# Seevic College

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
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 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.*

**College grade profiles 1993-96**

| | Inspection grades | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Activity** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Programme area | 9% | 59% | 29% | 3% | <1% |
| Cross-college provision | 14% | 50% | 31% | 5% | <1% |
| Overall | 12% | 54% | 30% | 4% | <1% |

# FEFC  INSPECTION  REPORT 16/97

**SEEVIC COLLEGE**
**EASTERN REGION**
**Inspected September-November 1996**

## Summary

Seevic College is a sixth form college in Benfleet, Essex.  The college provides a wide range of courses for school-leavers and for an increasing number of adults.  It has strong and effective links with its partner schools and with universities in the region.   There are comprehensive arrangements for the recruitment and induction of its students, who benefit from good pastoral support.  High standards of teaching and learning are maintained on most courses.  The staff are well qualified and committed to the success of their students.  A range of services is provided for students including careers guidance and additional support for their learning. There is a well-resourced independent learning centre.  Senior managers have provided sensitive and effective leadership during a period of uncertainty and have been supported by the corporation.  Governors should now focus more closely on the key factors affecting the success of the college.  Progress is being made on the development of quality assurance procedures but arrangements for their implementation should be strengthened.  The college should also: complete the management restructuring process; extend its use of performance indicators; improve completion rates on some courses; increase its range of industrial links; and improve 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 | 2 |
| Quality assurance | 3 |
| Resources:      staffing | 2 |
|                     equipment/learning resources | 2 |
|                     accommodation | 3 |

| Curriculum area | Grade | Curriculum area | Grade |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mathematics and computing | 2 | English and modern languages | 2 |
| Sciences | 3 |  |  |
| Business | 2 | Social sciences | 1 |
| Media, expressive and performing arts | 2 | Other humanities | 2 |

## INTRODUCTION

1      Seevic College, in Benfleet, was inspected between September and November 1996.  Enrolment and induction were inspected in September 1996, the curriculum areas were inspected during September and October 1996 and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected from 11 to 15 November 1996.  Twelve inspectors spent 51 inspector days in the college and visited 124 classes involving 1,500 students.  They scrutinised students' work and held discussions with staff, students, parents, members of the corporation and representatives of the community, local schools, higher education and the Essex Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

## THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2      Seevic College was established in 1972 as South East Essex Sixth Form College serving 12 partner schools in the Castle Point and Rochford area of Essex.  The college is located in Benfleet, about eight miles from Southend and was one of the first purpose-built sixth form colleges in the country.  The original main building has been supplemented by additional temporary accommodation over the years.  The college also leases a two-storey building from the borough council and part of a school nearby in Rayleigh.  The college has its own sports field a quarter of a mile from the main site.

3      The 1991 census recorded the population of Castle Point and Rochford as 162,000.  The unemployment rate in Castle Point is equal to the average for Essex of 7.5 per cent while the rate for Rochford is lower, at 6.1 per cent, and that for Southend higher at 9.2 per cent.  Distribution represents the largest employment sector in the Castle Point area, followed by construction, financial and business services and other manufacturing.  The area has a high percentage of small businesses.  Benfleet is a commuter area; a significant proportion of the population travel to work in London.

4      There has been a 25 per cent increase in full-time student numbers during the last five years.  Over that period, the proportion of part-time students has increased to 19 per cent of the total student population.  At the time of incorporation, there were very few students attending the college from outside its traditional catchment area of partner schools.  The college now attracts some 32 per cent of its students from outside this area, notably from the nearby areas of Southend and Basildon.

5      The college operates in a highly competitive environment.  There are five other further education colleges within a 10-mile radius, namely Basildon College, South East Essex College of Arts and Technology, Thurrock College, Palmers College and Chelmsford College.  Of the 23 secondary schools in the South East Essex area, 19 are grant maintained and 10 have sixth forms.  By September 1997, three of the college's original 12 partner schools will have sixth forms and only one will remain a local education authority (LEA) institution.  There are three special schools nearby which cater for students with moderate learning difficulties.

6    During 1995-96, the college had 2,315 students enrolled.  Of these, 1,849 were full-time students and 466 part time.  Student numbers by age and by level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2.  The curriculum of the college covers eight of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas.  Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3.  There were 119 full-time equivalent teachers and 50 full-time equivalent support staff.  A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7    The college's mission is to provide an education of high quality for 16 to 19 year old students and for adults.  As an open access institution it aims to provide a supportive environment to encourage the intellectual, practical and cultural development of all its students and seeks to enhance the opportunities for lifetime learning for the local community.  The strategic plan emphasises the college's continued development of adult provision whilst recognising that the largest part of its provision will continue to be for school-leavers.

**RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION**

8    The college offers a wide range of courses to meet students' needs. Seventy-seven per cent of all full-time equivalent students are following two-year advanced level courses.  Forty subjects are offered at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and in a number of these students can choose between different syllabuses.  Fifteen GCE advanced supplementary (AS) courses are available.  There are nine general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced programmes, seven at intermediate level and two foundation level courses.  Nearly 30 per cent of students aged 16 to 19 are currently following GNVQ programmes.  In order to preserve science provision in the locality GNVQ advanced science is jointly taught in a collaborative programme with a local further education college.  National vocational qualifications (NVQs) in administration at levels 1, 2 and 3 are also available.  Students can choose from 18 general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects.

9    The college offers courses designed for students with moderate or severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities.  These students' needs are thoroughly assessed so that the college's provision builds on their previous experience.  Students on the foundation studies course are able to study for a range of nationally-recognised qualifications.

10    The college's strategic plan identified the need to widen provision for adults and to respond to the requirements of local business.  These objectives have largely been achieved.  In 1995, the college changed its name to Seevic College (South East Essex Sixth Form and Community College) in line with its broadening provision.  The business school has developed a range of short courses in information technology, secretarial skills and business languages which are available to the community and to local companies in the evenings and at weekends.  Recruitment to these

courses has been highly successful and more than 400 part-time students enrolled last year.  The college sponsors Castlepoint and Rochford Adult Community College which offers GCE A level and GCSE evening courses on the Seevic College site.  The college has decided to discontinue developing its own evening GCE A level and GCSE courses to avoid competition with this provision.  Opportunities are available for adults to join daytime courses and about 40 students are enrolled for this academic year.  Daytime adult students have access to the same range of student services as 16 to 19 year olds.

11    There are well-developed links with higher education institutions. The college runs a successful access course as part of the Essex Access Consortium, attracting about 20 adult students each year.  The college offers a range of first-year degree modules through a franchise agreement with Anglia Polytechnic University.  This year, the programme has been extended to include second-year and third-year modules in English, history, psychology and sociology, enabling students to complete their degree while studying at the college.  Through its membership of the Essex and Havering Sixth Form Colleges consortium, the college has established an agreement with 11 regional universities for students to progress to their courses.

12    The college publishes a range of effective promotional documents which cover the breadth of its activity.  Professional market research was undertaken before the development of the business school courses.  A marketing consultant has been working with senior staff on the design and further development of the college's marketing strategy.

