

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Peter Symonds' College

May 1996

**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.

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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 60/96

PETER SYMONDS' COLLEGE

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected April 1995-January 1996

Summary

Peter Symonds' College is a large sixth form college serving students from Winchester and a wide area of central Hampshire. It mainly offers GCE A level and GNVQ full-time courses for school leavers, and an adult education programme with a growing number of vocational courses. Students on GCE A level courses achieve high examination results. The college provides a range of cultural and sporting activities and students are outstandingly successful in these; one student has been selected for the next Olympic games. Teachers and support staff are well qualified and there is good teaching in all subjects. There are close links with the local community and with schools. The college is well governed and well managed and it achieves a high level of quality throughout. Staff are committed to the aims of the college and there is effective strategic planning, which is reflected in good organisation at course level. Internal communications are good. The tutorial system is well organised and there is strong learning support for students of all abilities. The college should address the following: improvement of its information systems; further development of links with employers; better sharing of staff expertise between its separate divisions providing courses for school leavers and adults; use of similar quality assurance procedures for all areas; and the inadequate social space available to students.

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		1
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		2
Quality assurance		2
Resources:	staffing	1
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	2	Social sciences	1
Mathematics and computing	2	Humanities	2
Business studies	2	Modern languages	2
		English	2
Creative and expressive arts	2	Adult basic education and provision for students with learning difficulties	1

INTRODUCTION

1 Peter Symonds' College was inspected between April 1995 and January 1996. The college's arrangements for the enrolment and induction of students were inspected in July and in early September 1995. Subject areas were inspected in April and December 1995. Aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in January 1996. Eleven inspectors visited the college for 55 inspector days. They inspected 167 classes and examined samples of students' written and practical work. Meetings were held with governors, employers, the head teachers of secondary schools, parents, college staff, students, community representatives and a representative of the Hampshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Peter Symonds' College, Winchester, opened as a co-educational sixth form college in September 1974, having previously been a boys' grammar school whose history can be traced to 1607. Since 1991, the college has offered adult and continuing education courses. It operates on two sites, with the larger campus for full-time students close to the centre of the city and the railway station, and daytime adult classes largely based at a much smaller site in Weeke, three-quarters of a mile away. Both sites are used for adult education classes outside the normal college day, as are several small outreach centres. The majority of pupils leaving the three Winchester 11 to 16 schools enrol on full-time courses at the college, and they normally represent about 40 per cent of the intake each year. Students are drawn from 140 schools altogether, with significant numbers travelling from Southampton, Basingstoke and Andover. Over 25 per cent of students come from independent schools.

3 Winchester is a cathedral city of some 30,000 people. It is within easy reach of London. It is also on the national motorway network, and is close to continental ferry terminals at Portsmouth, Southampton and Poole, and the international airports at Eastleigh, Heathrow and Gatwick. The city's largest employers are Hampshire County Council, the army, educational institutions which include two higher education colleges, IBM, and a range of other high-technology and service industries. The college serves an area of high employment. Hampshire has 6 per cent of its workforce registered as unemployed, and the Winchester and Eastleigh district has a rate of only 3.2 per cent.

4 Peter Symonds' College is one of only two maintained sixth form colleges in the country to offer boarding accommodation. Boarders come from countries all over the world, but most are British. The college provides sixth form education for the Falkland Islands. At the time of inspection, the college had 4,854 students. Of these, 1,809 were full time and aged between 16 and 19, and most were following courses leading to the General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) or General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). Most other students are on part-time programmes in the college's adult and continuing education division.

Enrolments by age and by level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. FEFC-funded enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are given in figure 3. The college has grown steadily since 1974, but in the three years since incorporation, enrolment of school leavers has grown by 50 per cent and enrolment of adults, including those on recreational programmes, by 40 per cent.

5 The college is organised in four divisions, three of which serve 16 to 19 year-old students. There is one vice-principal with responsibility for the curriculum and for quality assurance, and another vice-principal whose major role concerns students' welfare and progress. The heads of the three sixth form divisions have responsibility for both curricular and pastoral matters, and each is aided by three heads of programme and two lead tutors. Cross-college curricular work is also managed through the divisional structure, including learning support and the library. There are 116 teaching staff and 60 support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

6 The college offers a wide choice of programmes. There are 39 GCE A level, five GCE advanced supplementary (AS), and 23 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses. Demand for GCE AS courses is low. One of three specialist music courses in Hampshire is located at Peter Symonds' College. GNVQ programmes are available in business, and in health and social care at advanced and intermediate levels; and in art and design, information technology, and leisure and tourism at advanced level only. On the Weeke site, the adult and continuing education division offers a range of programmes leading to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), mainly at level 2 and increasingly at level 3. Short courses in counselling and information technology are proving successful. Employment training is provided for over 100 students, most of whom either find jobs, or go on to further or higher education. A wide range of arts and crafts and physical activities are taught in the leisure programme.

7 Provision for students with physical, hearing or visual impairments, and with learning difficulties such as dyslexia, is well planned and appropriate to their needs. A range of classes is offered for elderly and frail people, and for those recovering from mental illnesses. The adult basic skills provision and the learning support programme has achieved the Basic Skills Agency's quality kitemark. An access to higher education course which enables adults to study social sciences, humanities and science, either full time or part time, has 30 students. There are few adults on other full-time courses during the day.

8 The college requires all its 16 to 19 year-old students to take part in a programme of cultural and sporting activities. Many students participate enthusiastically, but those who are unable to find a place in activities they want quickly lose interest and their attendance falls away. About a third of these activities leads to some form of recognised certificates.

9 Liaison with schools is effective. Heads of division act as links with four partner schools, and they have contact with pupils from year 9 onwards. They are supported by a trained team of staff drawn from all curriculum areas. Regular newsletters keep schools abreast of developments at the college. The Winchester Consortium promotes curriculum liaison with local schools, and helps to ease the transition from secondary to further education. There are strong links with other colleges in Hampshire, and especially with sixth form colleges. Close contact is maintained with the local education authority (LEA) and with community groups, particularly through non-vocational adult education which is offered at seven centres. The college supports some other groups which make their own local provision for classes. The Cheriton village initiative is one example, in recognition of the quality of which, the organiser has been awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE).

