Stroud College of Further Education

***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 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 59/96

STROUD COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION
SOUTH WEST REGION
Inspected March 1995-February 1996

Summary

Stroud College of Further Education offers a wide range of courses for full-time and part-time students. Governors are actively involved in the work of the college and bring a range of appropriate expertise. They have recently appointed a new principal. The college has a clear strategic plan which is understood and supported by the governors. Staff are less clear about the college's aims and their role in its success. Good relationships exist with local schools, the TEC, the LEA and the community. Equipment and accommodation is generally of a good standard; the learning resources centre is well equipped and there is good wheelchair access to the Stroud site. There are some effective systems in place to support full-time students but many, including tutorials, careers guidance and counselling, are weak. Many college policies are being revised and as a result implementation is inconsistent. There is a lack of rigour throughout the college in recording and monitoring procedures including the collection of information on students' attendance, achievements and destinations. The number of students on GCE and GCSE programmes completing their course but not entering for the examination is high. Retention, attendance and destination rates are a cause for concern on a number of courses. The college should address the following: the lack of a quality assurance policy and effective operational procedures; the lack of a staff-development plan; and the poor provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision	Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision	3
Governance and management	4
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	4
Quality assurance	4
Resources: staffing	3
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Health, social care and hairdressing	3
Construction	3	Art and design	2
Engineering	3	Humanities	3
Business and administration	2	Adult basic education	2
Leisure and cookery	3	SLDD	4

INTRODUCTION

1   Stroud College of Further Education was inspected between March 1995 and February 1996. Twenty inspectors spent a total of 73 days in the college. Art and design was inspected during March 1995. Enrolment and induction procedures were inspected in September 1995. The remaining curriculum areas were inspected during the autumn of 1995 and graded aspects of cross-college provision in February 1996. Inspectors visited 165 classes and had discussions with college managers, teaching staff and students. They inspected a wide range of course documentation and students' work. Meetings were held with parents and employers, and with representatives from the careers service, local schools, the Gloucestershire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and the community.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2   The college is one of five further education sector colleges in Gloucestershire. It primarily serves the rural region of mid-Gloucestershire, including the towns of Stroud, Nailsworth, Dursley and Stonehouse, although the construction plant maintenance course recruits from a much wider geographical area. The other four further education sector colleges in the county are Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology, the Gloucester site being only 10 miles to the north west, Cirencester College, 14 miles to the east, Royal Forest of Dean College, 34 miles to the west and Hartpury College, an agricultural college, 19 miles to the north west. There are three 11 to 18 secondary schools close to the college's main site in Stroud, two of which are single-sex grammar schools. Within 10 miles of the college there are two more 11 to 18 schools and two 11 to 16 comprehensive schools. Approximately 72 per cent of year 11 school leavers in Gloucestershire proceed to further full-time study either at school or in a further education sector college. Most students at the college are recruited from the Stroud area.

3   The population of the Stroud District Council area is 100,000. Unemployment in the Stroud District Council area in December 1995 was 5.1 per cent. This is lower than the corresponding figure for Gloucestershire of 5.8 per cent and compares favourably with the figure of 7.0 per cent for the south-west region. Historically, the area has had a strong engineering base, although this has decreased in importance over recent years. Mid-Gloucestershire is characterised by small towns and small rural communities and is now dominated by small and medium sized companies involved in light industrial, warehousing, specialist craft and service sector work.

4   In November 1995, the college had enrolled 5,580 students, of whom about 16 per cent were full time. Eighty-two per cent were aged 18 and over. Seventy per cent of students were enrolled on programmes leading to nationally-recognised academic or vocational qualifications; the remaining 30 per cent were following non-vocational adult education courses. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of

attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The college employs 230 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 137.5 are teaching staff and 92.5 are support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

5   Following the appointment of a new principal in April 1995, the college was reorganised. The post of vice-principal and 26 other posts were made redundant. The 10 curriculum units were established in five schools: fine and applied arts, business management and administration, leisure, communications and social studies, health care and community studies, and technology and engineering. A new management structure was introduced and all the senior posts and all but one of the middle management posts were filled internally. At the time of the inspection, many formal structures such as those for student services and quality assurance were still being introduced. As from September 1995, the senior management team comprises the principal and four directors. Each director is responsible for one of the following: marketing and external relations, curriculum, personnel and services, and finance and administration. The five heads of school report to the director of curriculum and have responsibility for the day-to-day management of teaching staff and students.

6   The college is in the process of rationalising its present accommodation and locating most courses at its three larger sites. At present, with the exception of art and design, most full-time courses are run from the main Stroud site. Art and design work takes place at the Lansdown and Castle Street sites in the centre of Stroud. Some basic education work is taught in the Old Town Hall. The Cainscross site, located one mile from Stroud, is used primarily for engineering craft courses and for accommodating up to 33 residential students. Sites at Nailsworth and Dursley are used for community education courses including adult basic education and computer literacy, and some art and design programmes. Adult education courses take place on college premises and at 15 schools and community centres across mid-Gloucestershire.

7   The college's mission and aims are set out in a new strategic plan for the period 1995-2000. The mission highlights the college's strong community focus. Overall college aims are to increase the number of students, to continually improve the accessibility and quality of courses offered, to establish long-term financial security and to promote efficiency and effectiveness in all aspects of the college's work. Clear reference is made to the college's role in the community as both a provider of further education courses and as a major local employer.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8   Until recently it was college policy to offer as wide a range of courses to as many students as possible. However, overall recruitment has been insufficient to sustain the large number of courses. Many classes are small and most courses have single groups. The college now recognises the

need to rationalise its provision. Currently a range of vocational courses is offered in information technology, art and design, social care, hairdressing, business, management and administration, cookery, leisure and tourism, engineering and construction. The prospectus includes information on eight General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes at intermediate and advanced levels although not all are running this academic year. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are available ranging from NVQ level 1 (RSA administration) to the diploma in management at NVQ level 5. Twenty-three General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level), 12 GCE advanced supplementary (GCE AS) and 17 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects are on offer.

