessons the pace of work is too slow. Students' work is generally marked carefully and returned promptly with useful comments.

43 Teaching on management and professional courses is of good quality. Case studies, examination questions from past papers, assignments and project work are used to provide interesting and effective opportunities for students to acquire relevant knowledge and skills. For example, higher national certificate students worked in small groups and competed to produce the best plan for a European business venture. In a few cases teachers present their material poorly. Several classes are small and this limits the range of teaching methods which can be used. Students are kept well informed about their progress.

44 Most classes in catering are well planned and managed. Teachers successfully encourage students to use their work experience and prior knowledge in their learning. Realistic work environments are used effectively to develop students' skills in working as part of a team and in meeting production standards and targets. However, some students are not clear about the structure of the GNVQ course, the units to be studied, the options available and the requirements for the achievement of a qualification. In a minority of classes schemes of work lack adequate detail, lessons are not well prepared, and the teaching is not demanding enough. Most students fully understand the procedures for assessment and completion of their portfolios. Whilst teachers' oral comments on students' work are helpful, written comments are poor and give little guidance on how students can improve their work.

45 In leisure and tourism, teachers vary their teaching methods to suit the different lengths of teaching sessions but they do not take sufficient account of students' differing abilities. Some schemes of work lack sufficient detail. Students have good opportunities for work experience, for appropriate outside visits and for taking part in a range of relevant sports. Students' progress is monitored effectively and students are involved in setting their own learning objectives. Assignment work is set at an appropriate standard and marked work is generally returned promptly with constructive comments. However, the setting of assignments is poorly planned and this leads to an uneven workload for students.

46 Teaching in hairdressing and beauty therapy is well planned and teachers generally use an appropriate range of teaching methods. Students

have good opportunities for relevant work experience, including work placements in Spain. The college salons and beauty therapy rooms provide realistic work environments where students gain good practical experience. There is insufficient theoretical content in the curriculum for some classes. Some students require more demanding work. Few students make use of information technology facilities which are available for them.

47 In health and social care, teachers make effective use of their own vocational experience and vary their teaching methods appropriately. Students had the opportunity to participate in well-designed group tasks. A wide variety of work placements is a feature of all health and social care courses. Students' assignments are well presented and imaginative. Teachers question students effectively to check that they understand what they are studying. In a few classes, teachers did not use teaching methods which were appropriate for the subject content.

48 In art and design, the quality of teaching varies across the different courses. The best teaching is on the access and foundation courses. Students on these courses take part in a suitable range of activities so that they acquire appropriate skills and experience of using different materials and processes. Students' progress is carefully monitored. On GNVQ advanced and intermediate level programmes the learning objectives of lessons are not always stated clearly and teaching time is not used effectively. The pace of work on these courses is often too slow and there is insufficient questioning of students to check their understanding. In some cases, students do little written work and what is produced is poorly marked.

49 Lessons in media studies, photography and printing courses are generally well prepared. In the better lessons the aims and objectives are made clear to students and the teaching is at an appropriate level. Briefs for projects are well produced and clearly indicate deadlines for submission and the criteria for assessment. However, not all teachers keep to the deadlines they have set. Students receive thorough feedback on their work with guidance for improvement and corrections of errors in grammar and spelling. Some lessons are poorly managed and the pace of work is too slow. Some staff did not direct questions at individuals and allowed the more vociferous students to dominate discussions.

50 The standard of teaching in modern foreign languages and on the access to higher education course is high. Lessons are well prepared and appropriate resources and teaching methods are used to take account of the needs of adult students who are returning to education. On the access to higher education course students are helped to develop the skills required to study on their own as well as those that they will require if they progress to higher education. For example, as part of a lesson designed to prepare students for higher education, a student presented a well-researched and carefully-prepared seminar on social stratification using appropriate visual aids. The quality of the presentation was

evaluated sensitively by the student, the class and the teacher. Teachers of modern foreign languages make consistent use of the language that is being learned and there is good coverage of the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In a small number of classes students did not have enough opportunity to learn on their own.

51 In English and in other humanities subjects, most lessons are well structured and students take part in a variety of activities. Key concepts in the social sciences and techniques in essay writing are explained fully. In some lessons, the pace of work is too slow and it is not sufficiently demanding. Questioning by some teachers fails to involve all students in the lesson. Students' work is generally carefully set, marked and returned promptly. In a few cases, students arriving late disrupt the start of lessons.

