

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

South Kent College

January 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to 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 05/96

SOUTH KENT COLLEGE
SOUTH EAST REGION
Inspected May-October 1995

Summary

South Kent College is a large general further education college offering a comprehensive range of programmes in Ashford, Dover and Folkestone. The college is an innovator in building external relationships. It is particularly responsive to the needs of industry, and offers many courses for Kent TEC and for individual companies. It has good links with northern Europe and many students benefit from foreign exchanges and from work experience abroad as well as in Britain. Links with higher education institutions in the region are strong. The college is well governed and managers imbue staff with a strong sense of common purpose. A commitment to pastoral care is evident in the good relations between staff and students, in the effective central student services unit, and in the successes achieved by students who have overcome a variety of disadvantages, including learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A number of matters require attention. Management information is inadequate and quality assurance is weak. Examination results and student retention vary widely between subjects and between different sites offering the same subject. Implementation of the tutorial system is uneven across the college, so that some students receive better advice than others. The quality of the buildings owned by the college is variable. Some provide a good study environment, others a very poor one. The college's libraries are generally poor.

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	2
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	1
equipment/learning resources	3
accommodation	4

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and information technology	2	Hairdressing and beauty and health and social care	2
Construction	2	Art, design and media studies	2
Engineering	3	Humanities	3
Business, secretarial studies and management	2	Teacher/trainer training	1
		Basic education	2
Leisure and tourism and hotel management and catering	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection of South Kent College took place in three stages. Enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the beginning of the 1995 autumn term. Between May and September 1995, seven full-time and eight part-time inspectors spent 45 days assessing quality and standards in the college's main curriculum areas. They visited 210 classes attended by approximately 2,470 students, and examined a representative sample of students' work. In October 1995, nine full-time inspectors spent 36 days assessing aspects of cross-college provision. Meetings were held with members of the corporation board, the college management team, heads of department, staff with cross-college responsibilities, teaching, support and administrative staff, and students. Inspectors consulted employers, representatives of the Kent Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), and parents of students at the college. They also attended college meetings and examined policy statements, minutes of committees, working papers and many other documents.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 South Kent College has sites in Folkestone, Dover and Ashford. It serves a geographical area of 1,250 square kilometres with a population of about 290,000. Ashford was originally a market and railway engineering town. With the growth of new business parks, it caters increasingly for high technology industries and it is poised to benefit from increased trade with Europe. Dover is the busiest ferry port in the world. Transport and communications account for much of its income. The biggest industry in Folkestone is tourism, followed closely by distribution and transport to Europe through the channel tunnel and the port. Agriculture is a major industry throughout Kent. There are good road and rail networks serving most areas in the county.

3 There is high unemployment in the areas served by the college, although the situation is improving. In August 1995, when the national unemployment rate was 8.2 per cent, for Kent it was 8.5 per cent, for the catchment area of the college it was 8.7 per cent, and for Folkestone it was 10.8 per cent.

4 The college operates in a competitive environment. There are two other further education colleges in the area, and strong competition from school sixth forms which are diversifying their courses. The college has some 13,800 students of whom 3,100 attend full time. The majority of students are over 19 years of age. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. Enrolment targets for 1994-95 have been exceeded, and further growth of 19 per cent is expected in 1995-96. FEFC-funded enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. The college employs 203 full-time teachers, 161 part-time teachers and 274 support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The college is organised into seven departments, five of which have curriculum and cross-college responsibilities, the other two providing college services only.

5 The college's mission is 'to provide the broadest possible range of high-quality education, training and associated services to meet the needs of the south Kent area'. The college intends that its character should be shaped by its proximity to mainland Europe, and by the opportunities this offers for links with European partners.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

6 South Kent College is perceived by many in the area to be three separate institutions at Dover, Folkestone and Ashford. Many students are reluctant or unable to travel the eight miles between Folkestone and Dover, or the 18 miles between Folkestone and Ashford. An important tenet of the college's approach to responsiveness, is that courses should be offered close to students' homes wherever possible. Many courses are therefore provided at two or more sites. The range of courses is very wide and the college is strongly committed to helping people who are disadvantaged. Work towards meeting the national targets for education and training, or the more ambitious Kent targets, is a central focus of the college's efforts.

7 Secondary education in Kent is available in a variety of different kinds of selective and open-access schools. Some take pupils between the ages of 11 and 16, and an increasing number from 11-18, although not all of these are approved by the secretary of state to run sixth forms. Some schools are unwilling to co-operate with the college, which they regard as a competitor. Although the college distributes attractive publicity material and a summary of its students' achievements to every school, it believes that this information is not always given to pupils. It is invited to only six school careers evenings. Funding difficulties have caused fewer special schools to send pupils with learning difficulties, behavioural problems and/or disabilities to the college for a pre-enrolment familiarisation period. Despite the difficulties, the college is committed to working with local schools whenever possible. For example, there is a franchising agreement with a school in Ashford which enables General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes in business studies, and health and social care to be offered there. Although informal contacts have remained productive, the formal connections between Kent colleges and the local education authority withered after incorporation. A new body, the Kent Association of Further Education Corporations, has been formed to rebuild them.

8 Links with higher education are good. Access courses have assisted the progression of students from further education to higher education for some 15 years, and this year the college has 230 access students. They are guaranteed interviews for higher national diploma and degree courses through the Kent Access Consortium. A modular access scheme guarantees places at Canterbury Christchurch College. South Kent College franchises an access course in music to Christchurch College. Two hundred and nineteen higher education students on higher national diploma and degree courses are taught in the college on programmes franchised from the

universities of Kent and Greenwich, Canterbury Christchurch College and Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education. Connections with higher education are co-ordinated by the college's partnership unit which is a useful means of securing good relationships and communications.

9 Employers speak warmly of the college's prompt attention to their enquiries and of its ability to tailor courses quickly to their needs. The college's creation of its own specialist training unit, South Kent Skills Training, is particularly appreciated because it has established a single focus for enquiries and contracts. Many of the college's relationships with employers have endured for a decade or more, and there is mutual understanding of the challenges facing industry and education. This has helped employers to come to terms with changing qualifications and has contributed to their willingness to help the college by providing work experience and access to the sophisticated equipment available in companies. There are formal panels of employers to advise the college in some, but not all areas of the curriculum.