9   About 150 of the 800 full-time students and 25 per cent of the part-time students are on GCE A level/GCSE programmes. The GCE A level programmes are popular with adults and all the GCE A level and GCSE classes include part-time students. The college is intending to introduce a flexible timetable to allow students further opportunities to combine GNVQs and GCE A levels or to gain additional GCSE qualifications. The college has 952 students aged 16 to 18 of whom 77 are attending GCE AS/A level courses. The college needs to improve the perception of the college as a provider of full-time GCE A level programmes among school leavers.

10   The college runs an 'open door' scheme which allows people who are receiving benefit to study free. This is advertised in the part-time courses programme and over 600 people have enrolled. Flexible patterns of study are well developed. About 550 students are studying through distance and open learning on over 80 courses, including NVQ level 2 in care management, GCE A level, GCSE and adult basic education. The open learning centres at the main site and at Dursley Education Centre stock relevant materials and provide access to computers.

11   Full-time provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is limited. There are two separate specialist full-time courses for students with moderate learning difficulties and/or severe learning difficulties. However, the opportunities for them to take part in vocational training are restricted and do not reflect either local occupations or students' aspirations. At present there are only two programmes at foundation GNVQ level, in health and social care and the built environment, and this restricts students' opportunities for progression.

12   There are well-structured part-time and full-time access courses for students wishing to enter higher education in art and design and humanities. The college offers part-time degree modules in humanities and science, franchised from the Cheltenham and Gloucester College. In 1995-96, 58 students enrolled on these modules.

13   Relations between the college and the local 11 to 16 schools are good. The Stroud Pyramid group of schools which includes the college, two 11 to 16 schools, one 11 to 18 school, 30 primary schools and two special schools,

meet together to exchange information and to facilitate progression for local pupils. Adult students make extensive use of the main site and the 15 outreach centres for a range of recreational and accredited courses. Courses for groups not normally entering further education have included a course for ex-offenders and a course to encourage women into management. The college works closely with Gloucestershire Local Education Authority (LEA) which funds its adult education provision. Providers of adult education and those interested in the needs of the community meet regularly to identify training needs and develop and plan provision. A survey carried out by this group to investigate the needs of those working from home has resulted in a telelearning project, developed in conjunction with Gloucestershire TEC and funded through the Competitiveness Fund. The project has enabled electronic communication links to be established between the main site and the college sites at Dursley and Nailsworth. Experiments are also being carried out to assess the value of linking computers to students' homes.

14   Since September the college has offered full-time students a small number of courses outside their normal course of study in order to enrich their programme. These include car maintenance, meditation and first aid. Two hundred and ten students were offered places but only 84 took up the offer. Attendance has since fallen. The college houses a local radio station, EASY FM. As part of their courses, Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) media studies students act as station managers and present some of the programmes.

15   The college's strategic plan includes a needs analysis which incorporates labour market information. The college makes use of market research provided by external and internal sources but the collection and analysis of data are fragmented and unco-ordinated. A plan has been produced but there are no systems to monitor or evaluate the effectiveness of the money spent on marketing. Although the budget for 1995-96 is an increase on last year, it is inadequate to cover the marketing needs identified. Governors identify marketing analysis and activity as a priority. The director of marketing and external affairs has overall responsibility for marketing and is supported by a recently appointed marketing manager. The central marketing team has begun to co-ordinate publicity. It is introducing a common format for course leaflets and has overseen the production of the 1996-97 prospectus. The prospectus is attractive and informative. It was designed within the college.

16   The college has good working relationships with Gloucestershire TEC. The TEC convenes termly meetings with the colleges in the area to review initiatives such as the further education development projects and labour market information. The TEC also convenes a chief executive meeting between colleges, the TEC and Gloucestershire LEA to consider matters such as the achievement of national targets for education and

training and provision of modern apprenticeship programmes. The college receives funding from the TEC for youth credits and for training for work.

17   College links with employers vary. The college has started to make significant efforts to improve relationships. Last year the college undertook a survey of employers to assess their opinion of the college. Employers responded well with a 60 per cent return of the questionnaires. As a result, a group of employers have come together to form an employers' steering group. Employers spoken to during the inspection were particularly appreciative of the flexible arrangements by which employees could attend courses. The college plays an active role in the Stroud and South Gloucestershire Education Business Partnerships and the South Gloucestershire small business club.

18   The college has established a franchise with a training organisation in Bristol (Avon and Bristol Training Associates Ltd) to provide some college programmes, mainly in information technology. The college has assessed the competence of the organisation to deliver the training but the systems in place for quality assurance are not satisfactory.

19   Although the national targets for education and training are emphasised in the strategic plan there is little evidence of them being understood below middle management level. The college newsletter and regular staff meetings are important means of communication but, as yet, they are not effective in disseminating information about national initiatives.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20   The corporation has 17 members including the principal, two members of staff and a student. The expertise of the governors is well matched to the needs of the college. Only two members of the board, including the student member, are female. A good-quality handbook for governors which includes a code of conduct has been produced recently. In order to improve their understanding of the curriculum, each governor is attached to one of the teaching schools or service divisions.

21   Governors are hard working and committed to the college. Meetings are well attended and businesslike and outcomes are accurately recorded. The appointment of one of the college's directors to the post of clerk to the governors in May 1995 has led to an improvement in the quality of support provided to the governing body. Governors have not always been appropriately informed of developments within the college. This situation is beginning to be rectified. They are now kept well informed of financial, staffing and accommodation matters and levels of enrolments. They welcome the clear reports presented to them by the principal. However, they have not received details of examination results for 1995 and subsequently have not yet reviewed student achievements. Governors are aware that they need to place more emphasis on monitoring standards and the progress made towards achieving strategic objectives. They do not yet review or evaluate their own performance.