13    Strong and effective links are maintained with partner schools and local special schools.  Liaison systems are well developed and transfer between institutions is effectively managed.  Staff in the partner schools consider that the college provides a wide choice of courses for students aged 16 to 19 and value its long-term experience in successfully running GCE A level courses.  The college's policy is to accept all school-leavers for whom it can offer an appropriate course.  Recently opened school sixth forms and intense competition for 16 to 19 students from other providers has resulted in a highly competitive local environment in which partner schools are anxious to sustain and further develop their links with the college.  As part of its response to these concerns, the college is engaged in negotiations to expand its accommodation and provision in nearby Rayleigh.

14    The college's relationship with Essex TEC is well established and productive.  The TEC funded market research into local adult education opportunities and more recently has financially supported the wider networking of the college information technology system.  The college has been chosen by the TEC to develop open learning centres to assist in the teaching of short courses to adults.  The TEC plans to promote these courses through the business link initiative.  The college has also been an active member of the South East Essex Education Business Partnership.

However, industrial links to support the design and delivery of the curriculum are limited.

15     Courses in key skills are compulsory for all advanced level students and each year more than a hundred students have gained Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network awards as part of this programme. This year the college is integrating key skills with GCE A level programmes and students will be able to work towards the platinum award. Enrichment activities are a feature of the curriculum and are highly regarded by students. Many students choose to participate in at least one activity while at the college. There is a wide range of activities to choose from, many of which are accredited by the Essex Open College Federation. At the time of the inspection, a student production of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* was one of a number of plays being presented for public performance. The college's orchestra and choir give regular concerts; students participate in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme; there are successful exchanges to Denmark and Holland for non-linguists; there are over 15 college sports teams; and clubs and societies include a branch of the Anti-Nazi League, an Islamic society and a Christian union. Over 100 students participate in the community service programme and an annual party for housebound elderly people organised by students is held on college premises.

16     The college is committed to equality of opportunity and has a well-publicised policy which is prominently featured in the college charter. The policy was formulated two years ago by a college working group which included students. There are plans to reconstitute this group to review progress and to develop further strategies to monitor performance.

**GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

17     The inspection took place during the autumn term whilst the principal was on long-term sick leave. During the previous nine months, the principal had been absent on a number of occasions due to illness. The vice-principal (curriculum) was asked to assume the role of acting principal with effect from September 1996.

18     The membership of the normally 20 strong corporation is in transition. Seven members have retired this year, mainly due to completion of their terms of office or business commitments. At the time of the inspection there were eight independent members, one co-opted member, one staff member, one student member, the principal and a TEC representative. Considerable effort has been directed to finding new members. Six people were due to be nominated to join the corporation at its next meeting: one co-opted member representing higher education, two independent members, a further staff member and two parent members. The range of experience of governors includes commercial training, secondary school and prison education, law and accountancy. The corporation has established two committees, remuneration and audit. There are five focus groups: personnel, finance and planning, quality

assurance, student services and a search group to support the work of the corporation. Committee chairmen meet to oversee the processes of governance. Members particularly value the work of the student services and quality assurance focus groups to inform them of the quality of the student experience.

19    The corporation takes a close interest in strategic planning and holds an annual conference to consider strategic issues. Members were actively involved in the shaping of the college mission and in the change of name to embrace the concept of a community college. Strategic targets for expanding provision for adults and the range of vocational courses have been achieved. Governors give generously of their time on college business. For instance, they responded well to the additional demands arising from the frequent meetings required to consider and agree the plans for restructuring. However, they have not always focused sufficiently on the key issues that are central to the success of the college.

20    The college has been slow to respond to the need to make efficiency gains. Consideration of the future organisation requirements and associated staffing needs has only recently been completed and action taken. There has also been little progress in a number of other key areas such as the definition and implementation of a college-wide quality assurance framework and the development of a formalised accommodation strategy. Financial analysis and reporting have only recently reached an acceptable standard. The corporation has now recognised the need to streamline its decision-making processes. Problems over clerkship to the governors have been resolved by the appointment, on a trial basis, of an agency service. This has led to more effective support for governors' meetings.

21    A new curriculum management structure was introduced in September 1996 with the aim of improving communication, responsiveness and accountability throughout the college. Nine schools and a cross-college unit replaced the previous 25 subject departments. The schools and the cross-college unit are grouped together into three college divisions, each headed by a member of the senior management team. At the time of the inspection, the new management structure had not been fully established. Management responsibilities at, and above, divisional level have not yet been redefined because of the principal's absence.

22    The senior management team have coped well with an extended period of uncertainty. Closely supported by governors, they have worked together effectively to manage the process of restructuring and staff redeployment. The job specifications of staff have been redefined and a cycle of meetings has been set up to improve communication. Recent records of senior management meetings indicate a more clearly-focused approach. Minutes of meetings now give more attention to action planning and to monitoring the implementation of policy.

23    Regular bulletins are used to inform staff about important decisions and issues facing the college. Staff felt that they were well informed and involved in the college restructuring. Contact between corporation members and college staff has been limited. Staff themselves have little awareness of corporation members' responsibilities and the framework within which they work. The procedures and timescales senior managers were following after curriculum development proposals and requests for resourcing had been submitted were not clear to many teaching staff. Some were finding it difficult to cope with the amount of written information received from the senior management team.

24    The success with which courses are managed varies across the schools. There is good teamwork, comprehensive course documentation and an effective system of meetings in mathematics, sociology, psychology, and on the foundation studies programme and GNVQ business courses. In some other curriculum areas, for example computing and information technology, management is less effective. Arrangements for managing cross-college initiatives such as key skills, facilities for students to work on their own, and some aspects of student guidance and support are still evolving. As part of the recent reorganisation, a cross-college unit was established to bring together staff in these areas. At the time of the inspection, reporting lines for staff in the unit lacked clarity and there was little definition of the objectives and timescales of the projects they were managing. The head of the unit had no direct line-management function for staff and no responsibility for ensuring that curriculum policies were implemented. The college recognises these weaknesses and is in the process of redefining roles in this area.

25    The college and the governors fulfil the statutory requirements of sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* by making provision for religious education and a weekly act of collective worship in the Christian tradition. Individual preferences for this provision are discussed with all students at enrolment and timetable amendments made where necessary to allow students to attend. Arrangements for worship can also be made for other religious groups.

26    The college has only recently defined performance indicators to enable management and corporation members to monitor the achievement of college and course objectives. Data on students' destinations, and reliable and up-to-date attendance figures, have not been available in the past. Procedures have been tightened to enable managers to obtain earlier analysis of the data on students' attendance and retention. A range of computer-based systems are in use to support management information and administration and there are plans to increase the range of on-line information available to heads of schools.