10 Relationships between the college and Kent TEC are particularly productive. The college provides about 10 per cent of all Kent TEC adult training and 5 per cent of its youth training. It is one of only two organisations approved by the TEC to offer enterprise training. Officers of the TEC appreciate the help given by the college in establishing new schemes. For example, a senior member of the college's staff was seconded to the TEC for six months to establish training credits. There are many examples of excellent training work undertaken by the college. These include: preparation of an advisory pack on coping with redundancy which was part of an effort by East Kent Initiative to relocate 1,000 former ferry employees; the 'WISK' project, in which people with learning difficulties are creating a natural heritage reserve on Romney Marsh; and a wide range of community action projects, including woodland management on various sites, and the creation of pathways and signs on the cliffs at Dover. The Rockeries job club in Folkestone assists unemployed people to prepare for work and to make job applications. The Romney and Rye small business club, which was established by the college, has about 80 members, some of whom are pursuing management training at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3. The college's contracts in youth training now amount to nearly £600,000 a year, and those for adult and community training to £800,000.

11 Parents who were consulted by inspectors warmly commended the college's support for students, and its adaptability to changing circumstances. Examples they gave included students who had been excluded from school for bad behaviour and had subsequently progressed through the college and obtained degrees; and students with learning difficulties who had come from special schools and had progressed into mainstream college programmes and successful work experience. There is a local view of the college as one that strives conscientiously to give impartial advice to applicants, deals sympathetically with parental

concerns, and works with dedication to encourage students of all abilities to give their best.

12 There is a busy and successful section of the college offering full-cost courses to companies. Called 'Phasor', its current annual turnover is over £500,000. Business has grown at a rate of about 10 per cent each year. Phasor originally concentrated on teaching English as a foreign language and other European languages. Notable work in teaching English as a foreign language includes a long-standing contract with a travel company in Hamburg, which sends some 1,500 teenagers a year to study at South Kent. Phasor works with an agent who has introduced training clients from Hungary, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates. While teaching English as a foreign language continues to expand, it now contributes only half Phasor's revenue. There is a well-designed brochure setting out its services in other areas, notably engineering, management and information technology. There are approximately 1,000 companies on Phasor's database, and the more active 500 are visited twice a year. These visits are a valuable source of market intelligence to supplement that available from Kent TEC and government agencies. The existence of an identifiable source of full-cost training courses, properly managed and staffed, is a significant strength for the college.

13 The college is a lively participant in European links. The European Business and Language Centre offers courses to companies. Clients have included the major ferry operators and Eurotunnel; a number of concerns with substantial export interests; and retailers such as Tesco and Marks & Spencer, whose staff need to be able to sell in at least two languages. The standard of teaching materials is high, and the centre responds quickly to new business opportunities. The European Business and Language Centre now has funding from the Esme Fairbairn Foundation to develop open-learning materials; to link the college campuses electronically; and, with substantial further funding from the European Union, to introduce an audio-conferencing network with seven colleges in other European countries. There are a dozen exchange agreements with colleges in France, Germany, Denmark, Belgium and Sweden. These produce over 100 student exchanges each year, with financial support from the European Union. In addition, about 25 students cross the Channel in each direction for work experience. There are courses in the college which have preparation for employment in Europe at their heart. These include a degree in European business and finance, a course for bilingual secretaries, and a Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma in leisure studies which is run jointly with a private college in Arras. The college receives about £150,000 a year in European Union funding at the moment, and is bidding to double this. New bids will include European study opportunities for students with learning difficulties. The college is the sole British centre for the European Employment Service Project; a network of eight units located in international border areas throughout the European Union to provide advice on living and working in other

member countries. The staff of the European Employment Service Project have access to a central job vacancy register on the Internet, and are dealing with between 1,000 and 1,500 enquiries a year. The college has taken a bold and worthwhile initiative in becoming a European Employment Service Project centre; all the others are run by national employment services. Despite this high level of concern with European matters, a European dimension is absent from some areas of the curriculum.

14 The college has offered full-cost open and flexible learning for many years. Some departments have particular strengths in this area, and 250 students are undertaking open and flexible learning programmes. A concerted effort is now being made to develop an open-learning centre at Ashford. TEC funding has assisted the college to employ a member of staff to develop open-learning materials. In addition, the college is purchasing open-learning packages from the National Extension College and adapting them to its own needs. A greater emphasis on independent study as part of mainstream courses would help the college to resolve some of the problems that arise from offering similar courses at its three main locations.

15 There is a college marketing committee which meets frequently to advise the head of client services, who has a manager and a copywriter to assist in producing publicity material. Staff are encouraged to comment through a news sheet and matters of special importance are put to them at an annual meeting. The college plans its marketing carefully and collects data on its effectiveness. Promotion is done through a variety of media, including radio campaigns, press advertising, and thoughtfully designed publications. The content of the prospectus reflects the college's equal opportunities policy.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

16 The corporation board has 15 members. There are nine business governors, one nominated by the Kent TEC, two staff governors and one student. The principal is a member of the board and the vice-principal is co-opted. There is one vacancy. The corporation has three committees: audit, finance, and general purposes and remuneration. The audit committee did not meet between November 1994 and June 1995. Other committees meet regularly and attendance has been satisfactory, averaging 76 per cent over the past 12 months. Governors have a range of experience which is helpful to the college, including management, accountancy, personnel and higher education. The board is seeking to recruit a banker, but the complexity of the college estate suggests that the addition of another member with experience of planning and development on a large scale, would also be beneficial.

17 Papers for the corporation and its committees ensure that members are well informed about developments in the college. Agendas concentrate on planning and control issues which are appropriate to the corporation board. Governors give their time generously and attend many college

events. All but one of the departments have a nominated governor to liaise with them.

18 The strategic planning process is thorough. Teachers participate in the formulation of strategic objectives through the course review process. The academic board devotes a day each year to consideration of the draft college plan. Governors and senior managers work together to establish college targets. At the end of the annual planning round, a summary is circulated to every member of staff. The strategic plan relates to the college mission statement. Its targets and timescales are set out clearly, but it lacks clear management objectives.

19 Senior managers have been successful in giving staff a strong sense of common purpose, despite the difficulties associated with operating on several sites. The decision to retain a departmental system, but to give most departments both a curriculum and a cross-college role, was guided by a need to develop collegiate identity and commitments. The resulting distribution of duties among senior managers sometimes appears to be random, and some department heads carry a particularly heavy workload. Managers generally communicate well with staff. News is sent out with the monthly payroll and the principal is available to staff at set times on all three sites. There is a limited electronic mailing facility, which could be developed further and expanded.

20 There are a number of management committees. The senior management team consists of the principal, vice-principal and departmental heads. Membership of the academic board comprises the senior management team, six elected staff representatives and four elected students. The curriculum development panel consists of the vice-principal, deputy heads of department and several staff with cross-college duties. The curriculum development panel has grown considerably in importance since its inception in 1992, and it is regarded by staff as an effective route to achieve results. There is an overlap between its work and that of the academic board, and there is now some confusion in the college about responsibilities and lines of reporting. The college should review the terms of reference of these committees.