22   In 1994-95 the college's average level of funding was £19.37 per unit. In 1995-96 the college's average level of funding is £19.15 per unit. The median for general further education colleges is £17.84 per unit. The college's estimated performance against target for 1994-95 was 93 per cent. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

23   In the light of the changing financial circumstances of the college a new strategic plan was produced in July 1995. It contains a clear mission statement and a thorough analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the college. It includes objectives and targets to be met. Governors were consulted and some amendments were made. Middle managers were asked to respond to it and produce their own operational plans. There has been no monitoring of progress to date. Schools' operational plans are generally poor; only one makes a link between the college's objectives and its own targets. No plan sets out targets, action required, responsibilities and timescales for achievement.

24   A new management structure was introduced in September 1995. It comprises the principal, four directors, five heads of school and 12 service division managers. The responsibility for quality assurance is not contained in any of the senior managers' job descriptions. All new job descriptions conform to a common format. They are contained in a new management manual which has been useful in helping new post holders come to terms with their new role. The establishment of the five curriculum schools has yet to bring about the needed improvements in the management of the curriculum and its delivery in all areas. Significant staff-development needs remain.

25   The management of some cross-college activities and initiatives is weak. The college is in the process of producing new or revised policy and procedural documents on a wide range of college issues. The only formal college policy in existence is for health and safety and this is under review. The lack of clarity about the status of many documents has meant that much of the college's business is transacted inconsistently.

26   Communication throughout the college is improving, but many barriers to effective communication remain. There is a good staff bulletin but only some staff read it. The principal has spoken to all staff six times since he joined. There is a regular cycle of college meetings. The principal has gained the confidence of most managers. Nevertheless, few staff outside the directorate have an overall picture of the present position of the college and where it aims to be. There is still some misunderstanding among staff about how and why the recent financial difficulties of the college occurred and little understanding about how they can contribute to its success. Disquiet and low morale exist amongst some staff. The academic board has in the past had little impact on the college. Its role and terms of reference have been reviewed. The new board has a clear structure and guidelines for its operation.

27   The directorate introduced a unit costing system last September to determine financial viability of courses at enrolment. The system for allocating non-staffing budgets to schools and service divisions is clear and understood by most staff. Managers are kept well informed of the budgets through monthly reports. Any variance of expenditure against budget is investigated. Managers' roles in the deployment and control of staff is not so effective. The appointment of part-time staff sometimes relies too heavily on informal procedures.

28   The college does not make effective use of its management information system. The management information unit is able to produce reports tailored to the needs of managers but not all managers are aware of the extent of the information available or how best to use it. The system does not cover all aspects of the college's work. Among the gaps are admissions, destination data and staffing information. The college relies on registers as a source of much information and these are not kept up to date. As a result much of the information is unreliable. During the inspection, inspectors struggled to get accurate information on student achievements and destinations.

29   There are few performance indicators in place. Advice to schools and service divisions to set operational plan targets has not yet been followed. The monitoring of attendance, course changes, retention and destinations of students is poor. Enrolment targets are set, but the college failed to meet them in 1994-95. The college estimates that it will meet them in 1995-96.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

30   The college does not give sufficient attention to the role of student guidance and support in the improvement of attendance, retention and student achievement. It does, however, recognise the need to improve its arrangements for admissions, guidance and all aspects of student support. In September 1995, a student support division was established with responsibility for admissions, the tutorial system, guidance, learning support, student welfare and careers. Despite considerable activity the division still operates largely as separate sections.

31   The information provided to full-time students before entry is generally satisfactory. Liaison with most schools is good and well received. College staff are involved in a range of activities, including working with school tutor groups, providing drop-in centres at schools and attending open evenings. Contacts are more limited in schools with their own sixth forms. The college holds open evenings and prospective students can arrange individual visits. Parents spoke positively about the information provided and the easy access to the college.

32   The admissions procedures for full-time students are thorough. All full-time students are interviewed at least once and further guidance is available for those unsure of the choice of course. Adult students can

obtain guidance from the adult guidance team at the main college site and at an outreach centre in Stroud town centre. In the last 12 months 480 adults have made use of the service. The majority of part-time students are recruited directly by the individual teaching schools and guidance is not an automatic part of the process. The collection, recording and analysis of admissions data are inadequate. Data on full-time students are recorded manually and not relayed to the central management information system. As a result, the production and analysis of summary information is time consuming and difficult to obtain. The central admissions office has no knowledge of the progress of part-time applications.

33   Accreditation of students' prior learning is well established in two teaching schools but is at an early stage of development in the rest of the college. Only four staff have so far achieved the assessor qualification required to advise and support candidates in the identification of prior achievement.

34   Support for students' literacy and numeracy needs is well established. Most full-time students receive screening tests which have been modified to cater for different levels. This year, the screening has been centrally administered and marked and this has improved its efficiency. Support has been provided to a significant proportion of the students identified as needing help.

35   There is no coherent set of policies and procedures for tutors to follow. Tutorial practice is inconsistent and sometimes unsatisfactory. The college has acknowledged the need to improve the tutorial system. New arrangements were introduced in September 1995. All full-time students have group tutors who have responsibility for their individual progress. Centrally, a senior tutor and two lead tutors are responsible for supporting and guiding tutorial practice. A large number of checklists and procedures have been devised and circulated to tutors. These include helpful recording systems to ensure students have completed induction, study skill screening, progress reviews and other activities. Not all are being used effectively. Full-time courses have an hour set aside for tutorial activity each week. Many students speak positively about the individual support they receive from their tutors. Variable use is made of this time. Some students receive regular individual tutorials but, for many, the experience is more informal and lacks rigour. Some students have not received an individual tutorial since starting their course. In a minority of cases the hour set aside for tutorial activity is used for additional teaching. On GCSE and GCE A level programmes difficulties arise because tutors do not teach many of the students in their tutor group. There are no arrangements for tutorial support for the large numbers of part-time students.