27    There is a financial strategy to accumulate cash reserves to fund large investments such as accommodation. Allocations of budgets for teaching materials are made to schools using a formula reflecting the funding methodology. The arrangements for allocating budgets are clear and

understood by budget holders who receive monthly statements of orders and expenditure. The intention is to devolve further resource management to schools and subject leaders. A computer system for planning and monitoring income and staffing hours at school level is used by heads of school. Capital funds are allocated on a basis of prioritised bids. The college currently prepares quarterly management accounts, but the corporation has recently requested monthly reporting. Work on improving the basic financial reporting procedures has delayed the development of unit cost calculations. The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £18.50 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.36 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6, respectively.

## STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

28    The college carries out a wide range of recruitment activities with local schools. Parents and teachers speak highly of the efforts made to meet the needs of each applicant. Year 11 pupils are offered a programme of 'taster' days and visits which are highly valued. There is a clear admissions policy which encourages early application and guarantees a place to those who confine their application to the college. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are offered a link programme based on established staff contacts with local secondary schools. Applicants for the access course can obtain information throughout the year from the adult education team. They attend a part-time planning course which provides opportunities for the accreditation of their prior learning and for guidance which is specifically related to adult students.

29    The induction process for students aged 16 to 19 begins in June and continues through to the first week of the new academic year. The college gives high priority to ensuring that students receive impartial advice and embark on appropriate programmes of study. The enrolment process involves parents as well as students. Careers staff are available during the enrolment period to provide advice. The induction tutor maintains contact with the student throughout the summer and for the first half term, after which there is a transfer to a tutor who teaches the student. Individual subject areas offer induction into teaching and assessment methods appropriate to their courses.

30    Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are offered appropriate support throughout their courses. Foundation studies students complete accredited assignments and are supported by a wide range of external agencies, and by a variety of work experience placements. Students on other courses who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are efficiently identified and sympathetically supported by an established team of staff. There is particularly good support for students with hearing impairments where communicators and note takers are provided on a one-to-one basis.

31   A variety of methods are employed to establish and provide for the additional learning support needs of students.  Screening tests in communications and numeracy are held for all GNVQ students and support is then offered on either a one-to-one or group basis.  GCSE and GCE A level students' needs are identified less formally through induction or later by tutor or self-referral.  The mathematics workshop is open at lunchtimes. Communication support is offered at all levels from basic skills to GCE A level essay writing by a group of experienced staff.  Students can also use packages which enable them to study on their own in the independent learning centre.  There is, however, no clear college-wide strategy for monitoring the effectiveness of communication and numeracy support or for mapping out future developments.

32   Adult students on the access course have a base teaching room and a tutor who has a specific brief for their support.  Adults who join other daytime provision are allocated a personal tutor from amongst their subject teachers.  Mature students requiring more specialised guidance are referred to the post-19 tutor.  Adults attending the college's evening and weekend provision have few support facilities.

33   There are established systems for reviewing students' progress, based on an initial action plan.  Students are encouraged to record their own skills and to take responsibility for their own learning.  The college successfully builds on the effective recording of students' achievements by local schools.  During induction, students are given a working file in which to build up their tutorial record and a disk on which to update their record of achievement.  In the 1995-96 academic year, 65 per cent of students completed a record of achievement.  The college values its relationship with parents who are encouraged to contact the college at any time.  Parents value this access and strongly support the regular parents' evenings and the college's informal but businesslike approach to students.

34   A new tutorial system has been introduced this academic year.  An unusual feature is the initial allocation of an induction tutor and the subsequent change to a personal tutor.  The personal tutor, who is one of the student's subject teachers, oversees the student's attendance and progress and, in the case of GCE A level students, the accumulation of key skills recorded for the Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network awards scheme.  The new system has identified clear priorities and measurable objectives chiefly related to students' attendance, progress through the review system, and retention.  There has been a thorough and continuing  programme  of  staff  development  to  introduce  the  new processes.  However, there is already considerable variation in the way tutors implement the new system.  The speed with which the system was introduced resulted in some of the implications for staff and students not being identified.  For example, second-year students did not benefit fully from advice on applications for higher education.  The development of suitable evaluation methods for the new system is at an early stage.

35    All students are offered appropriate careers support.  The college employs a specialist careers officer from the Essex Careers and Business Partnership on a full-time basis.  Comprehensive advice on university entrance is available and, in addition, there are job search sessions followed by relevant assignments.  For those seeking employment there is a weekly drop-in jobclub, attended by an employment adviser, which provides details of local vacancies.  The careers centre is located in the independent learning centre and is well resourced.  There are two dedicated careers interview rooms and adequate administrative support.  The centre provides students with easy access to a wide range of careers related software.

36    Students can normally be seen by a qualified counsellor within 24 hours.  General information and advice are available from a variety of sources: personal tutors, divisional tutors, reception staff, leaflets in the library, and staff in the adult education centre and independent learning centre.  Although the information available to students and staff is comprehensive, undue time is spent searching for answers to queries.  Students are able to voice their opinions and concerns through the college council.  Representatives are elected from each tutor group and include 16 to 19 year old students and adults.  A college commitment to support the student council is made in the college charters.  Pressure on accommodation is adversely affecting the provision for student facilities.  Although the college has adjusted its timetable to spread out the demand on resources, the common room remains very crowded at peak times and separate facilities for adults and the student council are not yet available.

**TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING**

37    Of the 124 teaching sessions inspected, 65 per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses.  In 4 per cent of sessions the weaknesses clearly outweighed the strengths.  The average attendance at sessions was 85 per cent and ranged from 73 per cent in GCSE classes to 88 per cent in GCE A level classes.  The average number of students per session was 12.5.  The grades given 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 | 15 | 32 | 29 | 5 | 0 | 81 |
| GCSE | 2 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| GNVQ | 3 | 11 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| Basic education | 2 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| Other* | 4 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| **Total** | **26** | **54** | **39** | **5** | **0** | **124** |

*includes access to higher education and NVQs.*

38    In the business school there was a strong emphasis on teamwork resulting in common practice in assignment design, assessment and the use of information technology.  The availability of networked personal computers with up-to-date software in nearly all of the teaching rooms allowed teachers to switch between formal teaching, group work and individual work using relevant information technology packages.  A business ethos was conveyed to students through the use of professional standard handouts.  On the vocational courses well-structured assignments and exercises encouraged students to work independently.  Students on the GNVQ intermediate programme were developing relevant key skills through the use of a carefully-planned guide provided by the teacher which gave useful advice on how to distil the key points from detailed case histories.  Students developed information technology skills in class and through studying for supplementary qualifications.  There was skilled teaching of less able students and specialist help was available for a student with hearing impairment.  A more didactic teaching method was used in economics, business studies and accounting where teachers relied more on lectures and students did follow-up work using set texts.  In some of these lessons teachers did not question students skilfully and it was evident that some students had difficulty in maintaining concentration and in grasping the key points.  There was little use of visual display.

39    Teaching was of a consistently high standard on social science courses.  Using detailed schemes of work and lesson plans teachers managed lessons well.  Aims and objectives were made clear at the outset of lessons.  The work in lessons was purposeful and productive and students were enthusiastic.  Teachers used a variety of teaching methods, often within a single lesson, including didactic teaching, group work, work in pairs, whole class discussion, question and answer sessions, experiments, note taking, effective use of the whiteboards and occasional use of overhead projectors.  Students' written work was regularly set, marked and returned in good time.