21 The college is changing the way it allocates money internally. Currently, departments are allocated funds for materials, and for agreed major items of equipment. From January 1996, each department will have a delegated budget for all areas of expenditure which it will be expected to manage. Longer-term plans include calculation of unit costs. The college has an average level of funding of £15.30 per unit of activity for 1995-96 which places it in the lowest 5 per cent of general further education colleges whose median is £17.84. Allocating and controlling expenditure is, therefore, of particular importance to enable these limited resources to be used efficiently. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

22 The college uses relatively crude performance measures. Student and course information is produced on a computerised system and it is

monitored closely. Financial management information is inadequate, but the formation of the new department of finance and information services, with a new head, has prompted some improvement. The large size of the college and its geographical spread make it inherently complex to manage, and it is vitally important that priority be given to developing more pertinent and timely management information.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

23 There is a clear policy statement for each element of guidance and support. The client services division has developed services for students from the time of their first contact with the college, through to when they leave, and those services over which the division has direct control are effective. Collection of statistics is thorough and there is some basic analysis of data. Tracking of students and the production of performance indicators should be improved.

24 The guidance and admissions unit offers both a telephone and a face-to-face advice service throughout the year. All application forms are screened by the unit, and applicants are offered a guidance interview before they are referred to departmental admissions tutors. Impartial guidance sometimes results in applicants being redirected to other institutions. Enrolment guidelines are revised annually to ensure that practice is consistent throughout the year. All full-time students have an induction programme which introduces them to college services and their courses. Staff in the guidance and admissions unit are available to advise students who wish to change their course of study. These procedures to introduce students to the college are largely successful.

25 A nursery on the Folkestone site has places for 20 children between the ages of two and five. It is open all year, except for bank holidays and a week at Christmas. Two-thirds of its places are reserved for the children of students, who pay at a subsidised rate.

26 Additional learning support in basic skills is at an early stage of development. Demand for such support is heavy, and students sometimes receive help too late in their college careers. The quality of learning support is good. The college has introduced formal assessment of literacy and numeracy for all GNVQ students and for those on NVQ courses up to level 2: some departments include those at level 3. The college recognises that assessment is likely to identify more students needing support. It intends to meet their needs by establishing resource centres in each of the three towns.

27 Students speak warmly of the helpfulness of teaching staff. A tutorial structure has existed in most parts of the college for some time, but it varies widely in its effectiveness. Some students are unaware that they have personal tutors in addition to their teachers. The college has prepared guidance on the role and responsibilities of personal tutors. Some good practice exists, particularly on access courses. However, on many courses, personal tutors wait for students to present issues to them, and some do

not understand their responsibility for guidance. A range of student services, including welfare and counselling, complements the work of personal tutors. The demands for these services are increasing. Staff help students with personal and social problems which interfere with their ability to study effectively, while the welfare service's primary focus is on financial matters.

28 Support for overseas students is comprehensive. Accommodation with local families is carefully vetted, and both the hosts and the students who stay with them receive advice and help from college staff. An accommodation list is maintained for home students who may need it.

29 Work experience is efficiently organised by the college's employer liaison service. Last year, there were 1,600 work experience placements, in which a significant proportion of General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) students were involved as well as those on vocational courses. Careers advisors play a major role in preparing students for progression to higher education or employment. The time that local authority advisors can give to the college is declining.

30 The college is seeking to increase the range of sports and recreational opportunities available to its students. The dispersed sites cause problems in organising competitive sports, and these are compounded by students' timetables which do not include recreational periods. There are no cultural activities organised by the college for students. The students' union is not a significant part of college life, although some recent social events have been successful. These are significant shortcomings which reduce the richness of the students' experience.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

31 Of the 210 sessions inspected, 61 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. Only 3 per cent had weaknesses which outweighed strengths. This performance is similar to the average for the sector, but within it there are wide variations between curriculum areas.

A summary of the inspection grades is given below.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

ProgrammesGrade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	2	13	14	1	0	30
GCSE	1	4	5	1	1	12
GNVQ	1	14	11	0	0	26
NVQ	18	16	10	0	0	44
Access to higher education	3	4	1	0	0	8
Basic education	3	8	8	2	0	21
Other vocational	5	19	20	1	0	45
Higher education	3	3	2	1	0	9
Other	6	6	3	0	0	15
Total	42	87	74	6	1	210

32 The average attendance level in the classes inspected was 83 per cent. The highest attendance rate was 89 per cent in leisure and tourism. Attendance was low in full-time business classes at 76 per cent and in catering classes at 77 per cent. Students across the college were not always punctual, and some arrived very late for lessons. Some teachers failed to determine reasons for lateness, and to nip bad study habits in the bud. Lateness and absence are not followed up by enquiries in all curriculum areas.

33 Most teaching sessions are well planned, and staff have good working relationships with students, of whom they have high expectations. Schemes of work are prepared for most courses, but some are simply lists of topics which do not identify the type of activity planned or its relationship to assessment. When teachers told their students what was to take place and the lesson proceeded logically and according to plan, there were incidental benefits in that the value of good organisation was demonstrated by example. This was seen to advantage in a sports and fitness induction class.

34 Teaching in art and design and media studies is usually well managed and effective. Only a few sessions are poorly planned. Staff are careful to provide integrated core skills teaching and assessment for their GNVQ students. Communications are assessed through the written and oral elements of practical projects. Numeracy and information technology are taught by a member of staff who has an art and design background.

35 Teacher training classes are of a very high standard. Lessons are well structured with clear aims, and students' views are sought frequently. In one assessment, a mature student did not meet the standards required. The teacher gave the bad news with understanding and gentle humour to reduce the tension. Another student commended the teacher for the

individual help and extended tutorial support received during a particularly difficult period of the course. Regular and honest feedback is a positive feature during teaching practice and assessor training. Teachers' comments on students' written work are supportive and developmental.

36 Students on access courses in science and mathematics contributed enthusiastically to their lessons. During a psychology lesson, the teacher engaged the students' interest so effectively that discussion took off without need for further intervention. Many students felt confident enough to contribute their personal experiences. Teaching on General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and GCE A level courses, is generally competent, with an emphasis on imparting facts which students copy into their notebooks. Practical work in science lessons is often too structured, giving little opportunity for students to develop the skills of experimental design.