10 The college has chosen not to make compact agreements with higher education institutions, but strong links have been established with local universities. Portsmouth University validates the access course for adults. A member of staff is seconded to Southampton University for a day each week to work on a computer 'expert system' on historical documents. Links with local universities are being established by GNVQ co-ordinating staff to facilitate students' progression.

11 There is close liaison with the Hampshire TEC. The TEC sees the college as a centre of excellence for GCE A level work. It has supported developments in NVQ and GNVQ, through funding accreditation for staff as assessors and verifiers, and supporting the recent launch of a business development training unit for small and medium-sized companies locally. The college is playing a central role in the ALEX project, which is concerned with the provision of work experience for GCE A level students. TEC funding has been provided to train college staff in management and in the use of the Internet. Staff are aware of the national targets for education and training and of the priorities set by the TEC.

12 The college has contacts with a wide range of local employers, mainly as sponsors of sports or prizes. Recently, companies have approached the college to offer lectures or other similar contributions to the curriculum, or to seek training for their employees. Other contacts derive from the organisation of work-experience placements for GNVQ programmes. Employers reported that the college responded quickly to enquiries, but a number of companies remain unaware of many of the newer initiatives being developed at Peter Symonds' College.

13 The college has a public relations officer, who is the first point of contact for the community and the press. All promotional material is approved by the senior management team. Separate prospectuses are produced for the full-time and adult provision, respectively. Both prospectuses are well presented and informative with style and content suitable for their respective audiences.

14 The college has a comprehensive policy for equal opportunities, which is well publicised, actively implemented and monitored. A high degree of support has been given to both male and female staff in dealing with childcare needs. In accordance with sections 44 and 45 of *The Further and Higher Education Act 1992*, the college provides the opportunity for a weekly act of Christian worship, if students require it. The college also provides facilities for other faiths. The Christian union student group meets regularly for prayer meetings, study and fellowship. GCE A level religious studies classes are part of the normal timetable.

15 History and tradition have been significant in determining the range of provision and they continue to be an influence. There is a conscious effort to provide the part-time adult students and the full-time students on their two separate sites with separate and distinctive learning environments. This approach works to an extent, but there are difficulties in ensuring that the best practice is consistently shared between both groups of students. It is also important that the existence of two distinctive learning environments should not inhibit adults who have made a return to study part time from progressing to more advanced or full-time courses.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

16 The governing body comprises the principal, 11 business members, two staff members, the TEC nominee, a co-opted member, and four nominees of the Christes Hospitall Schools Foundation, which owns the college site. There are no student or parent representatives, although some governors are parents of present or past students. At the time of the inspection, there were two vacancies. Two new business appointments have been made recently, using newly-adopted procedures for succession. Members have a breadth of experience in finance, property management and the law, which the college uses to good effect.

17 The full board of governors meets twice a term. Much of its business is carried out by its six committees: policy and resources; curriculum; premises; personnel; remuneration; and audit. Every committee works to agreed terms of reference and has an orderly cycle of meetings. Occasional working parties are convened to deal with single issues. Meetings are generally well attended and carefully minuted. The governors are well briefed by managers, curriculum leaders and other staff about developments in the further education sector as a whole, as well as about college business. Policies are formally adopted and reviewed. The governing body has a clear view of its role, and of the distinction between proper oversight of the college and operational matters. Governors have produced a self-assessment report which is to be reviewed every year. They attend open evenings, presentations, concerts and plays at the college to keep in touch with its daily concerns, and have recently set up a series of meetings with students. The governors have chosen to continue the custom of producing an annual report to parents.

18 The governors have taken an active role in developing and updating the college's strategic plan, and their curriculum committee reviews the college's performance against the operational plan. The cycle of strategic and operational plans is arranged to ensure that staff at all levels are able to contribute. The college's overall objectives are reflected at subject, programme, and divisional level. Copies of the strategic plan are readily available to all staff.

19 The senior management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals, the four heads of division and the bursar. It was modified at the time of incorporation, and has been altered again more recently to reflect the new requirements arising from rapid growth in student numbers. Management roles and responsibilities are clearly understood by staff at all levels, and are set out in a comprehensive handbook. Current responsibilities are not always reflected in job descriptions although there is a general expectation that they should be reviewed during appraisal. More specific guidance is needed to ensure that this takes place.

20 Good use is made of the various teams and committees in the college, and there are clear distinctions between those that meet routinely and those that are convened for an immediate task or specific purpose. The membership and remit of each group are set out in the staff handbook, with a calendar of their meetings. Meetings are generally well recorded, with the agreed actions and the people chosen to carry them out, clearly identified. The college's managing group, which is made up of members of the senior management team, heads of programmes, and the head of learning support, has been instrumental in raising the quality of teaching and learning. Its main focus are the full-time courses, rather than the provision for adults. Most divisions and programme areas are well managed. Lines of responsibility are clear; planning documents reflect the strategic plan; and meetings are well organised and minuted. Staff work well together in subject teams.

21 Lines of communication are clear throughout the college. Staff make their voices heard through regular meetings at divisional, programme and subject level. They receive information at weekly briefings, from bulletins, noticeboards and committee minutes. The senior managers place emphasis on the importance of consulting staff on the way the college is run. As a result, staff feel valued and are well informed about their college. There is, however, scope for strengthening the mutual understanding of aims and the sharing of ideas and expertise between staff in the adult and continuing division and the rest of the college.

22 Procedures for financial allocation are clear. Money for major equipment is apportioned using a bidding system. Funding for class materials is managed by the heads of division, and allocations are based on a mix of formula funding and bidding. There is tight control of expenditure against the budget, with computerised financial data and twice-termly summaries. Unit costs at course level have been calculated

for the first time this year. Information is shared with other local sixth form colleges to help identify costs and means of achieving efficiency. The college's income and expenditure for 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 is £18.31 per unit, which compares with the median for sixth form colleges nationally of £19.37 per unit.