52 Learning support sessions are well planned and good records of students' work and progress are kept. There is some effective teaching in numeracy which is designed to meet the needs of individual students. On specially designed courses for students with learning difficulties there is a lack of opportunity for students to learn in the workplace or in vocational training areas. For some students on these courses the aims and objectives are not clear and students do not have enough opportunity to work by themselves. Initial assessments of students and individual learning plans on English for speakers of other languages and essential adult learning courses are not sufficiently detailed. Teachers' schemes of work in English for speakers of other languages are well developed. In some English for speakers of other languages classes teachers do not explain to students the connections between listening and speaking and reading and writing. Teaching in these classes does not challenge some students. On the essential adult learning course teaching materials are often unimaginative and poorly presented.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

53 Standards of work on many courses are appropriate for the course being followed and students are enjoying their studies and are well motivated. In 1995, the degree of students' success in achieving good results in examinations and vocational awards varied. This variation in achievement occurred across and within programme areas. The college does not hold reliable data on students' achievements. Each faculty holds data for its own courses and the quality of these data varies.

54 Seventy-eight per cent of the 472 students in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment's 1995 tables were successful. This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Pass rates for students on vocational courses at intermediate level were variable in 1995. There was a 94 per cent pass rate on the diploma in medical secretarial studies, and 70 per cent on the GNVQ intermediate course in leisure and tourism. Most of the part-time

NVQ food production students were successful at levels 2 and 3 and 100 per cent of beauty therapy students at NVQ level 2. On the certificate in childcare and education courses 88 per cent of adult students successfully completed their courses but students who had started the same course on leaving school were less successful and only 37 per cent achieved a qualification. Only 50 per cent of full-time NVQ level 2 hairdressing students were successful and only 8 per cent of part-time students achieved a full qualification. Results were also poor on the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) first diploma in technology, the GNVQ intermediate course in business, the part-time course in business administration at NVQ level 2, the GNVQ intermediate course in hospitality and catering, the NVQ level 2 course in bakery and the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) course in flexography.

55 There were good results on some two-year national diploma courses. Ninety-five per cent of students achieved a full qualification on the BTEC national diploma in leisure studies. Eighty-nine per cent of students studying the diploma in nursery nursing were successful. There were good pass rates and retention rates on the BTEC national diploma courses in visual communication, printing and publishing. On other advanced level courses, students who completed the courses were generally successful. Eighty-nine per cent of students on the BTEC national diploma course in typography were successful but retention was poor at 64 per cent. When measured against first-year enrolments (in November 1994) only 62 per cent of students on the advanced GNVQ in business completed the course but 84 per cent of those who completed gained the full award.

56 Students on management and professional studies courses were generally successful. Results on the diplomas in advertising and diploma in public relations courses were particularly good. Pass rates on the certificate in personnel practice and the certificate in management studies were also good. There were poor pass rates on some courses, including the certificate in marketing and the institute of legal executives courses. Examination pass rates on the C&G in electronic servicing courses in the evening and those for unwaged adults were good at 89 per cent and 82 per cent, respectively. Eighty-six per cent of students on the higher national certificate in mechanical and manufacturing engineering were successful.

57 In 1995, 320 students, aged 16 to 18, were entered for GCE AS/A level examinations. They achieved an average point score per entry of 3.5 (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on data in the 1995 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. The overall pass rate for students aged 16 to 18 at grades A to E was 66 per cent, which is below the national pass rate for general further education colleges. There were 333 GCE A level subject entries for students aged 19 or over and the pass rate at grades A to E of 63 per cent was the same as the national pass rate.

58 GCE A level results for students aged 16 to 18 in the various subjects present a mixed picture. There was a 100 per cent pass rate in human biology and in art and design a pass rate of 94 per cent. Full-time GCE A level students achieved good results in English language and literature, communication studies, media studies and psychology. There were good pass rates at grades A to E in accountancy, environmental science and government and politics. Results in biology, economics and French were poor and well below national pass rates. Students aged 19 or over achieved some good results in GCE A level examinations. Pass rates, at grades A to E, were above national averages in communication studies, economics, English literature, environmental science, geography, German, government and politics, human biology, law, psychology and sociology. Results were poor in physics with a pass rate at grades A to E of 20 per cent and no student passed in pure mathematics and statistics.