37 In the humanities and social sciences, there is a distinct difference between the standards of teaching and learning on access programmes, and on GCSE and GCE A level courses. The greater maturity and commitment of adult students contribute to more effective learning on the access courses. In addition, there is good learning support for access students, while the support provided for students on GCE and GCSE programmes, many of whom have not achieved good GCSE grades at their first attempt, is patchy. Course documentation is generally good and lecturers have a sound knowledge of their subjects, but lessons in some GCE and GCSE subjects are too long.

38 Most engineering practical sessions are well organised. Committed staff and students work enthusiastically and safely. Teachers prepare relevant schemes of work and use detailed lesson plans. Chalk boards are used extensively, but students spend too much time copying notes from them. In many sessions, students were passive observers for much of the time. Little use is made of question and answer sessions to check learning or provoke discussion.

39 Management programmes are well adapted for mature students, both in the style of teaching and the business-like accommodation that is used. In book keeping and secretarial classes, staff encouraged the mature students, motivating them and building up their confidence. Teachers used their industrial experience to illustrate the expectations of professional awarding bodies. Most teaching was characterised by good relationships, appropriate pace and effective use of teaching aids, but some classes were too big and students had to wait too long for help from the teacher.

40 In hairdressing and beauty, a good lesson on hair colouring was given to a group of evening students. The teacher used an overhead projector, samples of commercial products and a selection of printed materials to illustrate the lesson, which was followed by a practical session. The students were attentive, and showed that they had understood the material and were eager to know more. A practical class held in a large hairdressing salon at the college involved about 70 first-year NVQ level 2 students and

four teachers. The students worked individually on hairdressing blocks and were helped by the team of staff, who circulated to answer questions and demonstrate techniques. Students worked hard and learned from each other, as well as from their teachers.

41 Students with severe learning difficulties on the lifeplan programme made clear oral presentations to their classmates, based on pictures they had drawn relating to jobs in a hospital. The group was encouraged to ask questions to which the presenter replied. Students on the 'into work' programme have three days' work experience each week, and achieve NVQ level 1 competences. Students are enthusiastic about their work. Most lessons are carefully structured, group work is effective, and the modular programmes help to maintain momentum. Practical sessions in cookery, painting and decorating, and first aid were good, but attention flagged in classes which relied on a single activity or style of teaching.

42 A class of building technician students were being briefed in preparation for a project. The brief was clear and reflected industrial practice. The teacher had a good command of the subject and skilfully introduced processes and regulatory documents. He stimulated discussion so that students were able to pursue the issues among themselves. Construction craft students were learning the rules for safe working with steps, ladders and trestles. The session took place in a workshop where there was space for demonstrating the equipment. The class was well planned, included a variety of activities, and involved students joining in the demonstration. Each item of equipment was described, illustrated, erected and used. Students were tested on their understanding of the safety measures to be taken, technical terms associated with the equipment and the correct procedures for assembly. At the end of the class an informative handout was given to each student. Communication and study skills are not given sufficient attention on construction courses, and information technology is insufficiently developed on craft courses.

43 The quality of teaching and learning on health and social care courses is good. NVQ classes are of a consistently high standard. In the first class of an NVQ level 2 programme, a group of care assistants were examining aspects of personal hygiene. Skilful use of question and answer technique by the tutor encouraged them to contribute from their own experience, and revealed their level of understanding. Their responses were analysed by the tutor who illustrated the interdependence of social, cultural, economic, peer group and family influences on personal cleanliness. The objectives of the class were clear to students and it was conducted at a lively pace and with humour.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

44 Most students enjoy their studies and are able to talk with enthusiasm about them. In some classes, students lacked the confidence to contribute and not all had appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding on which to progress. Students were observed working well in groups. In

business studies, students worked in teams, and willingly shared ideas with fellow students. Many students acquire high levels of practical skill, notably in construction, engineering, and hair and beauty. Students with learning difficulties learn to carry out practical tasks effectively.

45 In GCSE mathematics and science, results have been generally good. In mathematics, the proportion of A-C grades achieved has been above the national average for each of the last three years. The examination results in GCSE biology have been well above the national average, and results in chemistry and physics have improved over the last three years. At GCE A level, the results in science and mathematics are more variable. In biology the pass rate has been 67 per cent in each of the last three years and retention has been about 80 per cent. The pass rate for physics has been poor: it declined to only 7 per cent last year, and the retention rate fell to 45 per cent. In chemistry, whilst retention is high, the pass rate has fallen to only 25 per cent. Results in environmental science and mathematics have been good, but have fallen in each of the last three years.

46 In humanities GCSE and GCE A levels, pass rates have declined for the last three years and the retention rates for most subjects are low. Data on students' achievements are often unavailable or inconsistent in this subject area. Subjects where results have been poor include GCE A level economics where the success rate has declined from 60 to 30 per cent, and retention has declined to 25 per cent, and English language where the success rate has declined from 83 to 60 per cent with falling retention rates. Exceptions to this poor record include philosophy, where pass rates have exceeded 80 per cent in each of the last two years, and law where the pass rate has improved from 53 per cent to 71 per cent in the last year, although this is still below the national average. In general, results are better for part-time courses than for full time.

47 There are a number of examples of similar courses taught at different sites of the college achieving widely differing results. Students taking GCSE subjects at Ashford have generally achieved better grades than those at Folkestone or Dover. Conversely, retention rates in GCE A level art and design have been better at Dover than at Ashford. The college should investigate the reasons for these variations.

48 The replacement of earlier qualifications with GNVQ has been marked by a fall in student achievements in many areas across the college. For example, students on the BTEC first diploma course in art and design achieved pass rates of 80 per cent and 71 per cent in the last two years the course was offered, but in the first year of its replacement by the intermediate GNVQ programme only 59 per cent of students achieved the full award. The pass rate on the BTEC national diploma in business exceeded 90 per cent in each of its last two years, but when this course was replaced by the advanced GNVQ the rate fell to 33 per cent and the retention rate decreased significantly. The GNVQ courses in leisure and tourism which started in 1993, have been marked by low retention and

pass rates. Sixty-five per cent of the first cohort of students failed to complete, and only 32 per cent successfully achieved the qualification. The college should take greater care to ensure that the introduction of new awards does not lead to a fall in standards.

49 Teacher training courses attract large numbers of students. Results across the range of courses are generally good, and retention rates are high. On the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) further and adult education teachers' certificate course, retention has been 88 per cent for each of the last two years, and all those completing the course were successful. In the certificate of education course, retention has been above 95 per cent for the last three years and pass rates have never fallen below 85 per cent. The gateway to teaching course has a decreasing retention rate, but the pass rate has risen steadily from 34 to 70 per cent in three years. The pass rates on access to higher education courses improved from 75 to 85 per cent over the last two years, and the retention rate has improved from 70 to 90 per cent. A significant number of students gained distinction and merit awards.