23 The college uses a range of performance indicators, and sets targets for enrolments, students' achievements including value-added indicators, retention and attendance rates of students. Reports on performance against targets are produced regularly. The destinations of students are analysed to guide careers advice. The reasons why students leave the college, or change courses, are recorded. The increasing external requirements for information have overwhelmed both the equipment and the personnel available to run the management information system. This problem has been compounded by the growth of the college and an increasing call for data from staff. It is being addressed by consultants.

24 The college's health and safety policy has been updated recently. While there are avenues to report health and safety concerns through a staff consultative group, the college should be more active in organising safety inspections and audits.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

25 Parents and students speak well of the impartiality of advice available when they enquire about courses at the college. Initial interviews for prospective students are followed by two well-organised taster days. Students help to inform applicants about life and study at the college, and they are encouraged to reflect carefully on their choice of studies. The college offers open evenings and provides helpful brochures. There is a telephone advice line for adult applicants. Enrolment and induction are well managed and staff work to guidelines to ensure consistency of practice for all new students. Initial tutorials cover college procedures and explore the needs of groups and of individual students. In their subsequent introductions, most teachers clearly described the demands of the new courses. Enrolment and induction procedures at the adult centre are effective. They include discussion on the style of teaching which would be most effective for each group, and careers advice where appropriate.

26 Tutorial support is well organised. There is a handbook for tutors which identifies students' entitlements, summarises the tutor's responsibilities, and outlines the tutorial programme for the year. Teams of tutors meet regularly to discuss common issues. Tutors meet their students daily for registration and to give out notices. Students normally have an individual review with their tutors twice a term. Most students, including those who board at the college, are satisfied with the support they receive from both personal and subject tutors. The effectiveness of

tutors does, however, vary. Some students felt they were getting less guidance and support than others. Tutoring for adults at the adult and continuing education centre, and for access students on the main site, is well conceived and thorough. Tutoring for other adults on the main site, including students in evening classes, is less good. There is confusion about who is responsible for these students. There is low attendance by main site tutors at courses on teaching adults which are offered by staff from the adult and continuing education division.

27 Students who wish to change programmes can do so through a well-managed procedure. Records of achievement are used during enrolment, and they are updated while students are at college. The attendance monitoring system generally works well, although some students have found ways to take time off without triggering absence reports. Some parents are concerned that attendance at the activities programme is not as rigorously monitored as at normal classes, and that representations to tutors have not improved matters.

28 Careers education and guidance are available in a centre attached to the college library. The college's careers adviser is assisted by two from the Hampshire Guidance and Careers service who visit regularly. The careers centre has a wide range of literature and prospectuses, and computerised guides to higher education. Preparation for higher education and graduate careers is particularly good, and it includes a briefing for parents. There is less advice given on employment opportunities which do not involve progression to higher education. The space used for careers interviews offers little privacy. The careers adviser organises about 175 work placements a year. There is no database of employers who will accept students for work experience.

29 The students' council has representatives from each tutor group. There is confusion about the relationship between this group and the newly-constituted students' union. The executive of the students' union is unsure how to make the union work. Further consideration is needed about the scope, role, responsibilities and authority of a union, and its relationship with the student council.

30 The national Basic Skills Agency diagnostic tests are used for students starting one-year programmes, and those who need extra help with literacy or numeracy are encouraged to attend the learning support centre. Test results show that, on entry to college, a great many students on intermediate level courses have very low levels of numeracy or literacy. The number of students using the learning support centre is growing and its services are under pressure. Students appreciate the understanding and help they receive. Support for students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties is good. Members of the learning support team keep in touch with subject teachers, some of whom have been trained to give extra help in class. The effectiveness of learning support is monitored through analysis of the Advanced Level Information System data for

students on GCE A level courses, but the degree of improvement among students on other courses is not measured.

31 Students are pleased with the help they receive from the information, welfare and counselling services. There are part-time counsellors at the college itself, and the college pays for the services of two counsellors from a centre in Winchester for two hours each week. The number of students seeking counselling is increasing. A group from the students' council is working to improve and promote the image of counselling at the college because it is felt that students are reluctant to ask for specialist help, even when they have serious problems. Among the issues this group needs to address is the way information about counselling is disseminated. Students may be inhibited from using the counselling services because the room used for confidential interviews is in a separate building; some students on their way there felt they could be seen by others. There is scope for closer co-ordination of support services for students across the college.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

32 Sixty-nine per cent of the teaching sessions inspected had strengths which outweighed their weaknesses. No lessons were graded at 4 or 5. This profile is above the average for the further education sector recorded in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report for 1994-95*. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		37	48	35	0	0	120
GCSE		1	5	7	0	0	13
GNVQ		1	6	4	0	0	11
NVQ		0	2	0	0	0	2
Other		11	5	5	0	0	21
Total		50	66	51	0	0	167

33 Courses are well planned, with detailed schemes of work. In science, these go beyond content and delivery to include notes on the effectiveness of different experiments; references for extension work; and appropriate homework. Students are made aware of course organisation through handbooks and unit guides. For workshop sessions such as business skills and GCSE mathematics, students have detailed schedules of work to follow, which are checked regularly. All the lessons had been prepared thoroughly. In the examples of best practice, the aims and objectives were stated clearly at the start and links were made with earlier learning. Topics were usually explored using a range of teaching techniques to retain students' interest. An introduction to Athenian democracy was prefaced by a quiz to check that knowledge from the previous session had been

retained. Students then divided into groups and teased out their understanding of democracy in Britain today, with the teacher pointing out differences between the present and the past. The whiteboard and overhead projector were used well to summarise significant points. Students prepared a competent set of notes comparing the two democratic systems.

34 Classes were invariably conducted in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, with good relationships between students and their teacher. Often, teachers were uncompromising in demanding that students give of their best. In a GCE A level music class, the teacher introduced the session by examining harmonies in the first two phrases of a Bach chorale. The students then completed harmonisation of the remainder and compared their versions with the original.