36   The college record of achievement is the main mechanism for tracking and reviewing each students' progress. It includes the learning agreement, a personal action plan and a review of the student's progress. A scrutiny of documents during the inspection identified some serious omissions.

For example, some tutors had not completed the start of year action plan, in several subjects the autumn reviews were not completed and on many records of achievement the comments on the progress reviews were superficial. The arrangements for the central monitoring of records of achievement are unsatisfactory. There are no supervisory arrangements in place for the writing of higher education references by group tutors.

37   Monitoring of attendance is weak. Registers are not kept up to date. Senior managers recognise that they cannot rely on the information recorded. The procedures for recording student absence are not consistently applied. Course transfer procedures are insufficiently clear and recorded information is not reliable.

38   The relationship with the careers service is supported by a service level agreement. A careers officer visits the college one day a week, mainly for individual interviews. The take up of appointments by students is improving but is still short of the target figure. Careers service staff also provide support for the college's careers information sessions, in particular with advice on higher education. Generally, careers education is at an early stage of development. There is no published policy and a lack of clear guidelines and programmes. Some tutors are not aware of the importance of the careers service provided or of their role in supporting students' careers education. The careers library is adequate but contains mainly paper-based information with very little computer-stored data.

39   There is an effective welfare advice and support service for financial problems. The welfare officer controls four student support funds. The service is only available on the main site and there is no monitoring of its use or effectiveness. The college does not have a counselling service to deal with enquiries that are not financial. It does not make sufficient distinction between personal counselling, welfare advice, personal tutoring and academic support.

40   There is a useful student handbook/diary which includes the basic information needed by students. The charter is not included and there is limited awareness of it among students. Students spoke positively about their access to the principal. He holds regular meetings with representatives of the student union. There are student representatives, nominated by the student union, on the corporation board and academic board.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

41   Fifty-six per cent of the 165 sessions inspected had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. In 14 per cent of classes weaknesses outweighed strengths. The following table summarises the inspection grades which were awarded.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	3	16	5	2	0	26
GCSE	0	6	5	1	1	13
GNVQ	2	7	6	7	1	23
NVQ	3	12	14	0	0	29
Other*	11	33	19	9	2	74
Total	**19**	**74**	**49**	**19**	**4**	**165**

includes engineering courses, art and design courses, access to higher education and higher education programmes, adult basic education and programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

42   In mathematics and science, classes were well planned. Teachers were confident in their subject knowledge and had developed good relationships with students. New topics were introduced carefully and teachers used a variety of teaching methods, including short lectures, oral questioning and video. Most students were well motivated, although in some two-hour teaching sessions the interest of students was difficult to maintain. Work undertaken by students and marks awarded were not systematically recorded by teachers; in some cases, the recording of homework marks was incomplete.

43   In some computing classes, effective use was made of high-quality workbooks produced by the teacher. In these sessions, students worked hard and the teacher was able to spend time discussing work with individual students. Some computing sessions were poor. For example in one session on spreadsheets, the more able students were held back while the topic was explained to the rest of the group. Reference materials and exercises were not provided, and there was insufficient checking of the work which had been covered. Assignments set on GNVQ programmes were appropriate but, in a few cases, the work set was not related to business applications of computing.

44   Practical construction activities are taught and assessed in a workshop. Most students worked hard on practical tasks and made appropriate progress. Students were aware of their targets and of what was required to achieve their full NVQ award. Records of work which had been formally assessed were up to date. Theory sessions often relied too heavily on copying from the blackboard and, in some cases, students' notes and portfolios were poorly organised.

45   In engineering, staff have developed good relationships with students. Where computers were used, students worked conscientiously. In theory classes, there was little variety in the teaching methods, no use of demonstrations and no opportunities to discuss work in groups. In some cases, teachers did not make effective links between theory and practice or check that students had understood the work. Teachers set work for students regularly, but in marking the work they provided too few comments to enable students to improve.

46   Teaching on business and management courses was planned thoroughly. Effective use was made of examples drawn from industry. In whole class and small group discussions, the quality of the debate was high. In wordprocessing, shorthand and typewriting, groups of students working for different examinations were taught together. Good relations between staff and students and the high levels of staff expertise ensured that appropriate progress was made by all students. Record keeping, particularly on NVQ administration programmes, was meticulous. In some classes, the pace of work was too slow for the group and the work set did not challenge the students.

47   Classes in leisure and tourism were not always well managed. For example, in one session where students had been set work while the teacher saw individual students on a one-to-one basis, the high level of background conversation interfered with the effectiveness of the teacher's discussions. Teaching of home economics and cookery was effective, but the lack of practical facilities limited the amount of food production work.

48   In hairdressing, theoretical sessions including applied science were carefully planned to support practical activities. In some theory sessions there was little variety in the style of teaching. Health and social care schemes of work and records of students' work were comprehensive. Difficult subject matter was presented sensitively. Teachers questioned students regularly to ensure they had understood and made use of practical examples to illustrate points raised during classroom teaching. Most students were confident and articulate and worked effectively in groups. In some lessons the teaching was poorly structured, students' existing knowledge was not explored or extended and little was achieved.