40    On separate specialist courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities there were examples of effective teaching and learning.  Teaching was relevant to students' individual needs, used real learning situations, encouraged independence and gave students responsibilities.  Teachers had a thorough knowledge of each student.  Lessons were well planned and the work challenged the students.  In support of, for example, reading development and individual learning activities a range of written materials has been developed to match students' age and ability.  Teachers used a variety of methods and work was conducted at a good pace while providing for continuing assessment and support for individual students.  Effective use was made of support assistants.  In a few sessions, teachers intervened too quickly in the work before students had been given time to attempt it on their own.  In other sessions, teachers made insufficient demands on students.

41     In mathematics and computing courses there were good working relationships between teachers and students which created a supportive learning environment.  Teachers translated their enthusiasm for their subject into interesting activities for students.  A variety of teaching methods was used to maintain students' interest and to challenge students of all levels of ability.  For example, in a GCE A level statistics lesson on the use of frequency distributions, although the students lacked confidence in this topic, through the skilful use of questioning and some added humour, the teacher enabled them to come to appropriate conclusions.  In mathematics there was good support for students of all abilities.  Extension activities were organised for students wanting to enter national competitions.  A wide range of learning materials has been developed to suit all levels of ability and is available in the mathematics workshop.  The materials were used effectively on pre-GCSE courses and for support provision.  Assignment documentation for GNVQ information technology programmes was well organised, enabling students to work in groups and independently on carefully constructed tasks.  Practical work in computing and information technology courses was workshop based and individual support was provided by the teacher.  The computer base room was too small for some class sizes and unsuitable for whole group discussions.  In some sessions, students were not sufficiently challenged and lost interest in the activities set.

42     In some science lessons, effective teaching challenged students and stimulated them into deep analysis of the topics under consideration.  In one session, the teacher invited theories from the students on how to work out the hand and arm movements involved in throwing a javelin.  Each student participated fully in their own individual, active way to demonstrate their theories.  Through class discussion, a realistic and precise sequence of movements was identified.  The class thoroughly enjoyed the experience.  Practical classes were well organised to promote the effective completion of tasks but students were not always required to develop the best working practices.  There were several examples where there was no insistence on the wearing of goggles, protective gloves or overalls.  In some classes, the teaching lacked variety and did not take sufficient account of the differing abilities of the students.  Teachers built and maintained good relationships with the students.  There were appropriate schedules for setting and marking of students' work, and agreed deadlines for the handing in of work which attracted penalties if they were not met.  Teachers made useful comments on students' written work but they were not always sufficiently detailed.

43     Practical work and theoretical studies were combined effectively on media, expressive and performing arts courses.  The tone of lessons was relaxed and friendly and led to effective discussion and good teamwork.  Students on GNVQ courses gained valuable experience assisting with the production of college marketing materials.  Music students used their experience in instrumental performance to aid the understanding of the

colour and texture of a piece of music played in class. Peer assessment was used effectively with performing arts students to help them develop a self-critical approach to their work. In art classes, students were directed to undertake extensive research before beginning projects. Assignments had clear aims and objectives and were generally challenging, although a few were too narrowly prescribed and did not allow for a broad interpretation. Feedback to students sometimes lacked enough detail to enable them to make improvements in their work. Teachers kept clear records of students' achievements and were able to track their progress closely.

44    In geography and religious studies, lessons were generally conducted in a business-like manner. Coherent schemes of work were in place and teachers resourced their lessons well. For instance, in a GCE A level geography lesson a series of colour slides effectively illustrated the major issues involved in urban dereliction and renewal. This stimulated students' personal work on the plotting of trends in the population of London. In a religious studies lesson, discussion of the status of the miracles was led by the teacher with good humour and skill and the pace of work was sustained by the sensible ideas contributed by students. In the less effective lessons, teachers failed to sustain the interest of less motivated students and did not provide them with enough work to do themselves. Visits and discussions were used to extend students' learning in geography and religious studies. Geography field courses visited the London docks and students on religious studies courses visited the British Museum in order to broaden their experience.

45    Lessons in history, law and politics were well planned and learning was set in context. Teachers used a wide range of teaching methods. One GCE A level history lesson was particularly effective. Students were guided through a discussion of the limits of Mussolini's authority in October 1922. All students participated, deploying information from their reading and from previous lessons. The teacher provided intellectual rigour and challenged the students who responded with obvious interest and enjoyment. In a law lesson which focused on a recent artificial insemination case and the controversy surrounding the Australian euthanasia case, the teacher skilfully centred discussion on the legal implications of these issues, sensitively balancing the law with moral aspects. The students were fascinated by the content and presentation of the session. Written work was regularly set and appropriately marked. In a minority of lessons, students did not participate effectively and in some GCSE lessons the work failed to stretch intellectually or enthuse students.

46    Students following English courses experienced varied and lively teaching which encouraged them to develop a personal, yet critical response. There were informal, good humoured and purposeful staff student relationships. Teaching sessions were well structured and effective in developing knowledge and skills. An emphasis on key words, ideas and quotations encouraged students to examine texts in detail. In a lesson on

*The Franklin's Tale* medieval harp and recorder music was provided to accompany a student's reading of the scene. Students showed confidence in reading and understanding. In a lesson on *Pride and Prejudice*, students discussed methods of presentation. The teacher's questioning was skilful, and encouraged students to probe the text in detail and to draw on other texts for comparison. Feedback from teachers was supportive in class and in marked work. Technical errors were highlighted and some marking was exceptionally detailed, creating a dialogue on the work between student and teacher. In a minority of classes teachers talked too much and either inhibited students from developing their own ideas or encouraged them to become too passive.

**STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

47    Students enjoyed their studies and spoke enthusiastically about them. They appreciated the commitment and support shown by staff in assisting them to achieve their goals. Many students participated in the range of voluntary additional cultural, creative and sporting activities that are offered. The college has an excellent record in competitive sport. For example, eight different sports teams were national finalists in 1996, the netball team were national champions in 1995 and 1996, and 14 students have represented their country in the last two years.

48    Most students worked purposefully in classes, mastering appropriate skills and specialist language. Practical work in sciences and expressive and performing arts was carried out competently. In humanities, mathematics, computing and business courses students developed effective research skills. There were examples of high levels of achievement in assignment and project work where students applied their knowledge and understanding through modelling and practical applications. GCE A level mathematics students used their problem solving skills in real life situations at the Ford Motor Company, reporting their findings to senior management. In 1995, GCE A level economics students achieved six out of the 12 distinctions attained world wide in one of the examination papers set by the Chartered Institute of Bankers. Students' oral work was generally of a high standard especially in English, modern languages and humanities. Students expressed opinions confidently and debated effectively. In a group discussion in religious studies, students were able to debate relativism in Christianity with perception, and one student was able to compare effectively this aspect of Christianity with Buddhism. Students worked effectively in teams.