50 In business studies, the results for most courses have been good and student retention high. In the diploma in management studies, passes have not fallen below 88 per cent in each of the last three years, although the retention rate has declined. Results in the supervisory management course have also been good with pass rates of at least 86 per cent in the same period. The success rate on the certificate in management studies has been at least 89 per cent and substantial growth in student numbers has not been accompanied by worsening retention.

51 Results on practical courses are very variable. Pass rates for those courses attended by part-time students in electrical and electronic engineering have been good. In the higher national certificate in electronic engineering, the rate has exceeded 90 per cent in each of the last three years. In the open learning national certificate, results have also been good. In the C&G electronic servicing course, the pass rate has increased from 40 per cent to 100 per cent over three years. Pass rates on the first year of the vehicle body repair course have been good at over 70 per cent during the last three years, with a retention rate of 85 per cent. However, results on full-time courses, which are mainly for school leavers, are poor with very high drop-out rates. In the national diploma in construction, only 37 per cent of students were successful and the retention rate was only 40 per cent last year. The pass rate on the national certificate in construction rose to 60 per cent last year with 100 per cent retention. In the first full-time building crafts course, leading to NVQ level 2, the retention rate was 66 per cent and all those who completed were successful. In hairdressing and beauty, passes have increased from only 12 per cent to 46 per cent in the past three years, but the retention rate has fallen to 46 per cent. In the fitness teachers diploma, the pass rate fell from 84 to 41 per cent last year, and 30 per cent of students left the course.

52 All basic education students work for accredited awards and have accreditation books which provide evidence of their achievements. Three students achieved the bronze level of the further education award scheme during the summer and three more will attempt the award this term.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

53 A framework for quality assurance was developed in 1992. Since then, it has been through a number of revisions and another is in prospect. The academic board has recently reviewed the existing quality policy statement and a new quality assurance procedures manual is to be produced. Current programme review procedures are set out in a document issued in 1994. In the last three months the evidence to support programme reviews has been better organised with the establishment of a system of course files.

54 Each course team prepares an annual review for the head of department, using a range of information including the results of student opinion surveys. Good examples of review reports exist in business studies, where they are carefully prepared, self-critical and set targets for improvement. However, the guidance for programme review is interpreted differently by various course teams. The results therefore vary in content, rigour and level of analysis. In the past, few reviews have used any statistical data other than examination results and student numbers, although for the first time this year, analysis of student progression from year to year was introduced in preparation for inspection. Examination results in reviews are not normally compared with national or local averages, and statistical trends are not identified. While there are recommendations for action, numerical targets are rarely set except for enrolments.

55 Heads of department prepare annual reports based on the programme reviews, and submit them to the academic board. These reports summarise changes in each department's provision, including its cross-college responsibilities. They concentrate on emerging concerns in the department, and particularly on resource or curriculum issues that need to be solved at a college-wide level. At the academic board, the departmental reports provide a basis for discussion of issues to be included in the next round of strategic planning, but do not contribute to an analysis of poor performance. The academic board is not the arbiter of the college's quality standards and there is no significant control over academic performance outside departments.

56 The college recognised this deficiency by commissioning a quality audit in April 1994. It employed an external consultant to inspect a sample of courses; seven to date. The reports are more rigorous than the college's own programme reviews, but evaluation of statistical information on students' achievements, retention rates or other performance indicators, is very limited. Use of the findings of the audit varies between departments, and the initiative has yet to be evaluated by the college.

57 A number of courses are exposed to external quality assurance systems, including those of the Kent Access Consortium, BTEC and other awarding bodies. The college's training unit has been approved by the TEC. The college's intention to achieve the Investors in People award was registered with Kent TEC in 1993. Initial staff questionnaires have been completed and the associated action plan has been produced.

58 A staff-appraisal scheme was started on a pilot basis in 1993, and it was improved last year. All teaching and support staff are involved and the scheme was introduced only after extensive consultation. It includes self-appraisal of progress towards personal and institutional targets and discussion with a line manager on training needs and job descriptions. It requires classroom observation. Effective training is provided for both appraisers and appraisees. The intention is that all staff should be appraised annually, but this has been achieved in only one department.

59 Staff development and training have been emphasised at the college for many years. They are co-ordinated by 'Frontline', a unit within one of the departments. An analysis of training needs is carried out annually. All staff are invited to complete a training needs questionnaire; heads of department are interviewed by the staff-development manager; and training is linked to the strategic plan targets. Staff development needs are discussed as part of staff appraisal, but because appraisal documentation is confidential, the value of a direct link with 'Frontline' is lost. The budget for staff development is 1.3 per cent of the payroll, and it includes support for 40 staff who are on extended courses. Priority is given to enabling staff to achieve teaching qualifications. Internal staff development events are well presented. All internal and external events are evaluated. There is an effective induction programme for new staff.

60 The college's self-assessment report follows the headings of the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*, and summarises strengths and weaknesses. It is a thorough document. Whilst its commentary celebrates strengths in detail, it is less forthcoming in its treatment of weaknesses. There is no detailed analysis of students' achievements to prompt plans for improvements in the curriculum. The college charter for 1995-96 has been circulated to all staff and it is available from reception points and branches of the library. It is issued to all students as part of the college diary, and is explained during induction.

RESOURCES

Staffing

61 The college employs 364 teachers, of whom 203 are full time and 161 are part time. Approximately 58 per cent of staff are male and 42 per cent are female. Only two members of the management team of 15 are female. All academic staff are appropriately qualified for the courses they teach, and over 80 per cent of them have teaching qualifications. Staff on vocational courses have appropriate Training and Development Lead Body

assessor and verifier qualifications, and most have recent industrial experience. There are 274 direct learning support, administrative and technical support staff, of whom 229 are full time and 45 are part time: 43 per cent are male and 57 per cent are female. Seventy-two staff have first aid qualifications; a commendably high number. Staff turnover is low. Approximately 27 per cent of all staff are aged 50 or above, and 57 per cent are aged between 30 and 50. About 70 per cent of the college's budget is devoted to staffing.

62 The head of support services is responsible for personnel and payroll management, and is supported by staff who are professionally qualified. The payroll is efficiently handled, but there is no back-up procedure should the payroll manager be absent. Information on staff is maintained on various databases. All staff have job descriptions which should be updated annually as part of the appraisal scheme.