49   Students in art and design are provided with opportunities to develop a variety of skills using different tools and materials and are encouraged to solve visual problems and discuss ideas. A programme of historical and cultural studies supports this work. Vocational work in photography and journalism develops a range of relevant skills. For example, C&G radio journalism students experience film/television, radio, print and publishing work. Television projects are related to outside work wherever possible. Some areas, such as printed textiles and computer-aided design are poorly resourced and this has an adverse impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

50   Detailed schemes of work and lesson plans have been produced in humanities. All teaching sessions were well prepared and linked closely to the requirements of examinations. In history and social sciences, the teaching sessions observed followed a similar format. The teacher worked through points on the board or used overhead projector transparencies. Students were expected to take their own notes and raise questions. Although teachers presented information clearly and in a logical order, the quality of students' notes was variable. In some cases, there was insufficient checking of students' understanding. In English and

communications, some effective whole-class discussions and group work were observed. Homework set was carefully marked, with supportive, detailed comments.

51   Schemes of work were available for foreign language teaching, but most did not contain information on teaching methods and lesson objectives. Teaching was generally effective. For example in one beginners' French class, the teacher communicated all instructions in French and used English only when it was clear that the students had not understood. As a result students quickly developed confidence in interpreting basic French. In an Italian class, imaginative use was made of an Italian television/radio schedule to practise numbers and times. In a few sessions, teaching methods lacked variety and students did not respond to questions. Comments made on students' written work were sometimes insufficiently detailed to help students.

52   In adult basic education, classes are run at outreach centres often at some distance from the college. Teachers spent considerable time discussing and producing individual programmes of work to meet the needs of each student. Activities were well designed, although a lack of access to audio-visual resources and information technology limited the students' experience. Nevertheless, progress made by students was generally good.

53   On courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities teachers do not work effectively together as a team or share the most successful methods of teaching students. Many students were working at too low a level. Programmes of learning for students were not always designed to include individual needs and intended goals. In some cases, students were insufficiently occupied and this adversely affected their motivation. Work experience, enterprise activities and a residential programme are organised for all students. Several students commented favourably on the residential programme.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

54   In general, students are developing appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding. Adult students, in particular, work well in groups and participate effectively in class discussions. In some cases, for example in science and engineering, there are insufficient opportunities for students to apply their knowledge through practical activities. In administration, some students showed limited confidence in oral work.

55   The college's learning resources centre is equipped with computers to support students in the production of coursework. On computing, management, administration and science courses, students present work of a high standard. In some engineering courses, work submitted for marking is poorly presented. Students in hairdressing, health and social care and leisure and tourism make limited use of the learning resources centre.

56   The pass rates for students entering GCE A level examinations vary. The pass rate for all subjects in 1995 was 80 per cent. This compares favourably with the average pass rate for all students in further education colleges (not including sixth forms) of 69 per cent for 1995. Ninety-eight students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE A level examinations in 1995 scored, on average, 4.0 points per entry. This places the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1995 tables published by the Department for Education and Employment.

57   In some GCE A level subjects, pass rates in 1995 were on or above comparable national percentage pass rates. This was the case in art (81 per cent), philosophy (100 per cent), psychology (82 per cent), sociology (72 per cent), English literature (89 per cent), accounting (88 per cent), French (88 per cent), biology (88 per cent), physics (100 per cent) and mathematics (100 per cent). Many of these subjects, however, have small numbers of entrants. Performance in communication studies (53 per cent), geography (29 per cent) and history (57 per cent) was poor.

58   Although pass rates are generally satisfactory in GCE A level subjects, the number of students completing the course of study but not sitting for the examination is high. Forty-one of the 108 full-time students in this category in 1995 were, the college considered, continuing in further education. Figures for part-time students are not available. Retention is also poor in many of the GCE A level subjects; French, history, geography, mathematics and physics recording less than 50 per cent over the two-year period.

59   The number of GCE AS entries was small. There were 73 entries across 13 subjects and the majority of subjects involved only one or two entrants. Generally, results were satisfactory with only law achieving a poor result of 11 per cent for nine entrants.

60   In 1995, there were 431 entries for 22 GCSE subjects, with an overall pass rate of 66 per cent. This compares with 67 per cent for 1994. GCSE results for those students who complete their studies are generally on or above the national averages for all students. For example, in 1995, 85 students taking GCSE mathematics achieved a pass rate at grades A to C of 54 per cent. Twenty-two students entered for both GCSE English language and literature achieved a pass rate at grades A to C of 95 per cent. Sixty-three students entered solely for English language achieved a pass rate at grades A to C of 54 per cent. Pass rates of 100 per cent were achieved in food and nutrition, photography, German, Spanish, Italian and French. Poor results were recorded in GCSE media studies (11 per cent). Retention in many GCSE subjects is poor.

61   In one-year full-time vocational courses, results varied. There were pass rates of 100 per cent in foundation art and design, access to higher education art and design and C&G furniture craft. Pass rates above 75 per cent were achieved in the BTEC first diploma in engineering (80 per cent),

GNVQ intermediate health and social care (81 per cent), and GNVQ business (88 per cent). Poor results included NVQ levels 1 and 2 business administration first diploma in information technology applications (30 per cent), C&G motor vehicle engineering (40 per cent) and intermediate GNVQ leisure and tourism (40 per cent).

62 On vocational two-year full-time programmes finishing in 1995, the following pass rates were recorded: GNVQ advanced business (87 per cent), BTEC national diploma in engineering (50 per cent), BTEC national diplomas in leisure studies (67 per cent), travel and tourism (80 per cent), social care (100 per cent), general art and design (96 per cent) and media studies (89 per cent). All students aged 16 to 19 in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment's 1995 performance tables were successful. This places the college in the top 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. However, the tables only take account of the achievements of 38 students completing BTEC national and GNVQ advanced courses in the age range 16 to 18. The majority of students achieving vocational qualifications are aged over 19.

63 There were some good results on part-time vocational programmes for those students who complete their studies. Pass rates of 100 per cent were recorded on the foundation management in care course, the BTEC national certificate in engineering, and C&G computer-aided design courses. Eighty-four per cent of NVQ level 4 and level 5 management students achieved their full qualification. Pass rates of below 50 per cent were recorded in the C&G repair and servicing of road vehicles course, the NVQ level 2 integrated plant course and the BTEC national certificate course in electrical and electronic engineering. Pass rates of 100 per cent were achieved in the examinations of the Royal Yachting Association. Results for students on part-time teacher training programmes were good.