49    In 1996 there were 1,479 entries for GCE A level examinations in 34 subjects. The average pass rate at grades A to E was 87 per cent. These results were higher than the national average in 1995 for students aged 16 to 18 in sixth form colleges of 84 per cent. Students aged 16 to 18 entered for at least one GCE AS/A level in 1996 scored an average of 4.7 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this

performance measure, according to tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE).

50    In 1996 there were 100 per cent pass rates in six GCE A level subjects: textiles, film studies, music, music technology, government and politics, and Spanish.  Students in a further seven subjects gained pass rates of more than 90 per cent.  In the same year, the proportion of students achieving grades A to C was above the national average for biology, design technology, electronics, film studies, geography, law, mathematics, performing arts, psychology, government and politics, and sociology.

51    There were 108 entries for GCE AS examinations in 1996 in 18 subjects.  The average pass rate at grades A to E was 56 per cent, a decline of 12 per cent on the 1995 figure, and lower than the national average in 1995 of 73 per cent for all sixth form colleges.  The number of entries has declined by 33 per cent over the last two years.

52    The college subscribes to an independent, external service which provides an analysis of the value added to students' achievements by comparing their actual performance at GCE A level with predictions based on GCSE grades.  In 1994 and 1995, students consistently achieved higher grades than those predicted in human biology, history, psychology, music and theatre studies.  They performed below their expected grades in art, chemistry, French, Spanish, government and politics and media.

53    There were 636 entries in 21 GCSE subjects in 1996.  An average of 52 per cent achieved grades A* to C; 4 per cent higher than the national average for sixth form colleges in 1995.  The number of students taking GCSE examinations and the number of subjects offered have fallen as alternative qualifications have become available.  The first 45 GNVQ intermediate entries in 1995 produced a pass rate of 80 per cent and two students gained merits.  In 1996, a pass rate of 67 per cent was achieved by 95 students, 20 of whom were awarded merits or distinctions.  Students on the GNVQ foundation programme achieved pass rates of 88 per cent in 1995 and 80 per cent in 1996.  Of the 47 students forming the first cohort of GNVQ advanced students in 1994, 37 completed their programmes in 1996 and 26 passed, of whom 13 gained a merit or distinction.  These pass rates were well above the national average for all colleges and schools according to data provided by the DfEE.

54    In the first access to higher education programme, which was introduced in 1995, eight out of 11 students completed the course and seven were successful in progressing to higher education.  In 1996, 16 out of 18 students successfully completed the course and 10 gained places in higher education.  The access planning programme, run as a precursor to the full programme, has achieved 90 per cent or more successful course completions over the last three years.

55    Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have a variety of opportunities to gain nationally recognised qualifications.  Students had a high level of achievement on the Associated Examining Board literacy

and numeracy awards and on the Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network youth awards. Students showed high levels of concentration in their work and developed practical skills. They also increased their level of independence. Students on the foundation studies course participated in an annual trip to Europe. They took a full part in the preparation and organisation required for this event.

56 Students' destinations are recorded at course level and show that a high proportion of students have been successful in gaining places in further and higher education or employment. For example, of 554 full-time students who completed GCE A level courses in 1995, 66 per cent went on to higher education, a rise of 4 per cent over the previous year. However, these data have not been systematically aggregated and analysed for the whole college. A high percentage of students completed their programmes of study. In 1995-96, the figure for the college as a whole was 90 per cent. However, completion rates were not consistently high across all courses. In access and advanced GNVQ programmes they were good, but the rate for GNVQ intermediate business fell to 54 per cent in 1995-96. Completion rates were poor on GCE A level media studies, physical education, performing arts and philosophy courses. Completion rates on GCE A level politics and further mathematics courses were high at 89 and 100 per cent, respectively.

**QUALITY ASSURANCE**

57 The mission statement commits the college to providing the community with an educational resource of high quality. This is further reinforced by the 1996 revised strategic objectives. Appropriately, a member of the senior management team has been given the responsibility for quality assurance. He is supported by the work of the governors' quality assurance focus group. They receive reviews on quality assurance and provide advice and approval for quality assurance measures proposed by the college. There has been a variety of quality assurance initiatives but each is at a different stage of development. The various aspects are not sufficiently integrated. They do not constitute a coherent system and are not applied consistently throughout the college. For example, the first college strategic plan contained a calendar for 1994-95 which outlined strategic quality assurance. Some, but not all, of the objectives were met. The process has not been continued in subsequent strategic plans. As a consequence, there is no college-wide quality assurance cycle indicating when review and action planning should take place. A quality assurance framework was approved by the quality assurance focus group in May 1996 but it has yet to be widely circulated or implemented. Quality standards relating to student support services were developed at an early stage but are not included in the framework. Senior managers recognise that the framework requires further development. The college has recently identified the performance indicators to be used in 1996-97, together with a schedule of dates for data provision and collection.

58    Methods for the review and evaluation of courses include analysis of examination results, the departmental audits, course folders and departmental reports.  Examination results, including value-added data, are analysed in detail at subject level.  In many areas, this leads to action plans for improvements.  For example, the government and politics department responded to poor examination results by changing the syllabus and making modifications to course teaching methods.  The results improved significantly in 1996 which suggests that the changes were successful.  However, in some other subject areas the data are not fully utilised and little action has been taken as a result.

59    Several initiatives to monitor and improve the quality of courses have been started but some have not been continued.  For example, in 1994 examination results were analysed at whole college level by a specially convened working party.  The work of this group led to significant changes to the enrolment process.  The average GCSE point scores achieved by students are now used as the basis for discussion of appropriate study programmes for students.  A system of departmental audits was introduced in 1995, when five departments were audited by a team of senior staff. The audit process involved lesson observation, interviews with staff and examination of documentation and led to a written report.  This audit cycle was halted during 1996 while restructuring was taking place and it has not been decided when it will be resumed.  The quality of departmental reports, which follow the format of the departmental audit reports, is inconsistent.  Some are detailed and analytical, offering rigorous self-review, while others are more descriptive.  Action plans vary in the extent to which they contain clear targets.  The cycle of departmental reporting has been irregular and incomplete.  There were no reports in 1994-95 and, although they were produced in 1996, no formal college response was made to them.  There is no clear plan for when the next reports are to be produced.

60    Students are encouraged to express their views and air their concerns in a variety of ways.  At course level, these include questionnaires and student representation on subject committees.  However, there is no systematic approach to acting upon these views or for reporting on them, for example, in course reviews.  At college level, enrolment questionnaires have been used regularly.  Students' responses have been analysed and modifications to enrolment procedures made as a result.  Questionnaires have also been used to evaluate other aspects of cross-college provision such as students' use of the independent learning centre, the 'taster' days for prospective students, and the careers and tutorial programmes. Parents' views have been sought on the effectiveness of parents' evenings. The college participates in a national attitude survey to elicit the confidential views of students about their experience at college but no systematic use has been made of the results.

61    The college has developed two charters to meet the varying needs of its student population.  One is for students aged 16 to 19 and the other for

post-19 students. Students receive a copy of the charter during induction. Elements from the charter are incorporated into the student learning agreement which sets out what students can expect from the college and what is expected from them. However, many charter commitments lack specific targets against which compliance can be measured. There are no arrangements for the charter to be reviewed.