35 In many classes, but most particularly in English, modern languages, sociology and psychology, there was a sense of intellectual excitement among teachers and their students alike. Students were prepared to risk expressing controversial or partly-formed ideas, and teachers raised personal viewpoints and their own uncertainties about the issues. A group of GCE A level students in German nearing the end of work on urbanisation, had studied the options for traffic management in a small town. Each student was given a character to play in a debate chaired by the 'Bürgermeister'. They then divided into three groups, each of which was required to agree a preferred option to present to the class. The Bürgermeister summarised each case and, still in character, asked the class to vote. The proceedings were conducted in fluent German, and the students had strong views which they put forcibly while remaining willing to listen with courtesy to their peers.

36 In most classes there was appropriate use of visual aids including overhead projector, whiteboard, photographs, magazine articles, models and objects. Printed handouts were of a high standard. There was particularly good use of video in business studies, religious studies, and media. In a first-year GCE A level media class, students watched the video productions made by the second-year students for their major projects. They analysed the content, style and production values of these, and evaluated them in order to appreciate the standard of work that would be expected of them in due course.

37 Group or pair work was a feature of many lessons, and was often used imaginatively. In business studies and humanities, it was the means for research and preparing presentations. In mathematics, students were encouraged to work together to share ideas. In religious studies, contrasts of ideology and belief were explored through this technique. In some subjects the tasks given to groups were not well chosen to stimulate discussion, or students simply felt too inhibited to work together.

38 Some successfully innovative approaches assisted groups of students with widely differing levels of ability to learn. For example, a team of

first-year GCE A level psychology students had just completed a commentary on psychological perspectives on children's play. It was printed, and is now in use as a teaching and revision resource for others. In languages, assignments are set which use materials which students can study by themselves to supplement class work.

39 Practical classes in science, and in art and design, are well organised and have a proper regard for health and safety regulations. Imaginative practical activities also take place in other subjects, including business studies, business skills, geography, sociology, and psychology. Weekly lunchtime concerts are given by music students to give them the opportunity to practise for the performance element of their examinations, and for auditions.

40 There are thorough procedures in all subjects to monitor progress. Students have to make action plans. Records of marked work are carefully maintained, and both tutors and subject teachers regularly discuss their students' progress. Evaluative comments made by staff on written work are usually fair and accurate. In most subjects, but especially in economics and English, students receive clear information and guidance about the quality of their work. Assessment practices are less good in languages, but teachers are addressing inconsistencies in previous methods of marking. In science, there are variations in standards of marking.

41 There was poor practice in a minority of lessons. This was exemplified by a lack of clear purpose in the lesson, excessive copying of notes, insufficient use of appropriate audio-visual aids, insufficient demonstration of skills, poor questioning technique by the teacher and too little variety of learning activities. In a few classes, the teacher talked at the whole class too much and some students lost interest. In some language lessons, teaching and learning were not always in the language being studied.

42 There was some good practice in teaching students with learning difficulties. Examples included a GCSE psychology class where a dyslexic student was using a computer notebook, and a GCE A level English class where an adult helper provided assistance to a student. Students were helped by their peers who readily accepted the presence of learning support assistants in classes. A student with severe dyslexia received individual help in reviewing his work for his three GCE A level subjects, which included daily planning time for assignments, revision techniques for examinations, and organisation of holiday study. The student and his teachers reviewed his progress regularly. Teachers were well briefed about the needs of students with learning difficulties, and were confident in being able to meet them.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

43 In most subjects, high expectations lead to high achievement, with the more able students confronting complex issues with enthusiasm. Students understand the structure and assessment requirements of courses, and most take an active part in all their aspects.

44 Some students have achieved national or international recognition for their achievements. For example, during the inspection an award was made by the Institute of Biologists to a student whose results in GCE A level biology were among the top 10 in the country. This is the second year running that a student from Peter Symonds' College has achieved this distinction. At a concert given by the college orchestra at Southampton University, a student gave a virtuoso performance of the Mendelssohn violin concerto. The orchestra then tackled the first performance of a new work by the head of music. Sports highlights for 1994-95 included county team championships in six-a-side soccer, rugby, hockey, tennis, sailing and golf, and individual students play at county level. The men's hockey team were runners up in a national competition. In tennis, two players are nationally ranked. A student finished in fifth place in an international cross-country running race. Peter Symonds' College students were first and second in the British Laser dinghy championships, and one student has subsequently been selected for the next Olympic games.

45 In 1995, 628 students aged from 16 to 18 years entered for GCE AS/A level examinations and gained an average of 6.0 points per entry and 17.5 points per student (where A=10 and E=2). Based on the data published by the Department for Education and Employment, Peter Symonds' College has been in the top 10 per cent of colleges within the further education sector for the last three years. Results in the sciences and in mathematics are consistently above the national averages, and performance in computing has improved steadily over the past three years to exceed the national average in 1995. Students in art, design and the performing arts generally do well, with 100 per cent pass rates in GCE A level practical music for the past three years; results in music theory have, however, been significantly below the national average for the last two years. In geography and sociology, the proportion of students achieving both grades A to C and A to E in GCE A level is significantly above the national averages, but results in history are falling steadily and are now below the national average. The number of students taking GCE A level psychology has doubled during the past three years and results are above the national average. Modern languages results have improved and are now well above the national averages, with a significant number of students achieving the higher grades. While GCE A level English literature results are consistently very good, those in English language are weaker and fall below the national average. Students taking GCE A level business studies and economics have done well for the past three years, with proportions of A to C and A to E grades well above the national average.

46 Students taking GCSE examinations were usually resitting subjects in which they had not done well at school. Results are variable. In mathematics, results were poor in 1994 but improved to reach the national average in 1995. GCSE results in geography are good, but they have been very poor for the last two years in travel and tourism. Achievements in psychology are good. In modern languages, GCSE results are average for sixth form colleges, but if poor retention is taken into account, performance in both GCSE and foreign languages at work courses are much less satisfactory. GCSE results in English language are average, although they fluctuate widely.