59 In 1995, 79 students, most of them resitting subjects, followed a full-time GCSE programme involving four or more subjects and achieved good results. The overall pass rate at grades A to C for 381 students aged 16 to 18 taking GCSE examinations in 1995 was better than the national average for general further education colleges. Results for students aged 16 to 18 taking GCSE English and mathematics were just below the national average. In other subjects, where the number of examination entries per subject was far smaller, results varied. More than 55 per cent were awarded A to C grades in accountancy, business studies, English literature, French, human biology, Spanish, Portuguese and Urdu. In a number of subjects, including art and design, biology, combined science and communication studies, pass rates at grades A to C were below national averages.

60 The pass rate at grades A to C for 598 students aged 19 or over taking GCSE examinations in 1995 was below the national average for general further education colleges. Results for the 214 students entered for GCSE English and for the 120 students entered for mathematics were below the national average pass rates for these subjects. There were some good results. In German, there was a 100 per cent pass rate at grades A to C and a pass rate of 83 per cent in law. Pass rates in art and design, human biology and Italian were at or about national average pass rates. However, in business studies, chemistry and tourism, less than 25 per cent of students aged 19 or over entering for examinations in 1995 were awarded A to C grades; a performance significantly below national average standards in these subjects.

61 Results on access courses were good. In 1995, 79 per cent of students completing the full-time access to higher education multi-exit course achieved a full certificate. Students taking the mathematics specialism achieved high standards of work. Eighty-three per cent were successful on the part-time access to higher education course. Seventy-six per cent of students studying on the access to business professions course were

successful. There were also good rates on access courses in art and design and social work.

62 The development of students' core skills varied. In science, information technology skills were underdeveloped, but some catering students demonstrated high levels of ability. In computing, students' work demonstrated poor standards of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Students on some humanities courses had limited oral skills. Practical work was carried out well in many areas. In science, students carried out practical work carefully and with precision, though, in a few cases, students were not sufficiently aware of safety issues. Generally, most practical work in engineering was good and high standards were achieved in fabrication work. Hairdressing students demonstrated good practical skills and worked competently and safely in salons.

63 Students with learning difficulties on specially-designed courses achieved a range of nationally-recognised qualifications, developed confidence and self-esteem and were able to work with less support from teachers. However, there was a lack of progression to employment or vocational courses for those on the directions course. Few students on the essential adult learning course and on English for speakers of other languages course, achieved the C&G wordpower certificate.

64 In 1995, a total of 1,296 full-time students completed GCE A level and advanced vocational courses such as BTEC national diplomas. Fifty-seven per cent of those whose destinations were known progressed to higher education, 21 per cent to further education and 22 per cent to employment. Only 30 per cent of students completing GCSE courses and vocational programmes at foundation and intermediate levels in 1995 progressed onto more advanced further education courses. There were examples of good rates of progression to higher education or related employment on some courses. For example, 90 per cent of the students who successfully completed the full-time access to higher education multi-exit course went onto higher education. All but one of the successful students on the diploma in international public relations progressed to related employment. There was also good progression to higher education and onto relevant employment from the nursery nursing course and from the certificate in childcare and education. Fifty-one per cent of the destinations of full-time students successfully completing college courses in 1995 are unknown.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

65 There is a clearly-defined quality assurance framework which covers the work of the teaching faculties but does not define standards or encompass all areas of the college. A major review of the college's quality assurance procedures has resulted in revised course logs, the introduction of self-assessment reports and centrally administered student questionnaires. The deans and associate deans are responsible for quality

assurance in the faculties and a vice-principal is responsible for making sure that appropriate systems are in place. A subcommittee of the academic board acts as a forum for the consideration of quality issues.

66 There is effective monitoring of courses. Course tutors complete a course log which includes a quality checklist requiring course teams to consider a range of quality issues. A number of improvements to courses have resulted from the process, including additional tutorial time for access to higher education students, increased access to computers on the Dacorum campus, and better lighting in the art and design studio. Proposals for new courses and significant revisions of existing courses are subjected to a rigorous process of internal validation. Not all courses are subject to periodic review. Internal verification of students' assessments takes place in all faculties but practices vary and are unco-ordinated. College-wide procedures are currently being developed.