63 The college has comprehensive personnel policies. The equal opportunities policy is reinforced in pamphlets which are issued to all staff. The college has taken steps to promote awareness of its harassment policy and to monitor it. There are 20 staff who have been trained to operate as mediators for staff or students who believe that they have been subjected to harassment. Procedures for the appointment of staff have been reviewed, and a draft recruitment policy and procedure is being discussed. Through the monitoring of its equal opportunities policy, the college recognised that women are under-represented at some levels. Some, but not all, recent advertisements have specifically encouraged applications from women. Applications and shortlists are monitored, and the personnel department provides an explanation for those who are not selected for interview. Feedback is provided for internal candidates as a matter of course.

Equipment/learning resources

64 The college has an adequate range of teaching aids, including overhead projectors, screens, and whiteboards. Audio-visual aids such as televisions and video or tape recorders are located in all curriculum areas, but they are not readily accessible at every site. The quality and condition of classroom furniture vary widely. They are particularly poor in some of the mobile classrooms.

65 Specialist equipment is adequate in most curriculum areas. It is good in engineering and construction; but in hairdressing and beauty, motor vehicle maintenance and in catering, some equipment is out of date or poor. The new equipment for art and design, and health and social care at the South Ashford site is good. Equipment available to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is generally poor. An assets register was created in 1993 and it has been updated regularly, but there is no equipment replacement programme. Information technology equipment is limited or inadequate in some areas, for example in science and business studies. The college is developing an information technology policy and

upgrading the facilities at its major sites. The ratio of computers to students is approximately 1:8, but this figure takes no account of the fact that many of the computers are obsolete. There are significant variations in the availability of computers at the various sites. For example, in Dover and Ashford the ratio is about 1:7, while in Folkestone it is 1:12. The college's open access policy is not wholly effective, and students cannot always use the available computers.

66 There are library and learning resource areas on each of the three major sites, and these are open during college hours. A small collection on the Elwick Road site at Ashford is available for part of the time. Each facility specialises in the curriculum offered at the site, and also has basic reference works. The total stock is over 55,000 books and a wide range of periodicals: many of the books are out of date. All the libraries have study spaces and limited drop-in computer facilities. There are chartered librarians at Ashford and Folkestone. The library provision is not well managed. There is no computerised catalogue, and neither staff nor students from one site have access to the catalogues of other sites. There are intended to be facilities for inter-site book loans and for loans from external libraries, but in practice these are hampered by the lack of information and effective procedures to transfer the books. Staff spend a great deal of their time in manually recording loans and chasing overdue books. There has been only one survey of student opinion, and the extent to which students use library resources is not analysed sufficiently.

67 The library manager is a member of the department of academic services and humanities, but is not a member of the academic board or of the curriculum development panel. There is no library users' group or other formal structure to ensure that the librarian is informed about curriculum developments. The strategic plan makes no mention of the need to introduce information systems into the library service, despite the college's intention to develop flexible learning centres. The internal quality assessment and position statements are unrealistic in describing the service as 'well stocked' and 'well used'.

Accommodation

68 The college has a total of eight sites in Folkestone, Ashford and Dover. The senior managers and central administration services are based in Folkestone. The Jemmett Road and Elwick Road sites in Ashford are both well established, and an extra building in South Ashford opened in September 1995. In Dover, there are two adjacent sites in the centre of the town and a small horticultural unit on the outskirts. Accommodation on all sites occupies almost 30,000 square metres, providing approximately 5.7 square metres per full-time equivalent student. Accommodation is generally fit for its purpose, but it is of uneven standard and condition. The college has outreach centres in south and east Kent, where job skills training is provided.

69 The main Folkestone site has a mixed stock of permanent buildings,

ranging in age from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s. There are 15 mobile classrooms, most of which have been refurbished recently. One large block was built in 1946 as temporary accommodation, but it is still in use. While the varying styles and condition of buildings do not add up to an attractive complex, there are pleasant grassed areas with established trees which improve the environment.

70 The sites in Dover are attractive, with a combination of mid-Victorian buildings, one of which has retained a number of original features, and sympathetically designed buildings from the 1970s. There are two mobile classrooms. The modern buildings are in variable decorative condition. One has been refurbished recently and is clean, bright and attractive, with carpeted floors and good-quality furniture. The others are in need of redecoration, new blinds and better quality furniture.

71 The Jemmett Road site at Ashford is located in a residential area of the town. The three main blocks, built just after the war, have flat roofs which are in need of maintenance. There are three mobile classrooms which are over 20 years old and in a poor state. The spacious refectory is well equipped and well used. At the time of incorporation the college acquired the adjacent land, which lies derelict and overgrown awaiting development. The small Elwick Road site is near the new Ashford international railway terminal and the centre of the town. It is used mainly for business studies courses. The main block is an early 1930s building and, although some classrooms are small, they have benefited from recent refurbishment. There are a number of mobile classrooms, some of which are in a poor state of repair. The South Ashford site was acquired by the college in the summer of 1995 as part of a joint bid for European funding with Ashford Borough Council, Kent TEC and Kent County Council.

72 Only the Maison Dieu site in Dover has lifts to all floors to provide easy access for people with disabilities. On all other sites, access is generally restricted to the ground floor. Inadequate, and sometimes remote parking, compounds the difficulties faced by students with restricted mobility.

73 The head of support services has responsibility for premises. There are three estates officers, one in each town, who supervise cleaning and maintenance. All the college's buildings are clean and without graffiti. The maintenance plans for Folkestone and Ashford are based on immediate priorities, rather than on a planned programme. The college has an accommodation strategy which includes a realistic assessment of the problems it faces, and it has made some progress in improving the condition of its buildings. The strategy includes an investment appraisal for every site, but since funding decisions have yet to be made, the document offers only options rather than firm plans. The college recognises that there may be some spare capacity in its accommodation, but it is unable to provide reliable statistics on occupancy. The college's commitment to meeting locally the education and training needs of all the communities it serves, results in significant extra estate costs. The

preparation of a long-term fully-costed estates plan, based on professional advice should be a priority for the college.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

74 The main strengths of the college are:

- its services to industry
- its extensive European links
- its accessibility to the community
- the effective involvement of governors and staff in strategic planning
- good central student services
- an extensive work experience programme
- excellent teacher/trainer training provision
- good provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- committed staff with a common sense of purpose.