47 Only a small number of students aged 16 to 18 have yet achieved vocational qualifications at the college. On the basis of vocational examination results the college was in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector, according to data published by the Department for Education and Employment. The retention of students in the first year of GNVQ art and design has been poor. In business and finance, GNVQ results at intermediate level are good, with 81 per cent and 97 per cent of students gaining the award in its first two years. However, the first outcome of the GNVQ advanced programme in business has been less successful, with only 62 per cent achieving the full award by the end of the two-year course. Business skills results are based on single-subject examinations in wordprocessing, audio typing, desktop publishing and shorthand. The results achieved by students who are also on full-time advanced GNVQ or GCE A level courses are satisfactory. Half the students on courses in business skills went directly into office work.

48 Foundation skills students who finished their courses in 1995, all found regular jobs or progressed to other courses at the college. Six of these 10 students achieved units in computer literacy and information technology, and all of them achieved RSA Examinations Board certificates. Many adult students on basic skills courses did not achieve wordpower and numberpower qualifications because they could not afford to enter for the final award.

49 In 1995, the college made the substantial achievement of successfully tracking the destinations of 91 per cent of its former students after two-year programmes, and 85 per cent of those who had completed a one-year programme. Analysis of these data is used to interpret trends and inform future guidance to students. Seventy-seven per cent of two-year course students progress to higher education. This figure included 22 per cent who took a year off; this is twice the proportion that did so in the previous two years. Most one-year course students (68 per cent) went on to additional full-time further education. Only 8 per cent of the two-year course students and 17 per cent of one-year course students went straight into jobs. In contrast, 43 per cent of students who left the college at the end of the first year of a two-year programme went into full-time employment, and a further 32 per cent went into further education elsewhere.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

50 A well-designed quality assurance system was introduced in 1994, and it has been improved subsequently. Policies and procedures are clear and effective. There is an annual cycle of quality assurance which involves governors, the senior management team and all staff. Responsibility for quality assurance is included in the terms of reference of the governors' curriculum committee, the senior management team, and the college's managing group. Quality assurance is an item on the agendas of most divisional and programme team meetings. Committees and working parties, which include support staff representation, are charged with implementing the policy.

51 The quality assurance system is directed by the senior management team. Each autumn term, a review of achievements in public examinations under the aegis of each head of division and head of programme is carried out by the principal. Reasons are sought for results which differ significantly from those predicted for individual students or groups. Each programme area is required to produce a mid-year self-assessment, which includes evaluation of enrolment, pastoral support, teaching and learning, achievements, and resources. Programme areas produce action plans, setting out standards to be achieved for the coming year. Each head of division has a checklist against which to monitor these action plans. Action plans for programme areas and support services form part of the overall operating plan of the college. Targets for examination pass rates, retention and attendance rates of students, are set annually by the senior management team. Reviews against these performance indicators are generally thorough, but some subject areas are less careful. Targets for services such as finance are being developed for the coming year, and these will be extended to other areas of administration as the college works towards the Investors in People award.

52 The college has subscribed to the national Advanced Level Information System for the past four years. This service allows colleges to compare students' actual achievements at GCE A level with predictions made on the basis of their GCSE performance, using national data as a benchmark. Advanced Level Information System data have prompted staff in some subject areas to change their teaching styles in order to raise the performance of students. The college is a member of the Hampshire external quality review scheme, which combines college self-assessment and peer review in a framework used by a number of sixth form colleges. The college acts upon issues which arise from this source, as it does in response to comments from external verifiers and examiners.

53 Good use is made of questionnaires to gather students' views of their courses and of the college's support services. Their responses are carefully analysed, with regular feedback to those taking part. Some changes have resulted. Examples include changes and improvements in teaching style; additional instruction in note making; an improved student diary;

improved publicity about counselling; and the provision of more study space. The adult and continuing education division is introducing a system of quality assurance but this has yet to be tested in practice. It includes evaluation by students of the teaching and learning they receive. Some of the courses provided by the division are, however, not yet subject to quality assurance, particularly those for adults taking evening classes leading to GCE A level or GCSE qualifications at the main college site.

54 The data which can be applied to quality control from the college management information system are limited. Information on enrolments, student attendance, retention rates, early leavers, performance against targets in public examinations, and destinations has to be collated from separate computerised or paper-based systems. This situation is unsatisfactory and may be aggravated as the college grows.

55 Staff appraisal has been introduced on a two-year cycle. Three slightly different versions of the scheme exist: one for teaching staff; one for support staff; and one for the predominantly part-time staff in the adult and continuing education division. Care will be needed to ensure that the objectives remain common, and that the three schemes do not diverge. Another, simpler process of review, is used for part-time staff. All staff, except those appointed within the past year, had been appraised by the end of 1995. Appraisal for teaching staff includes classroom observation. Most staff acknowledge the benefits of appraisal in raising the quality of teaching and in making in-service training more relevant.

56 Spending on staff development is about 1 per cent of the college's staffing budget. Training targets identified through appraisal are part of the college's staff-development plan, which is considered by the college management group and senior management team to ensure that it is consistent with the strategic plan. The programme strikes a fair balance between the needs of the individual, and those of the college. There is evaluation of staff-development events through questionnaires and oral feedback, but the college is not able to assess the impact of training on performance.

57 There is a carefully-organised induction programme for all new staff. Newly-qualified teachers receive additional support, which includes classroom observation, mentoring, and a special emphasis on development of tutoring skills. Staff spoke highly of the quality of induction.

58 The college produced a revised charter in 1995, after consultation with staff, students and parents. The respective responsibilities of the college and of students are stated precisely. Copies of the charter have been distributed widely. Tutors explained its purpose at induction, but nevertheless most students and parents consulted during the inspection remained unaware of the complaints procedure.

59 The college has produced a self-assessment report under the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Strengths and

weaknesses are listed, with a brief summary of the supporting evidence. The governors played a significant part in the development of this report. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements that had been reached, although there were parts of the report which were too descriptive and did not attempt to assess effectiveness.