67 An annual report on quality is produced for each faculty. The report includes findings from the course monitoring process, a comparison of performance with the targets which had been set the previous year, targets for the year ahead, and a self-assessment report. Before faculty reports are submitted to the academic board they are evaluated by the academic development committee. The criteria for evaluation are not clearly defined. The faculty report on quality is not required to include a review of students' achievements. Faculties adopt various practices for reviewing students' achievements. In some, the faculty board reviews the results whereas in other faculties reviews are held at section or divisional level and the outcomes are not always reported to faculty boards.

68 Student questionnaires are used effectively. There are two centrally administered questionnaires covering student access and college services. Faculties use their own course evaluation questionnaires and the teaching and learning resources service conducts a library user survey. On some courses students complete a questionnaire on the quality of teaching. Improvements resulting from the findings of questionnaires have included the provision of college transport for students travelling between sites and increased homework.

69 The arrangements for validating that a franchisee can provide training at an appropriate level of quality are not formally documented. Training organisations are not subject to approval procedures by the college and there is no requirement for franchisees to show that they have appropriate quality assurance systems in place or for these to be approved by the college. Contractual arrangements require the franchisee to provide training 'to the satisfaction of the college' and 'to provide all services in accordance with the college charter'. Visits are made to assess the quality of the facilities, to discuss contractual arrangements prior to agreement and to monitor the delivery of the programme. Visits include direct observation of classroom activity and discussion with students. However, there are no criteria for evaluating the quality of provision. Monitoring the fulfilment of the commitments in the college charter relies on a brief

discussion by college staff with students. The brief summary reports that are written about the quality of the franchised work are not subject to scrutiny by the college's academic board.

70 The college has made little progress in establishing performance targets for all areas of its work. Targets for enrolment are specified but targets for other areas of performance, such as retention, progression and successful completion of courses, are usually not. Targets included in faculty quality reports are often not quantified and consequently do not allow for changes in performance to be measured easily. Apart from the use of the library association's performance targets, targets for cross-college services have not been formulated. The college's self-assessment report has recognised the need to establish performance targets.

71 Students receive a copy of the college charter during their induction and it is referred to in the students' diary. The charter does not specify standards of quality. No one has overall responsibility for the charter and there are no specific mechanisms for monitoring the fulfilment of the charter's commitments.

72 A detailed self-assessment report was written using the headings of the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Each section was produced by a separate task group that carefully considered all the strengths and issues, including those set out in the faculty self-assessment reports. A number of areas for further development were identified. Many of the judgements on key issues are consistent with the conclusions reached by the inspection team.

73 The planning of staff development takes account of the training required to support curriculum development and of the individual training needs of all staff. Although there has been some training, for example, to support the introduction of NVQs, insufficient attention has been paid to providing industrial and commercial updating for staff in some areas and to training all staff in supporting students with learning difficulties. Staff development is evaluated within faculties and by the director of professional development against the objectives set out in faculty and college staff-development plans. The college made a commitment to Investors in People to Hertfordshire TEC in 1993. As yet, the college has made little progress towards achieving the Investors in People award.

74 All support staff, and the majority of teaching staff, have undertaken appraisal since 1993. The present arrangements do not require line managers to be involved in the appraisal of staff. Observation of teaching is not a requirement for teaching staff and outcomes from appraisal are not necessarily linked to appropriate staff development. The appraisal scheme is being reviewed to enable managers to monitor individual achievements more effectively and to support the development needed to improve performance. Newly-appointed staff are effectively supported by a well-organised induction programme which includes opportunity to take

part in initial training sessions which cover, for example, classroom management and presentational skills. All staff complete a probationary period and are assigned a mentor and a supervisor. During the probationary period, teaching staff are observed at least twice a term and written comments contribute towards the evaluation of their suitability for permanent appointment.

RESOURCES

Staffing

75 Teaching staff are well qualified for the work they undertake. Over 60 per cent have a first or higher degree and the remainder have higher level professional qualifications. Approximately 65 per cent have a teaching qualification. In engineering and catering, teachers have been slow to achieve the assessor and verifier qualifications they require for NVQ and GNVQ courses. Most teachers have relevant industrial or commercial experience but in some areas such as business studies, engineering and catering it is dated. Approximately 17 per cent of teaching is carried out by part-time staff. The proportion of teaching undertaken by part-time staff varies across the college. In business administration the large number of part-time teaching staff places a heavy administrative burden on full-time staff. In art and design and on management courses part-time staff bring valuable commercial expertise. Administrative and technician staff provide teachers with good levels of support.