62    The college's self-assessment report was presented clearly using the headings outlined in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Material for the report was compiled by the quality assurance manager and presented to the college corporation in September 1996 as a report on the quality of the college's courses and services. This document was then modified, with strengths and issues being highlighted. The report draws upon evidence from college quality assurance processes. Although parts of the report were lacking in detailed analysis, the judgements were broadly consistent with those reached by the inspection team.

63    A comprehensive appraisal process, called professional review, has been established. All staff were trained in 1995 with the intention that all would be reviewed during the year 1995-96. The college restructuring activity interrupted the process but subsequently all staff occupying new posts have been reviewed in order to identify their training and professional development needs. Summaries of the review process are fed into the staff-development planning cycle. Teaching and support staff speak positively about the review process. A common induction programme for all new teaching and support staff was established for September 1996, building upon previous practice. New staff are assigned a mentor who supports their induction into the college. Further support is provided through staff-development activities, including regular meetings with the staff-development co-ordinator. During their one-year probationary period all new staff are observed twice. A full professional review is scheduled for the end of the period. New staff reported that they have valued the initial stages of the programme.

64    The college's commitment to staff development is reflected in the budget allocation which represents approximately 1.5 per cent of the total staffing expenditure. Priorities are determined by a network group which is chaired by the staff-development co-ordinator and whose membership consists of managers from across the college. Individual training needs are identified in a variety of ways. These include the professional review and the process undertaken by the college to secure Investors in People recognition, which has a target date of April 1997. Staff-development activities are linked to the college's strategic objectives and their effectiveness is evaluated and the outcomes disseminated. However, these procedures are not always systematically applied.

**RESOURCES**

**Staffing**

65    College staff are well qualified, experienced and committed to the success of their students.  Seventy-nine per cent of teachers have first degrees, 29 per cent have higher degrees and 80 per cent have a teaching qualification.  In addition, many have industrial or commercial experience, though the college has recognised that this needs updating to enable teachers to be more effective.  At the time of the inspection, there were 26 teachers with, or working towards, assessor and verifier awards, which will be sufficient for the range of vocational courses offered.  Additional staff development is planned to increase this number as the range of vocational programmes increases.   Support staff make a valuable contribution to the operation of the college and work collaboratively with teachers.  Almost all support staff have undertaken training or educational courses relevant to their employment and 17 per cent have, or are working towards, a degree.

66    Tighter controls have led to improved efficiency in the deployment of teaching staff.  The college has estimated that between 1995-96 and 1996-97 there will have been a reduction of 21, or 15.5 full-time equivalent, full-time and part-time teaching staff.  Over the same period there is expected to be a reduction of 5.8 full-time equivalent support staff.  Policies and procedures for staff recruitment have been updated to take account of the *Employment Rights Act 1996*.  They were used extensively, and proved robust, throughout the restructuring process.

**Equipment/learning resources**

67    There is a wide range of specialist equipment to support most programme areas.  Students in the business school have ready access to information technology equipment.  The school also has an extensive range of audio-visual equipment and furniture which helps to convey a business ethos.  Language students benefit from an 18 station language laboratory of a high standard.  Students on foundation studies courses are provided with a comprehensive range of specialist materials and also have access to the wide selection of specialist facilities across the college, such as that for jewellery making in the technology workshops.  However, in a few areas the range and quality of equipment is limiting the students' learning experience.  For example, there is insufficient up-to-date hardware and software for the expanded range of courses in information technology and computing.

68    The library is located in the main building.  There are approximately 18,500 books, all protected by the security system.  There is a wide range of text books to support humanities subjects such as history, psychology, sociology and the sciences.  Compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases prove a valuable resource for students of English, law and history.  The library takes five daily newspapers and subscribes to about

60 journals. The range of periodicals and journals related to art and design is poor. There is a useful and increasing stock of videos to support English, drama, history and dance. There are study places for about 100 students, but at peak times these are insufficient. In addition to the library collection, most subject areas have their own stocks of recommended texts which they issue to students on long-term loan. Library staff are helpful in directing students to sources of books around the college but there is no central catalogue of the total bookstock within the college. The existing card-based index and issue system and the lack of a computer-based catalogue limit students' ability to acquire and develop some essential study skills. Students have access to the Essex county library catalogue on CD-ROM from which they can obtain books on inter-library loan.

69    The independent learning centre, located in the White House, provides a valuable resource centre equipped with 40 modern computers and an extensive range of software of a professional standard which students can use as and when they wish. There are over 60 CD-ROMs in the independent learning centre including those for national newspapers, several encyclopedias and special interest disks, such as the works of Chaucer. Access to the Internet is limited to one terminal. There is a wide choice of both audio and video tapes. In addition to the computer workplaces, there are about 30 other study spaces. The centre is popular and well used by students. The college has responded positively to the issues raised in a questionnaire circulated to students about the independent learning centre and its facilities. For example, the number of computers has been increased, better printers installed and more guidance leaflets provided.

70    In total, the college has 244 computers available for student use and 80 per cent of these have modern processors. Sixty computers are located in the business school on the Park School site. The overall ratio of students to computers is 7.8:1. Some subject areas, for example social sciences and geography, do not have ready access to computers that would enhance the quality of teaching and learning. The recent appointment of an information technology co-ordinator and the establishment of an information technology strategy group has begun to improve students' access to information technology facilities. Historically, information technology facilities were 'owned' by departments; now all computers are managed centrally. Some computers within the independent learning centre can be booked for whole group activities and this has increased access to students in health and social care and in foundation studies. Recently, there has been increased attention to monitoring the use of information technology facilities by, for example, the analysis of student 'card swipes' in the independent learning centre. Spot checks by the college have revealed that many students are not 'swiping in' and some of those that do often use facilities other than the computers. At present, neither individual computers nor networks are equipped with software that could provide more accurate data on their use.

71     In the new organisational structure there is no one person with overall responsibility for the management of physical resources.  Senior managers are acutely aware of the need to maximise the use of both rooms and equipment.  In 1995, changes were made to the operation of the timetable in order to make more effective use of both equipment and premises.

**Accommodation**

72     The main college site is located in pleasant woodland, adjacent to a residential area in Benfleet.  At the rear of the site is a sports hall, managed in conjunction with the local authority.  The main building was purpose built in 1972 to cater for 700 students and a student:staff ratio of 11:1.  As a result many of the original teaching rooms were small.  Additional accommodation for the increased number of students has been provided by an assortment of relocateable classrooms on the western, wooded part of the site together with a single, much larger building, referred to as the White House, located near the rear of the main site.  There is a sports field about a quarter of a mile away.

73     There are about 18 huts of various sizes and shapes which provide approximately 43 per cent of the total space used for classroom teaching.  Some of these have been adapted to cope with increased class sizes and are pleasant internally.  In a number of subject areas, staff have worked hard to create an appropriate ambience for their subject.  The external appearance of many of the huts is unattractive and a few have rotting window frames.   In view of the proposed developments in the accommodation strategy, expenditure on the huts has been reduced to a minimum.