RESOURCES

Staffing

60 The college's teaching staff are highly qualified. Ninety-seven per cent have degrees in appropriate subjects, and 27 per cent of them also hold higher degrees. Ninety-six per cent of the full-time teaching staff have teaching qualifications. All part-time staff employed in the adult and continuing education division who are not teacher qualified, are required to study for the appropriate City and Guilds of London Institute award during their first year. There are 115.4 full-time equivalent teaching staff employed at the main site, of whom 58 per cent are female; and 35 support staff of whom 66 per cent are female. There are an equal number of men and women who are senior managers. The adult and continuing education division has 2.5 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 120 hourly-paid tutors, 45 of whom are involved in vocational work supported by the FEFC. They are assisted by a large number of skilled volunteers, particularly in the adult basic education programme. Three per cent of the college's staff are from minority ethnic backgrounds, a proportion which is equal to the proportion within the local community.

61 Recent appointments of staff with vocational expertise in art and design, business, leisure and care, have been made as the college extends its curriculum to include qualifications such as GNVQs. These new appointments have been complemented by work placements for staff, particularly for teachers of business and health and social care courses, in order that they may update their vocational expertise. Part-time staff whose main work is outside education contribute their current industrial and commercial knowledge to some courses. Twenty-four staff have completed Training and Development Lead Body awards to enable them to act as assessors or verifiers for GNVQ and NVQ and a further 24 are working towards them.

62 Both teaching and support staff are enthusiastic and energetic. There is good teamwork in the college. Staff are dedicated to their pastoral roles, and a number make an extensive contribution to the activities programme for students. Many give their time to projects with students which have become a feature of the college, such as production of the yearbook.

63 There are appropriate personnel policies and procedures for staff appointments, disciplinary and grievance matters, redundancy, and equal opportunities. Turnover among full-time teaching and support staff is low, and there are many staff who have been at the college for more than

10 years. The numbers of teaching staff have grown considerably over the last three years but this increase has not been matched by larger numbers of learning support and technical staff. The level of technical support in art and in information technology was improved during the inspection, but some of the college's services need additional clerical support.

Equipment/learning resources

64 Most classrooms are suitably equipped with whiteboards, overhead projectors and video equipment. Many also contain computers. The new science laboratories are well equipped, and there is a modern language laboratory which is used for both class teaching and individual study. Facilities for studying electronics are particularly good. The college has a modern multi-gym and a wide range of indoor and outdoor sports equipment. Other local leisure facilities such as squash courts and a dry ski slope are used to extend the range of sports for students. The music department has a wide range of professional instruments, and a well-equipped recording studio. The audio-visual aids unit has satellite television. In art and design, studio equipment is good, but printmaking would benefit from availability of a wider range of processes. Ceramics equipment is under used. Video facilities are inadequate to cope with the needs of media students.

65 The library holds 17,000 books and subscribes to 90 periodicals and newspapers. There are two multi-media compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database terminals, six networked computers, and a range of video and audio equipment. Books are security marked and computer indexed. Analysis of their use is available by student, by subject, or by item. The library is relatively small with only 156 study spaces, one for every 12 full-time students. There is insufficient seating at busy times of the day, but there are several other quiet areas that can be used for study. Library spending was low at £10.18 for each full-time equivalent student in 1995.

66 The open-access information technology centre has been enlarged recently. It provides 47 workstations equipped with modern 486 specification computers. There are 131 similar workstations elsewhere in the college. A computer network, upon which most of the college's software and some CD-ROM material is available, is accessible across most of the college including the two boarding houses. The ratio of one computer to every 11 full-time students is relatively poor, but students report that there is no difficulty in gaining access to machines. The college's target of 1:10 by 1998 may prove insufficient if the number of students on vocational courses continues to rise.

67 The college plans equipment replacement in detail. In the current year, it spent over £200,000 on equipment, nearly half of which came from its reserves. Inventories are held at programme area or divisional level, but the college is only now producing a central inventory which it intends to complete by the end of 1996.

Accommodation

68 Buildings on the main site range in age from the original Victorian school, through additions dating from the 1960s, to the new science block completed in September 1995. The main site has a comprehensive range of teaching spaces, a library, a student canteen, a student centre, and recreational facilities that include playing fields and tennis courts. There is one new and nine older temporary classrooms, of which only four have been in regular use this year. There are two boarding houses which accommodate 66 students. The residential accommodation is good and it includes shared study bedrooms, and social facilities. The original buildings are not ideally suited to modern needs, and the college has had to make major changes to accommodate increased numbers of students and a wider curriculum. Examples of recent changes include the conversion of storage space to extend the learning support area in the college centre; the conversion of the theatre pit to enlarge the performance area and auditorium; and the resiting and improvement of the multi-gym. Some of these changes have caused new problems with sound-proofing. Shortages of storage space for students' work inhibit three-dimensional studies in art and design.

69 The main site is a pleasant place on which to study, but its steep slopes create problems for wheelchair access in some areas, and there is not enough social space. The canteen is a source of frustration to students because it seats only 114, and has short opening hours. This problem is made more acute than it need be by the uniform break and lunchtimes. Overcrowding in the college centre has led to complaints about poor maintenance of toilets.

70 The adult education site at Weeke is a former infant school. It has a hall, a small number of classrooms, an information technology suite, a communal area and catering facilities. Much of the accommodation has been extensively refurbished, and it provides a welcoming and comfortable environment. There is easy wheelchair access to most of the rooms. The site has no learning resource area other than for computing, and there is a shortage of car parking.

71 The college estate is well managed. All the buildings on both sites are in good repair, with evidence of systematic maintenance and refurbishment. On the main site, there have been a number of recent improvements to smoking areas, parking, and interior lighting. Some external lighting still needs to be improved. There is a well-developed accommodation strategy and room utilisation is monitored regularly.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

72 The particular strengths of the college are:

- high students' achievements
- good teaching
- effective governance and management
- sound strategic planning
- substantial growth in student numbers
- a widening curriculum
- good procedures for student recruitment and guidance
- good learning support for all students
- a committed and highly-qualified staff.