76 The specialist personnel unit provides a useful advisory service to managers and staff on a range of employment issues, including recruitment and selection, induction and employment legislation. The college has recently taken over the administration of the payroll function. Comprehensive policies and procedures have been developed for all aspects of the unit's work. Currently, not all job descriptions are up to date and the college is carrying out an exercise to remedy this. There is no college handbook and many faculties have devised their own.

Equipment/learning resources

77 In most areas there is a wide range of specialist equipment. The motor vehicle section has an extensive range of tools and equipment, including new vehicles with energy management fuel systems. The business assessment centre at Dacorum provides a good training environment but the one at Cassio has insufficient equipment. There is up-to-date equipment in the travel office but the office is poorly sited for promoting business. The beauty therapy clinic has recently been upgraded to a high standard but some hairdressing salons are in need of refurbishment. Restaurants are equipped to provide good realistic working environments for catering students. However, some kitchen and bakery equipment is old. There is a wide range of technical equipment for printing. The imaginative remodelling of space has provided good media suites and

recording facilities which are equipped with an extensive range of video and sound-recording equipment.

78 Learning resource centres on the four main sites, and at the art and design centre in Ridge Street, are attractive. All centres have sufficient study places, including quiet study areas. Computers on open access, links to the Internet, extensive CD-ROM database collections and reprographic facilities are available. Facilities for audio-visual viewing are limited and videos are not issued on loan to students. There is a bookstock of over 80,000 books and approximately 600 periodicals. All books are catalogued on a computerised system which is linked to the three other Hertfordshire colleges and the University of Hertfordshire. Students have access to the database and resources of all libraries via many access points across the college. Some of the books in hairdressing and beauty therapy, catering, childcare and social sciences are out of date. Learning resource centre staff liaise effectively with teaching staff on the acquisition of learning materials. There has been a significant investment in networked computing facilities and the ratio of computers to students is good. Of the 837 computers available to students 30 per cent are available on open access. The majority of computers are modern and there is a suitable range of software.

Accommodation

79 The college occupies a total of 10 sites. There are four main sites: the Cassio, Leggatts and Watford campuses, all in Watford, and the Dacorum campus in Hemel Hempstead. The buildings range in age from a Victorian school building to the newly constructed Leggatts centre. The standard of accommodation varies. An attractive converted country house at Bucks Hill is used mainly for management courses. The Leggatts campus has good accommodation which is light and airy. The accommodation at Callowland Centre for art and design is small for the number of students using it and facilities for students are inadequate. Overall, the Cassio campus is shabby and untidy and some parts are in need of redecoration. The huts in use at three sites on Cassio, Hempstead Road, and Ridge Street provide poor teaching accommodation. The accommodation strategy is currently being written. An analysis of room use has been carried out and initial findings indicate that the college has 25 per cent more space than it requires. Currently, accommodation is allocated to and managed by faculties but there are plans to move towards greater central co-ordination to make better use of accommodation. Minimum standards have been set for some aspects of teaching accommodation and improvements are being made. The accommodation strategy should provide a basis for the maintenance and redecoration schedule which the college is planning.

80 Access for wheelchair users is restricted on most campuses. All parts of the Leggatts campus are accessible. Only ground-floor level facilities are accessible on other sites and there is limited access to some upper floors at Hempstead Road. There are few external signs and internal signs

are often poor. The standard of refectory facilities varies. Under arrangements with the youth service, students at Leggatts and Dacorum have some access to recreational facilities in the youth wings at lunch time. There is a recreational playing field at Leggatts. Students have access to a sports hall and swimming pool at Leggatts under an agreement with the local council. There is a 15 place creche at Dacorum for use by children of students, staff and the public.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

81 The particular strengths of the college are:

- a wide range of vocational provision from foundation to postgraduate level
- productive links with schools, higher education, industry and the community
- the expertise, enthusiasm and commitment of governors
- some effective teaching and support for learning
- the comprehensive range of central support services for students
- the procedures for monitoring courses
- the high level of learning resources, including the library and computer facilities.

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

- address the variation in practice and standards of achievement between and within faculties
- introduce arrangements to monitor teaching and improve the proportion of effective teaching
- increase the overall success of students in achieving vocational and general education qualifications
- develop procedures to evaluate students' achievements
- implement more rigorous procedures to monitor attendance
- establish quality standards, performance targets and indicators
- improve the poor standard of some accommodation, its decor and cleanliness.