64 The assessment procedures on courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are unsatisfactory. The aspirations and potential of individual students are not taken into account. Short-term targets are not set, with the result that achievement is very difficult to measure. Work is sometimes repeated unnecessarily. Motivation of students, particularly those with moderate learning difficulties, was sometimes low. Nevertheless, some students with more severe learning difficulties were able to demonstrate increased confidence and independence, for example, in using community facilities and buses and in group work.

65 The college does not hold a reliable central summary of students' destinations. Some information was available for some courses, but it was not possible to form a view of the effectiveness of the whole college in preparing students for the future.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

66   There is a strong commitment by the directorate to the development of a quality assurance system which will lead to continuous quality improvement of all services offered by the college. Some service agreements are being piloted. Although there is some good practice in the existing system, much is weak. Consequently, there is not a sound base of commitment and practice to build on. The college is committed to achieving the Investors in People award, although the date for an accreditation assessment has been postponed for 12 to 18 months because of management changes and the changes being made to the staff appraisal scheme.

67   The college does not have a policy statement on quality assurance and does not state clearly who has management responsibility for quality in the college. Some members of staff do not understand what is meant by the college's quality system or know the outcome of many of the procedures. Performance targets for senior managers and heads of school have already been set, but targets and performance indicators at course team level are still to be decided. Heads of schools have produced operational plans to meet the targets set: many are poor and do not have measurable outcomes. The preparation of action plans as part of a quality improvement process is weak in most parts of the college.

68   As part of course review, the marketing section has undertaken student perception surveys for a number of years. These have led to the production of comprehensive reports of students' opinions about all aspects of the college. These reports are considered at senior management level and responses prepared recommending action to be taken by the course teams. Course teams have not always given due attention to the recommendations made and, although they are required to make a formal response, the quality of responses has been poor in some cases. More recently they have deteriorated further. In some cases, the outcomes have been simply noted; in others, the action identified has had no measurable outcomes. Where staff have drawn attention to problems requiring resources there is no evidence to show how these matters were dealt with by senior managers.

69   The college quality system has relied heavily on student surveys and questionnaires for monitoring the effectiveness of the service. Little attention has been given to the analysis of students' achievement and teaching and learning. It is not yet standard practice to produce regular reports at programme level which include an evaluation of performance against agreed criteria. Reports from external moderators and external verifiers are commented on by senior management and passed to heads of schools who have the responsibility of discussing these with course teams and ensuring that appropriate action is taken. Other aspects of quality provision to meet the requirements of awarding bodies have been slow to develop. Not all specialist areas have sufficient staff qualified for the roles

of internal verifier and accreditation of prior learning counsellor. There are no college-wide procedures for internal verification or to moderate the standards of assessment across courses.

70   The college's self-assessment report is based upon the structure of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report is self-critical in identifying strengths and some weaknesses. In governance and management, some of the strengths identified involve procedures which have yet to be implemented. In students' recruitment, guidance and support, some weaknesses have not been identified. The report was developed by drawing upon information and assessments undertaken elsewhere, particularly the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis produced during the preparation of the strategic plan and the reports from the FEFC's inspectorate. It is particularly self-critical in such areas as teaching and learning with regard to the work of course teams and the planning and development of assignments. There is some use of quantitative data to justify conclusions in the section on student achievement.

71   Until last summer the college had appraised both support staff and full-time teaching staff. The appraisal scheme for teaching staff did not include appraisal by line managers and was based upon peer appraisal, the appraiser being chosen by the appraisee. Staff-development activity was in the main linked to an individual's needs rather than those of the institution. The appraisal scheme is being revised. The college has had a staff-development programme in place for some time which has been used successfully up until last year. The post of staff-development manager is currently vacant and for this year the management of staff development is divided between three members of the directorate. There is no overall staff-development plan, although requests are checked against strategic planning objectives. The lack of an overall strategy for staff development is an important omission at a time when a number of significant staff-development needs have been identified. An evaluation of the impact of staff development is not effectively undertaken. There is no formal system for the dissemination of knowledge and skills gained through staff development, although a requirement to pass on training outcomes forms part of the application procedure.

72   The college has published a charter in line with national requirements. Not all students are aware of the college charter and its contents nor do they have copies of it. Some members of staff are not yet fully aware of the commitments in the college charter and some do not respond effectively to these commitments. Compliance with the contents of the charter is not monitored. For example, complaints are not logged and some are not dealt with within the time commitments stated. Complaints files are kept by a number of managers but the overall picture of how a complaint has been dealt with is not clear. The charter is not effectively covered during students' induction and is not on the college induction checklist used by staff.

RESOURCES

Staffing

73   In September 1995, the college responded to its financial difficulties by reducing staff and rationalising its curriculum units. At the time of inspection, 18 staff were working their redundancy notices. Many staff do not understand the present position of the college and its strategic aims.

74   In most areas of the college, staff are adequately qualified and experienced for the work they do. Seventy per cent of full-time teaching staff and 37 per cent of part-time staff possess a teaching qualification. Over 70 per cent of staff have had significant industrial experience but much of it is now dated. Forty-one per cent of staff have been in post for more than 10 years. Part-time staff support approximately 30 per cent of the teaching. In a number of areas they bring recent industrial experience. However, the recruitment and deployment of part-time teachers is not carried out systematically.

75   In engineering, the number of staff with academic qualifications at higher levels is not sufficient to support the range of higher level work. In computing and business, some staff lack appropriate formal qualifications for the areas in which they teach. Fifty-nine full-time staff have achieved a relevant vocational assessor award. This is a relatively low level of achievement given the dominance of vocational courses in the college.