73 If it is to continue to improve the quality of provision, the college should:

- improve its management information systems
- ensure better use of staff expertise across both sites
- provide consistent quality assurance for all areas of its work
- develop employer links more extensively
- increase the social spaces for students.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)

 - 3 FEFC-funded enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

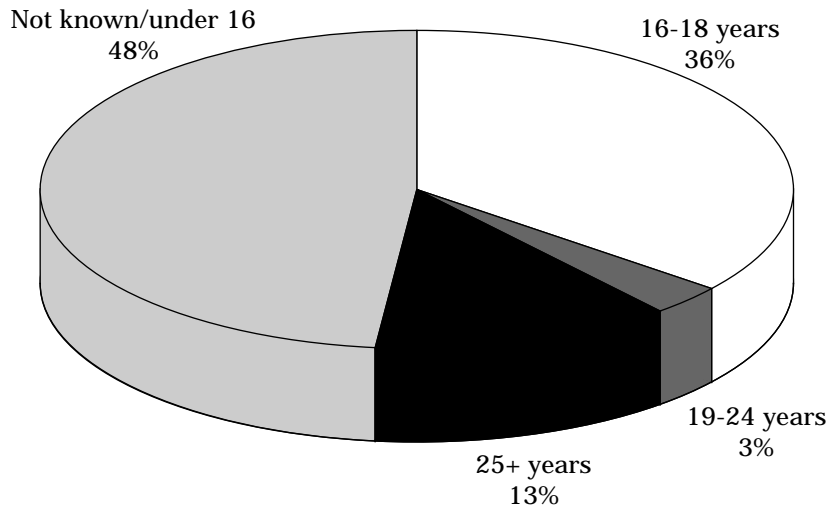
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 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

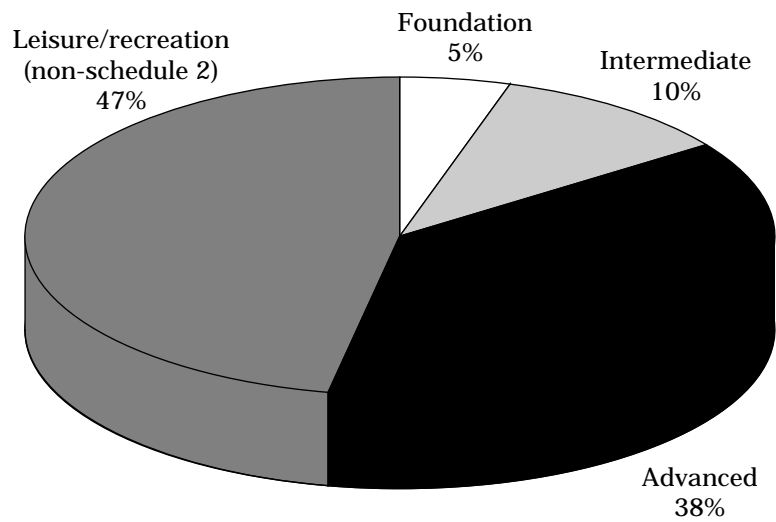
Peter Symonds' College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 4,623

Figure 2

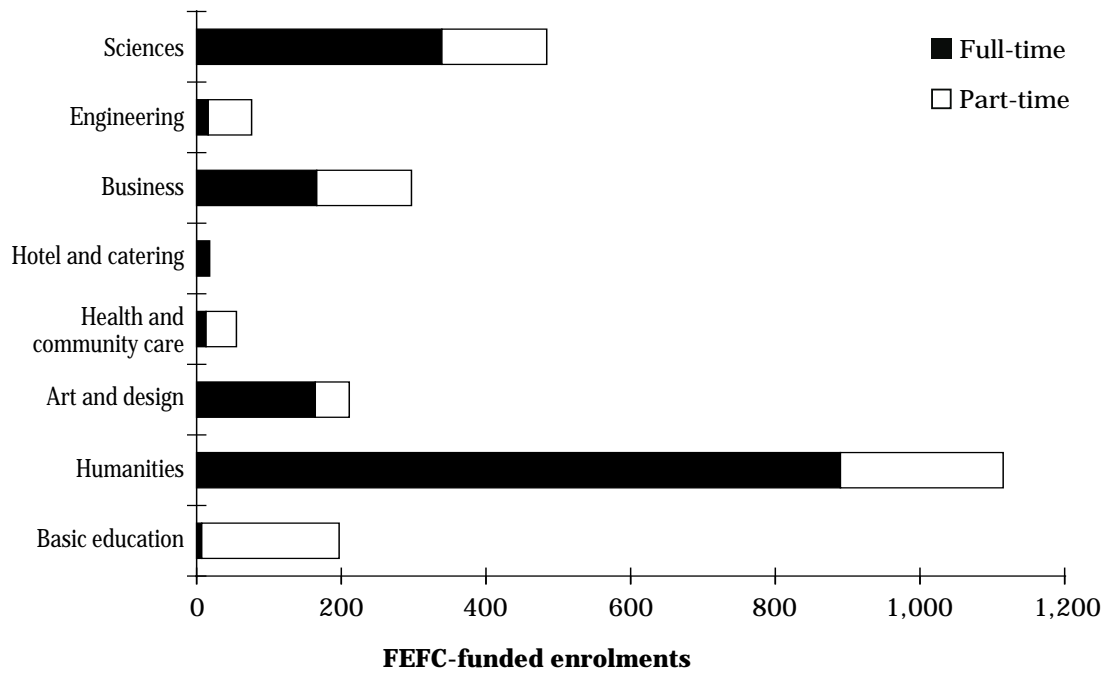
Peter Symonds' College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 4,623