FIGURES

-
- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)

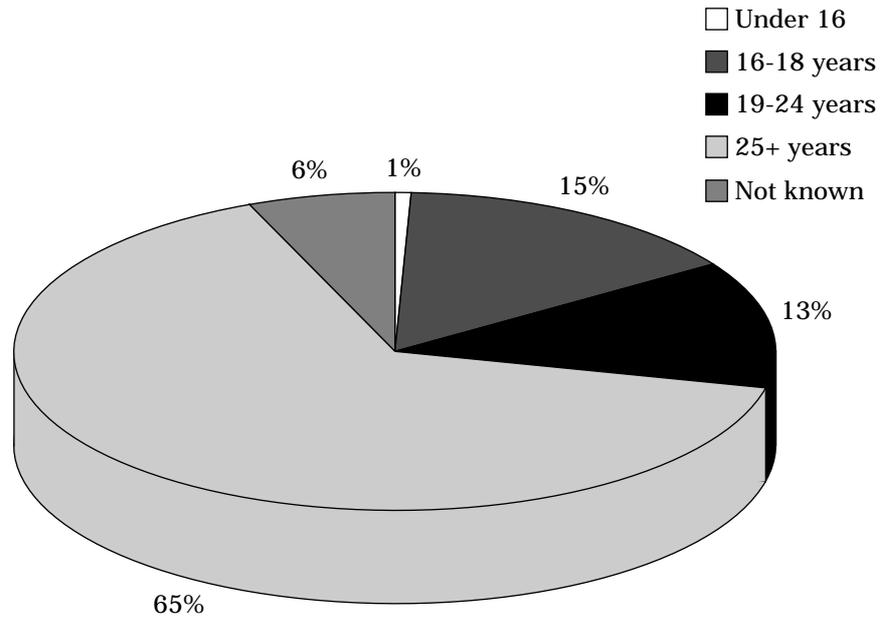
 - 5 Estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

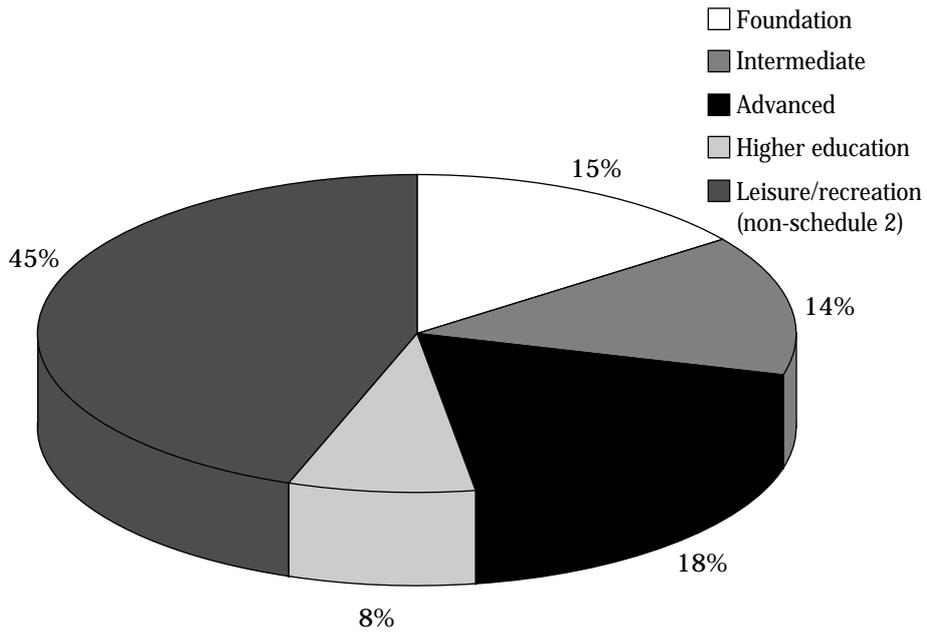
West Herts College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 28,017