76   General technical support is well organised and technician staff provide a wide range of skills and experience to the college's schools. Administrative staff are well qualified and experienced. They are now managed centrally. They are well organised but support is thin in many areas of the college. Although there are three technicians reporting to the information technology manager, one technician has a significant commitment to developing the telecentres on the main Stroud site and at Dursley and another provides a service for non-computer equipment. As a result, the overall level of support available for information technology across the college is inadequate.

77   The personnel section has a staff of two reporting to the director of personnel. Information on staffing is available in a variety of paper-based reports but the section lacks appropriate resources and tools to provide up-to-date information on the deployment and management of staff.

Equipment/learning resources

78   Overall, the level of specialist equipment to support teaching and learning is satisfactory. In particular, there are modern, well-equipped facilities for hairdressing, modern languages and construction. Less well-equipped areas include auto engineering where equipment is not keeping pace with the introduction of new technology. The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is generally poor. Despite the adequate level of specialist equipment across the college, much

of it is old and requires substantial maintenance. There is appropriate provision of overhead projectors and videos in most classrooms and adequate provision of consumables.

79   The college-wide provision of information technology equipment is good with over 200 modern machines giving a student to workstation ratio of approximately 9:1. Access to computers is satisfactory although the 22 machines in the learning resources centre are the only fully open access provision, the remainder being deployed in groups of about 16 in various teaching rooms. The college is developing a number of telecentres that will allow video conferencing and access to a range of network services, including the Internet. The first two are being established at the main site and at Dursley. With the exception of the 40 computers supporting administration, there is no college wide communications network, the majority of the computers being stand-alone systems. There are some variations between rooms in different locations in terms of compatibility of software and reliability. The recent formation of the central information technology services unit provides a focus and a mechanism for addressing issues and the development of information technology across the college.

80   There has been considerable investment in the provision of the learning resources centre on the main site. The central location provides large well-maintained pleasant areas with 134 study spaces which are frequently used to capacity. The centre is exceptionally well used. The 5.5 full-time equivalent staff provide a friendly and efficient service. However, the staffing levels are inadequate for the opening hours and the growing requirement to provide individual support for students. In addition to books, journals, reports and reference materials, staff have organised useful collections of newspaper cuttings to support project work. Video, compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database and computer facilities are provided in separate areas. Outdated books have been removed from the shelves resulting in a good basic provision of essential books. The need to build up the stock is being addressed through a budget increase in the past year.

Accommodation

81   The college operates from seven sites in Stroud, Dursley and Nailsworth. Five of these are freehold and two are leasehold sites. The Stratford Road site provides 70 per cent of the accommodation and includes some good specialist provision, including the mathematics workshop, the computer numerical control and computer-aided design suite and the languages area. In addition, there has been some good refurbishment of spaces such as the conversion of an engineering workshop into a high-quality teaching room. Wheelchair access to the site is good with lifts, ramps and stair lifts to all rooms.

82   Most of the general teaching accommodation is satisfactory or better. However, many corridors lack display and some areas are untidy and in need of maintenance. There are some unsatisfactory areas, for example

in secretarial studies and the cookery area where small rooms limit the flexibility of use needed. Approximately 18 per cent of the accommodation on the Stratford Road site is provided in mobile classrooms. The majority of these are adequate and the adaptation and refurbishment of one to include a one-way mirror wall for teaching psychology is a good example of use. However, the mobile classrooms provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are totally inadequate.

83   The Highwood Education Centre at Nailsworth has the potential to provide some good accommodation. Situated some six miles from the main campus, it provides 11 per cent of the total space available but is currently used by only a very small number of students. At present, the site lacks a sense of purpose and students do not feel part of the college. The college plans significant movement of courses from other sites for the next academic year. Plans are in hand to provide the necessary adaptations and refurbishment of the accommodation.

84   Lansdown Road, the former college of art, accommodates much of the college's art and design programmes. It provides a good range of appropriate facilities and spaces with high ceilings and excellent lighting. The School of Fine and Applied Arts also occupies the site at Castle Street, a former teachers' centre. This is within walking distance of the Lansdown Road site and provides accommodation consisting mainly of studios for drawing. The building is in need of substantial maintenance and investment. Wheelchair access to both of these sites is poor. The college also occupies three small rooms in the Old Town Hall which is situated between Lansdown Road and Castle Street. These are used mainly for adult basic education provision.

85   The Dursley Education Centre, some 11 miles from the main site, provides engineering facilities and a range of general purpose classrooms, the majority in mobile classrooms. The centre provides for approximately 1,150 part-time students. The general quality of accommodation on the site is good, but wheelchair access to most of the site is difficult. The Cainscross Centre, one mile west of the main site, comprises an engineering centre used only one or two days a week by a small number of students. The Ashway hostel, a Victorian building which has been converted and extended to provide accommodation for 33 students, is on the same site. Although the hostel is currently only used by a handful of students, it is in urgent need of upgrading and refurbishment.

86   The college has completed a detailed analysis of its accommodation and produced an accommodation strategy. This strategy is clearly linked to the overall college strategic plan and takes into account current curriculum development and student needs. This plan is the basis for moving certain courses from the School of Fine and Applied Arts to the Highwood Centre and for the rationalisation of engineering workshop provision. Its strategy is to make the Stratford Road, Lansdown and Highwood sites the focus of future college development.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

87   The strengths of the college include:

•   a wide range of courses offered to meet a variety of students' needs

•   good relationships with schools, the TEC, the LEA and the community

•   governors who are committed to the success of the college, have a good understanding of the issues facing the college, work well as a team, and bring a range of appropriate expertise

•   a clear mission statement and strategic objectives based on an analysis of the issues facing the college

•   a well-understood system for allocating non-staffing budgets

•   some effective support arrangements for full-time students including the provision of learning support, welfare advice and support on financial matters

•   a self-assessment plan which provides a realistic appraisal of strengths and weaknesses

•   satisfactory specialist equipment

•   generally satisfactory levels of information technology equipment

•   a good, well-used learning resources centre

•   a range of good-quality general accommodation across three of the sites

•   good access for wheelchair users to the main site.