75 If it is to improve the quality of its provision, the college should address the following:

- the poor quality of management information
- inconsistency in tutorial arrangements
- inadequate access to information technology for students
- inadequate library provision
- poor retention rates and examination results in some areas
- the ineffective quality assurance system
- the lack of accommodation utilisation data and long-term estate planning
- the lack of an equipment replacement policy
- the poor condition of some buildings and the access problems they pose for people with disabilities.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at August 1995)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (as at August 1995)

 - 3 FEFC-funded enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at August 1995)

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

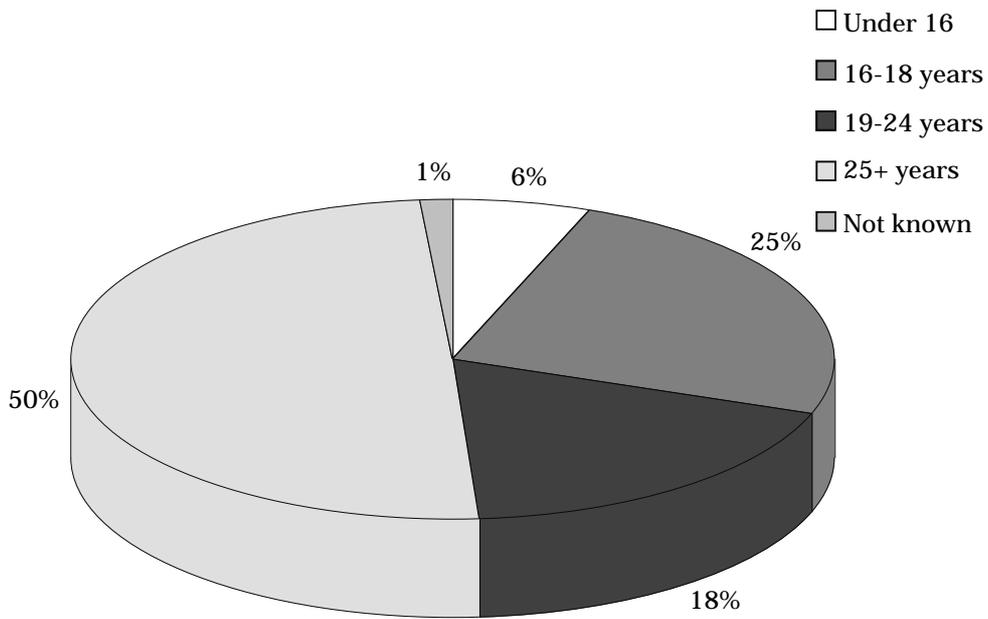
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 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

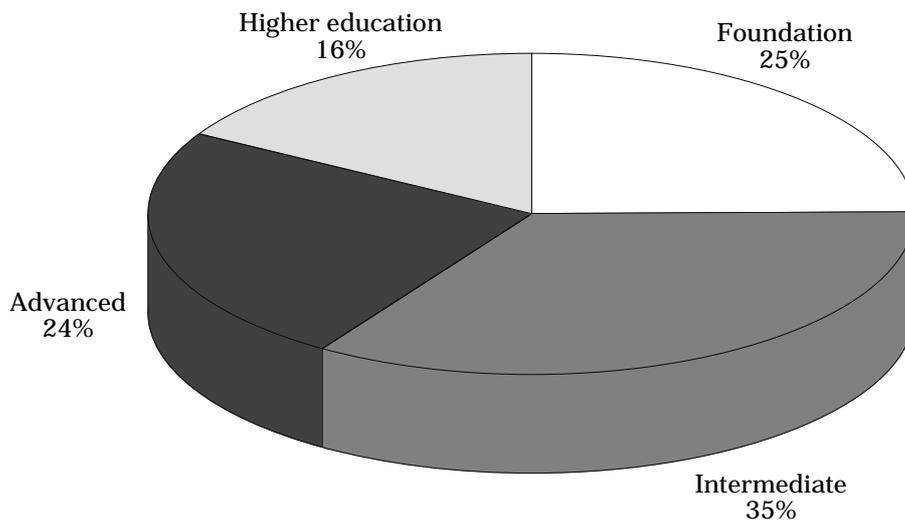
South Kent College: percentage enrolments by age (as at August 1995)



Enrolments: 13,841

Figure 2

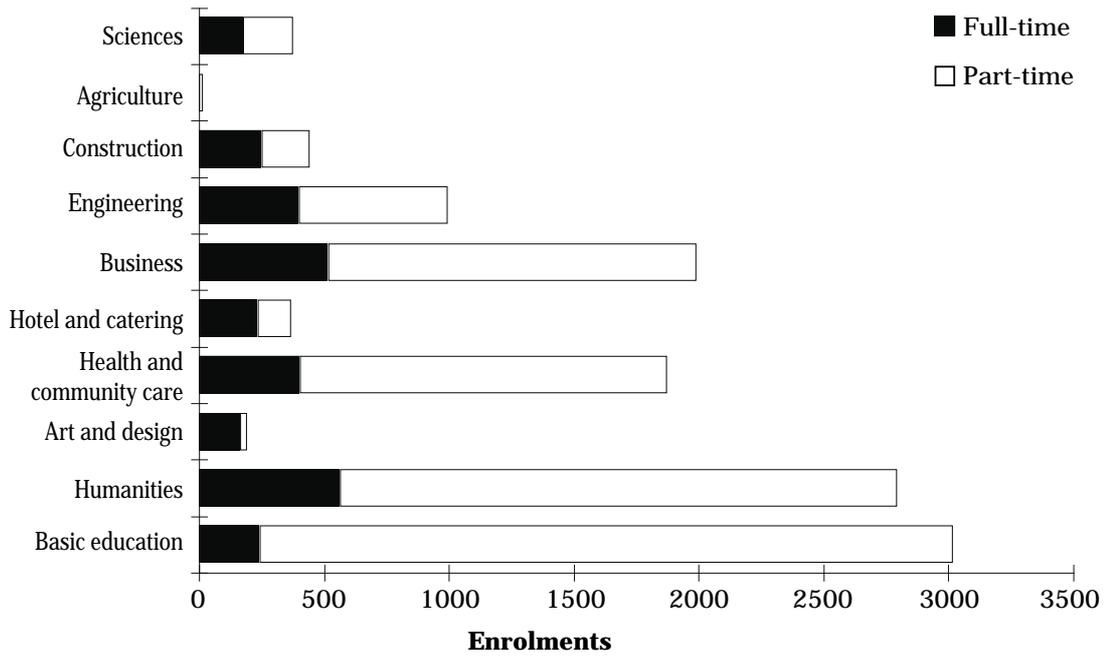
South Kent College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at August 1995)