74     The White House is leased from the local authority.  It provides over 10 per cent of accommodation for classroom activities.   The accommodation has been extensively refurbished by the college and it now presents an up-to-date image, but the combination of lease charges and running costs means that its overall operating costs are higher than the main building.  Several of the rooms in the main building, the huts and the White House suffer from poor heating and/or ventilation.  Some rooms also have problems owing to poor sound insulation.  The college also has the use of rented accommodation at the Park School in Rayleigh.  This is of satisfactory standard and has been redecorated in the college colours.

75     The college has expended considerable effort in establishing an attractive and purposeful environment by, for example, internal refurbishment and remodelling and by the adoption of a corporate colour scheme.  This has been effective in some communal areas such as the main entrance foyer and corridor where there are partially carpeted walls.  Some subject areas, for example, the training office for business studies NVQ students have also been improved.  Closed-circuit television cameras have recently been installed to improve security.  Attention has also been given to improving access for wheelchair users.  This has been effective in

many of the areas of the main site and, by extensive use of long ramps, in many of the huts. Wheelchair access to and within the White House however, remains a problem.

**CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

76    The strengths of the college are:

•    the wide range of courses at GCE A level, in GNVQs and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

•    well-developed links with higher education in the region

•    responsive and comprehensive systems for recruitment and induction

•    the clear and measurable objectives of the new tutorial system

•    high standards of teaching and learning on most courses

•    the high quality of students' assignment and project work

•    the effective and clearly-focused senior management team

•    staff development closely linked to professional review and to college strategic priorities

•    well-qualified staff committed to the success of their students

•    the wide range of equipment and library materials to support most courses.

77    If the college is to build on existing strengths it should address the following:

•    insufficient industrial links to support the curriculum

•    the lack of systems to monitor the effectiveness of general learning support

•    the completion of the management restructuring process

•    the focus given by the corporation to the key factors affecting the success of the college

•    the quality of teaching on GCSE courses

•    low completion rates on some courses

•    the systematic application of a coherent quality assurance system, including the use of performance indicators

•    the lack of up-to-date industrial experience of a few teachers

•    the poor quality of some of the accommodation.