Figure 2

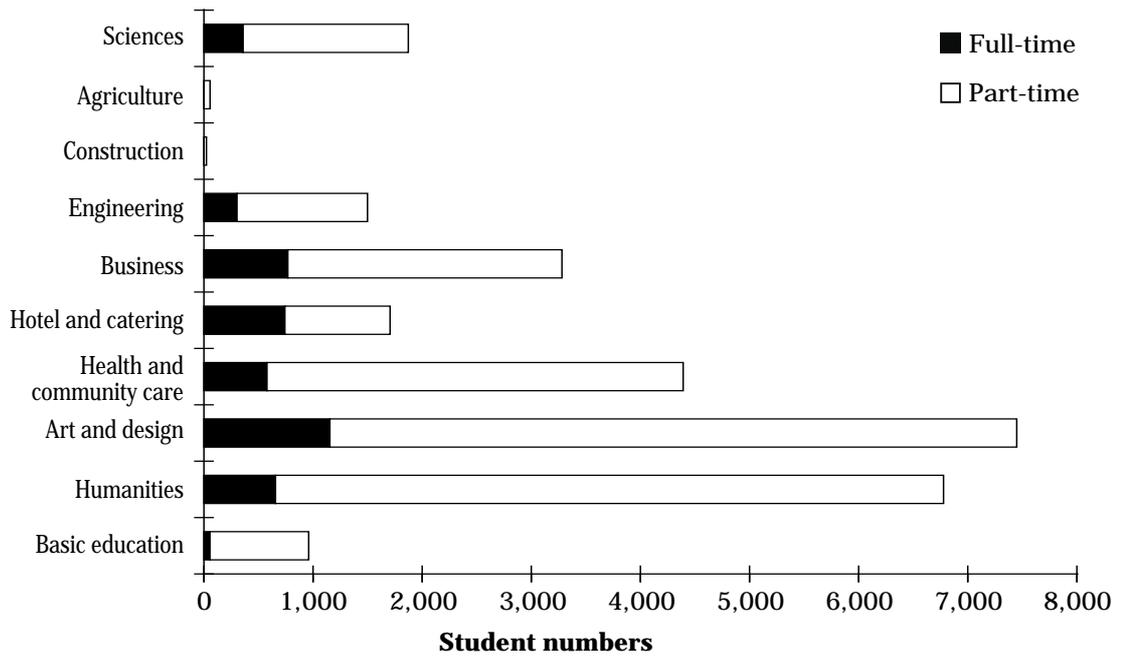
West Herts College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 28,017

Figure 3

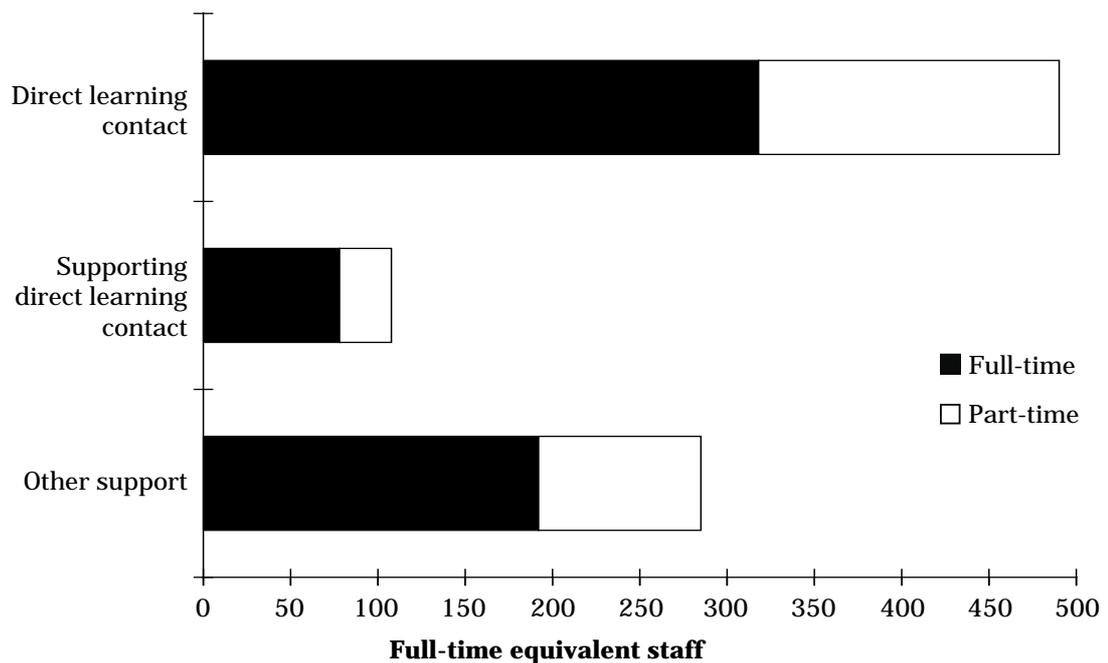
West Herts College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 28,017