Figure 3

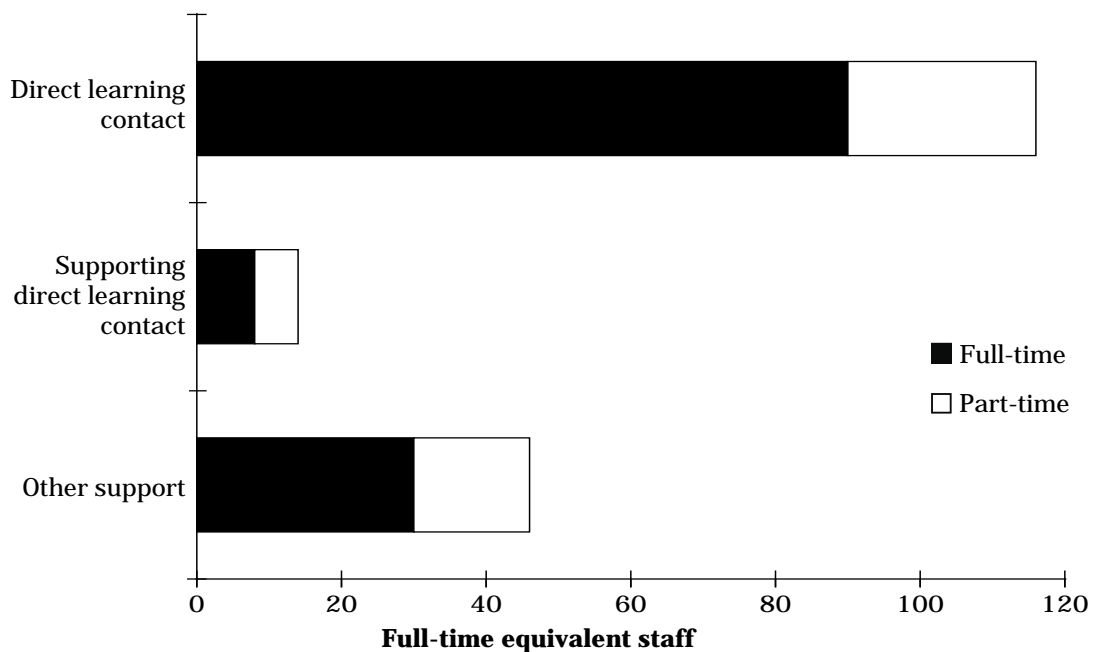
Peter Symonds' College: FEFC-funded enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



FEFC-funded enrolments: 2,453

Figure 4

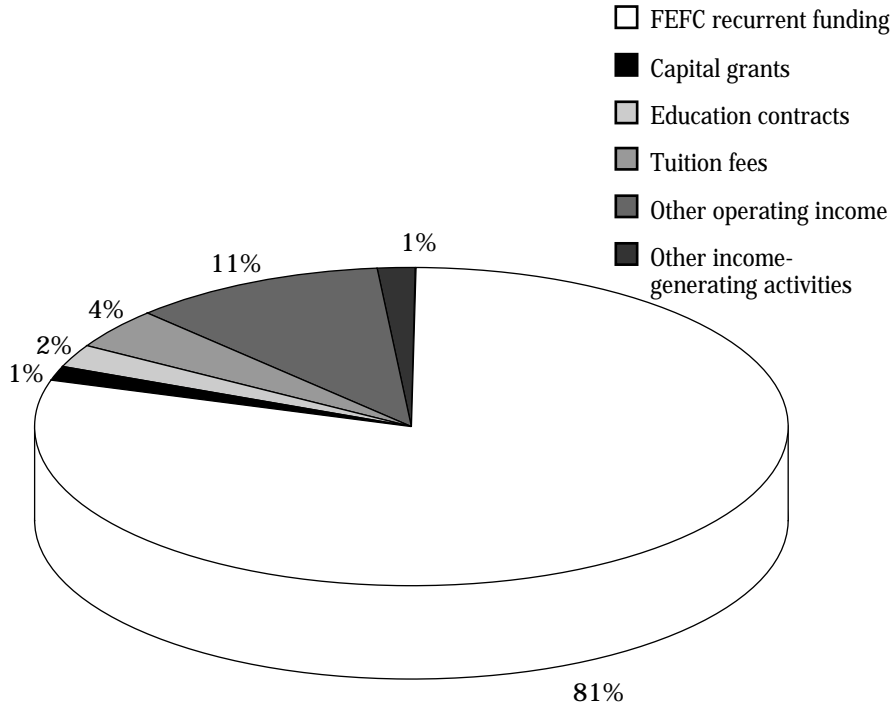
Peter Symonds' College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 176

Figure 5

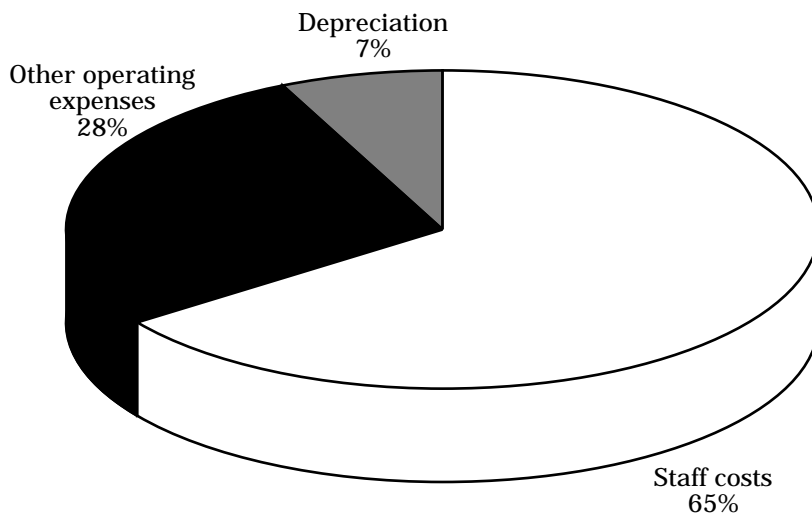
Peter Symonds' College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £5,525,284

Figure 6

Peter Symonds' College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £5,416,366

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