Enrolments: 13,841

Figure 3

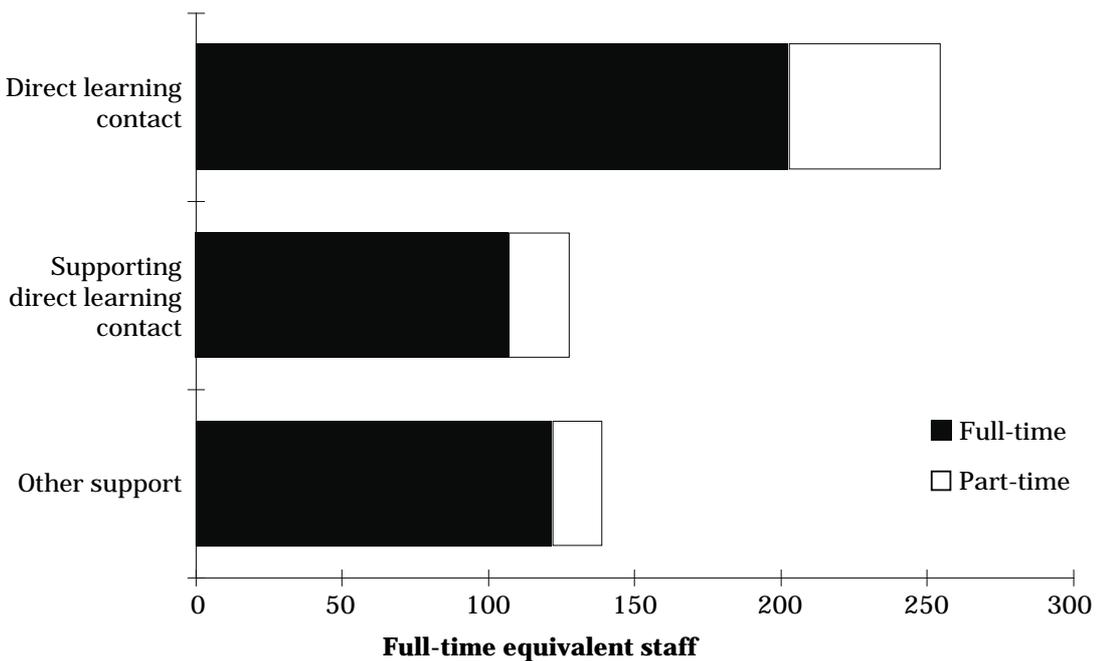
South Kent College: FEFC-funded enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at August 1995)



FEFC-funded enrolments: 12,070

Figure 4

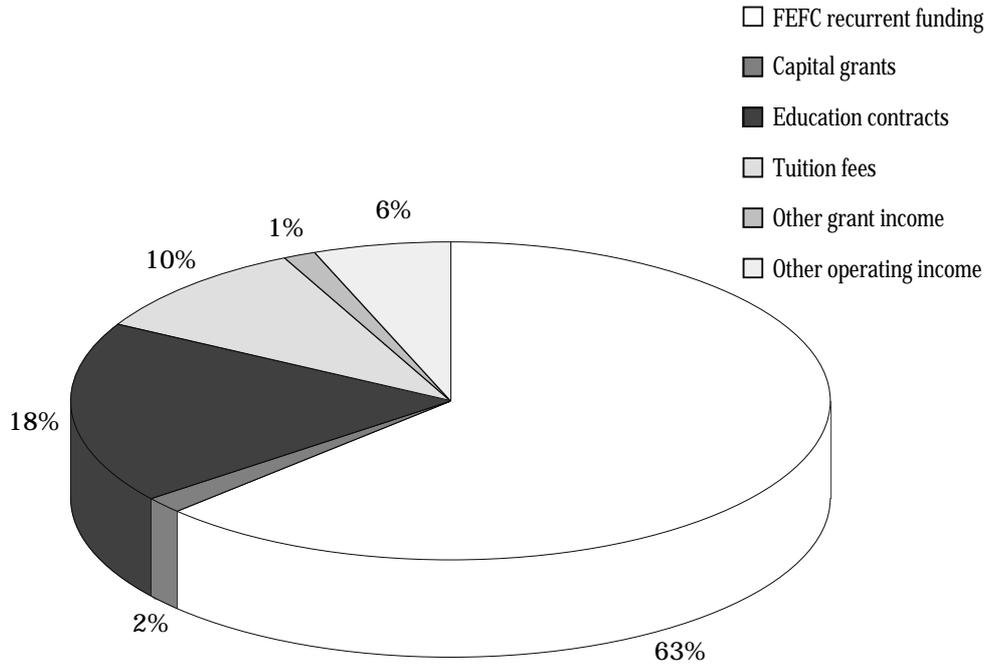
South Kent College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1995)



Full-time equivalent staff: 522

Figure 5

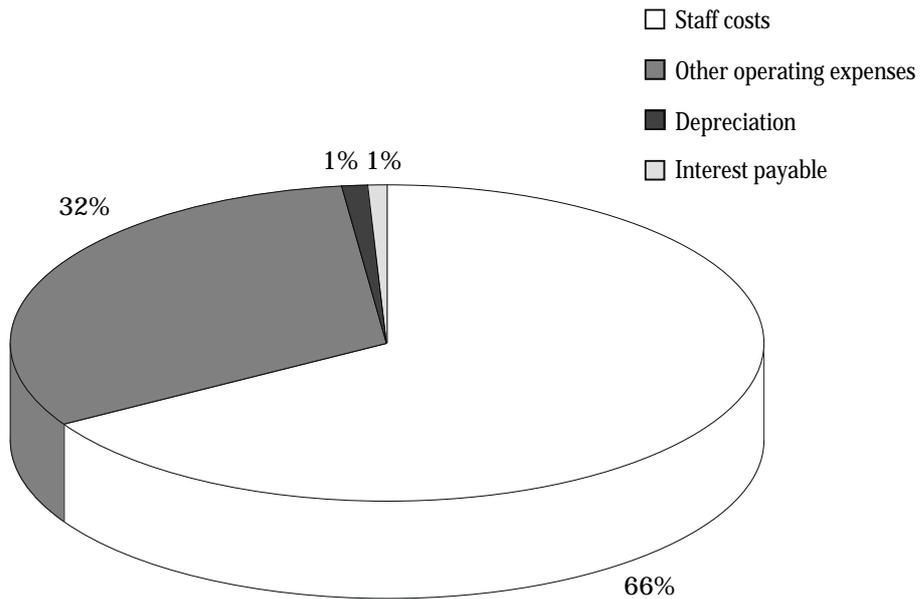
South Kent College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £13,234,000

Figure 6

South Kent College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £13,096,000

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