# FIGURES

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

**Figure 1**

**Seevic College: percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)**



25+ years
15%

Under 16
1%

19-24 years
4%

16-18 years
80%
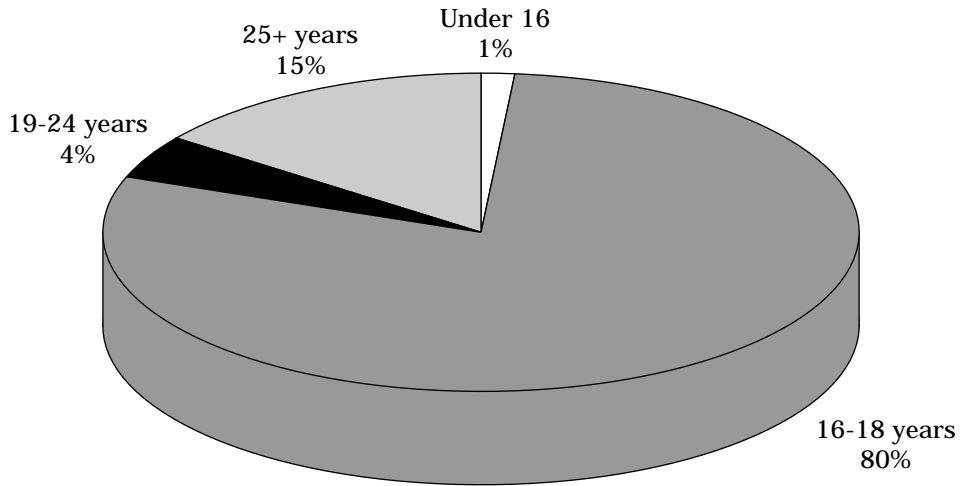
Student numbers: 2,315

**Figure 2**

**Seevic College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)**



Foundation
11%

Intermediate
21%

Advanced
68%

Student numbers: 2,315

24
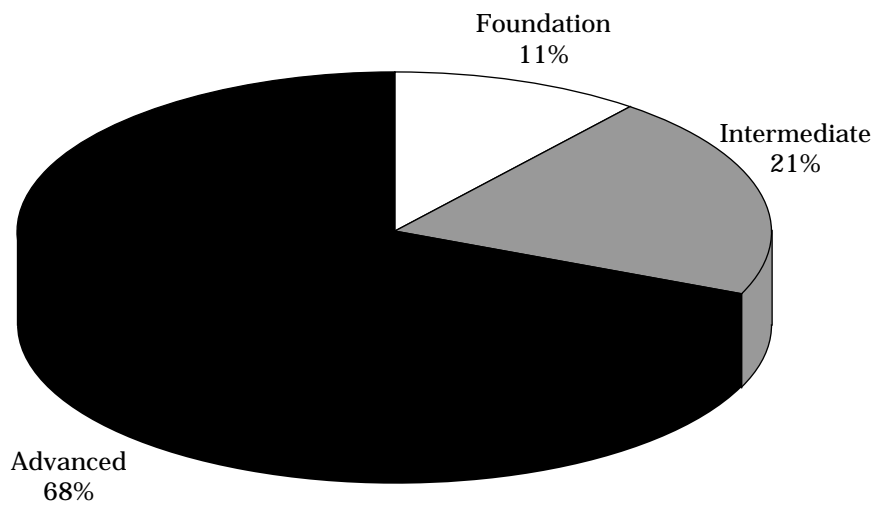
**Figure 3**

**Seevic College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)**
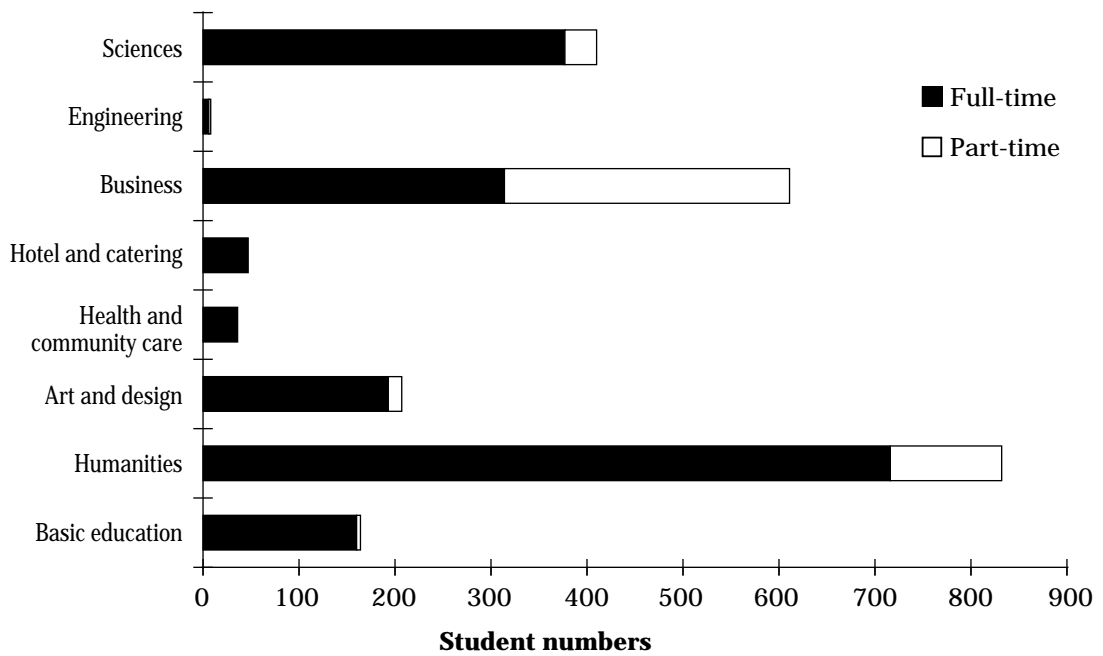


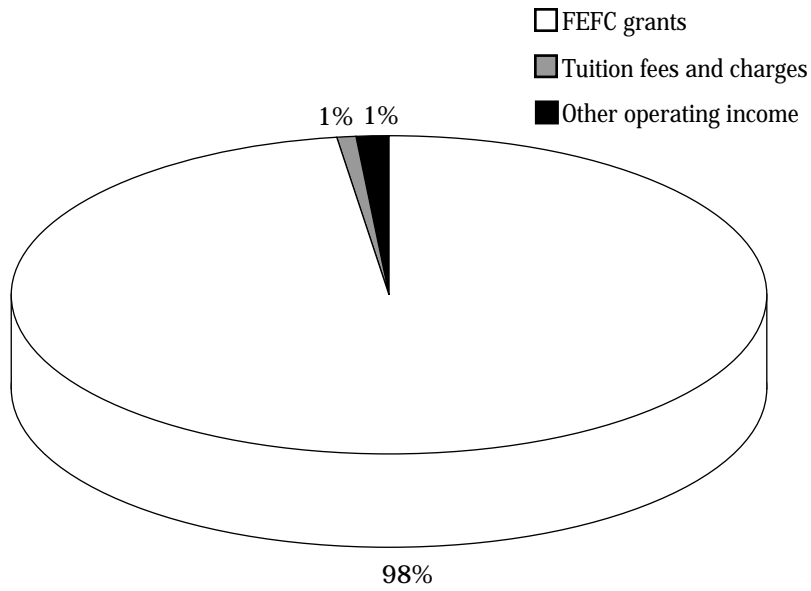Student numbers: 2,315

**Figure 4**

**Seevic College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)**
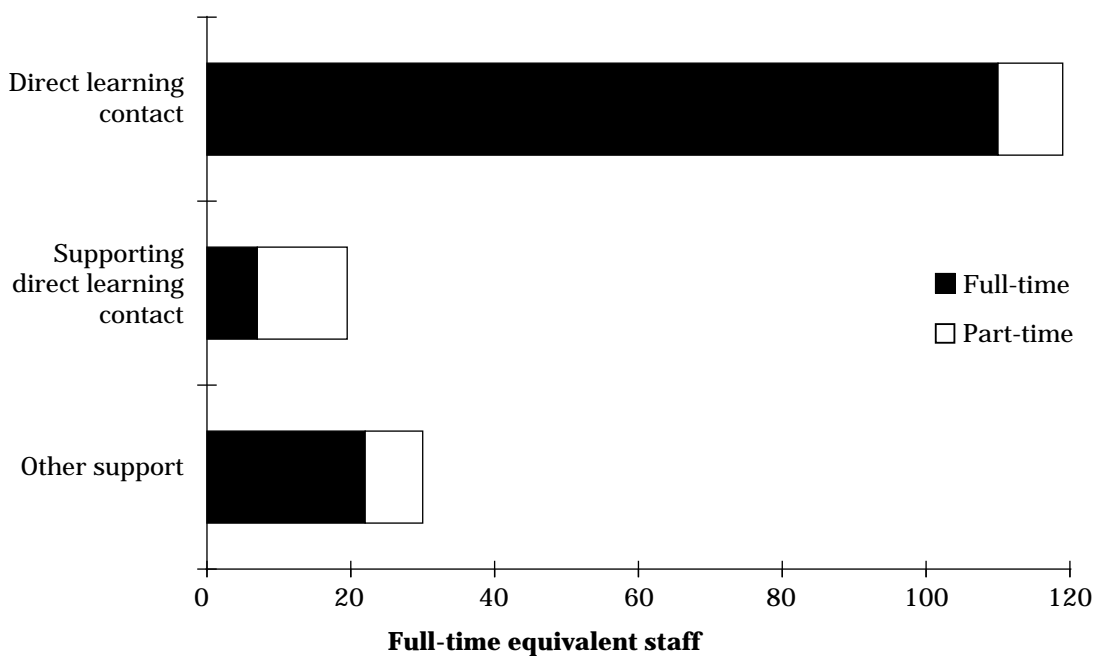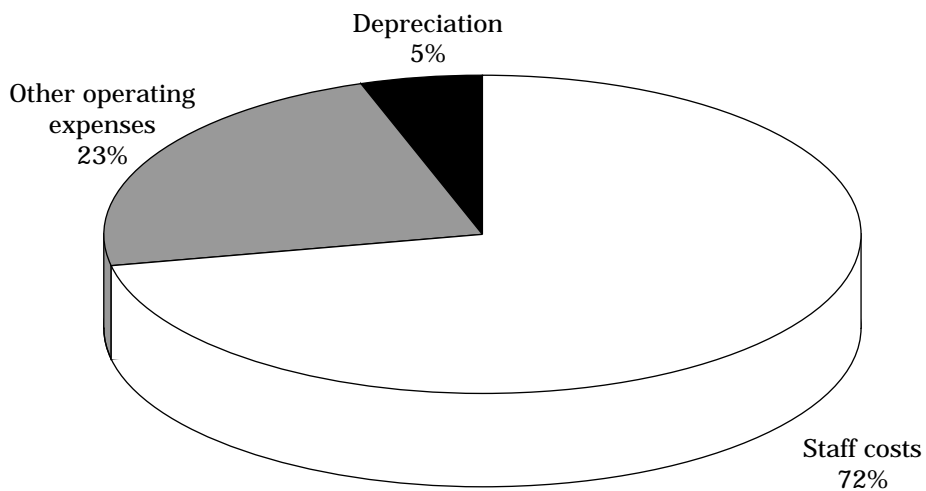


Full-time equivalent staff: 169

**Figure 5**

**Seevic College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)**

☐ FEFC grants
▨ Tuition fees and charges
■ Other operating income

1% 1%

98%

Income: £5,688,000

**Figure 6**

**Seevic College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)**

Depreciation
5%

Other operating
expenses
23%

Staff costs
72%

Expenditure: £5,750,000