Figure 4

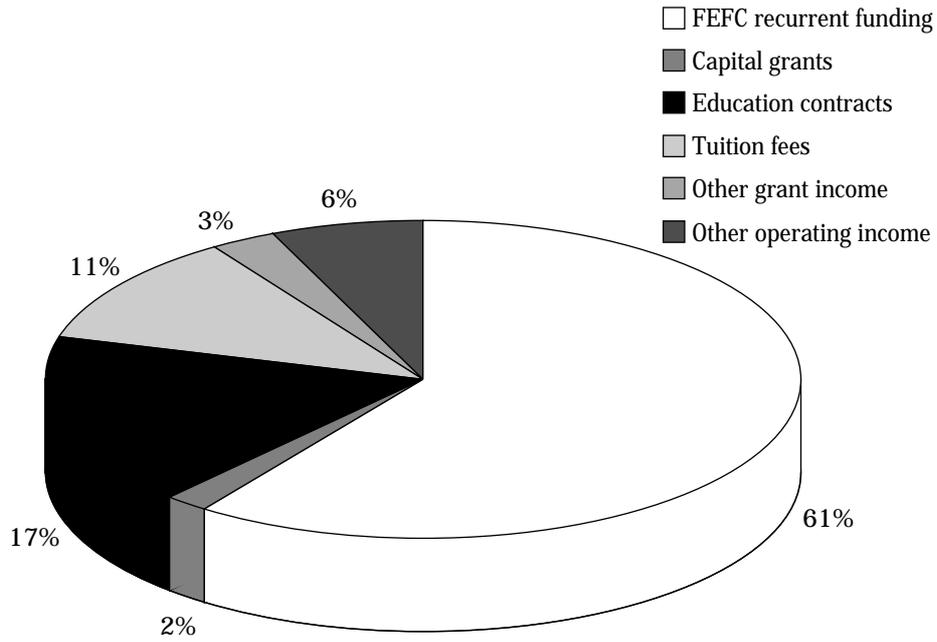
West Herts College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 883

Figure 5

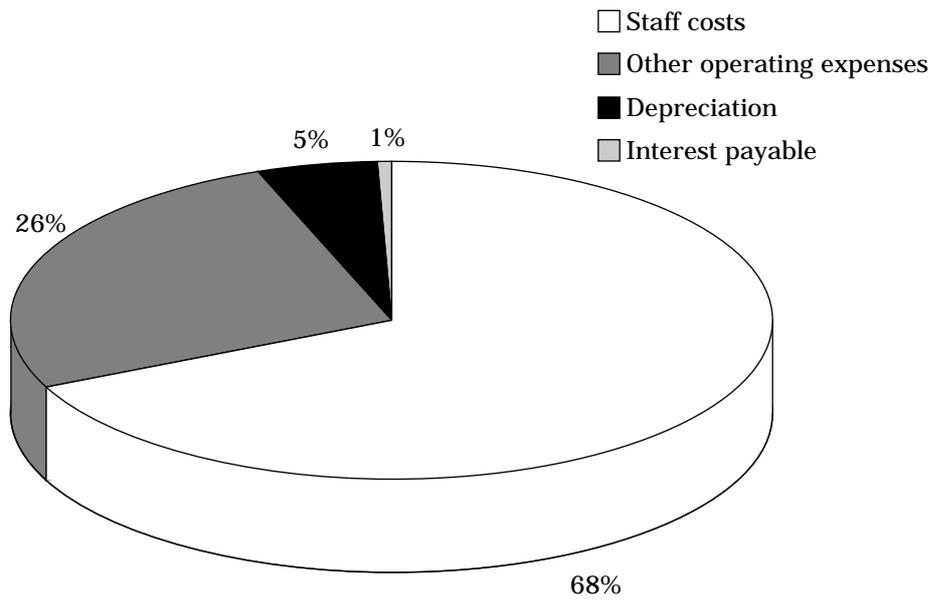
West Herts College: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Estimated income: £26,665,000

Figure 6

West Herts College: estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Estimated expenditure: £27,155,000

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