88   If the college is to make progress in achieving its aims, it should address the following issues:

•   a general lack of understanding amongst staff about the college's aims and their role in making it a success

•   the limited number of college policies resulting in a lack of compliance to college procedures

•   a general lack of rigour throughout the college in recording, monitoring and feedback procedures

•   the unreliability of much of the student data produced by the college, in particular class registers

•   the number of courses with small classes and single groups

•   the enrolment of some part-time students on inappropriate courses

•   the lack of attention given to student achievements and destinations

•   the failure to appreciate the role of student support systems in improving student achievements

•   poor arrangements for tutorials, career guidance, counselling and the recording of students' achievement

- the lack of a quality assurance policy and effective operational procedures

- the lack of an overall staff-development plan

- provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities which is poor in terms of management, equipment and accommodation

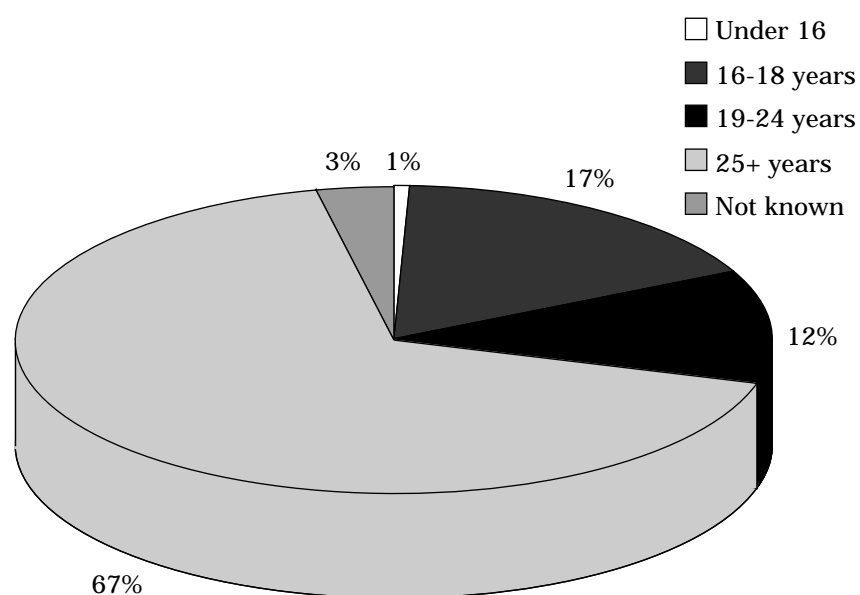- some sites which are in need of major maintenance and refurbishment.

FIGURES

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

Figure 1

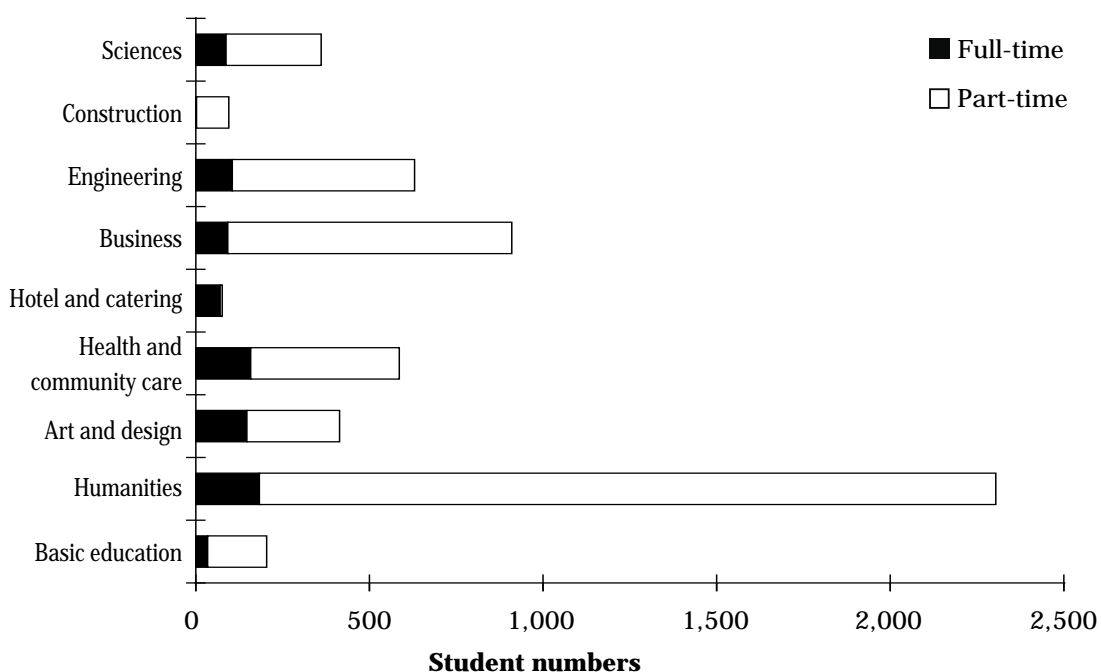**Stroud College of Further Education: student numbers by age (as at November 1995)**

Legend:
- ☐ Under 16
- ■ 16-18 years
- ■ 19-24 years
- ☐ 25+ years
- ■ Not known

3% 1% 17%

12%

67%

Student numbers: 5,580

Figure 2

Stroud College of Further Education: student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)

Foundation
10%

Leisure/recreation
(non-schedule 2)
30%

Intermediate
35%

Higher
education
3%

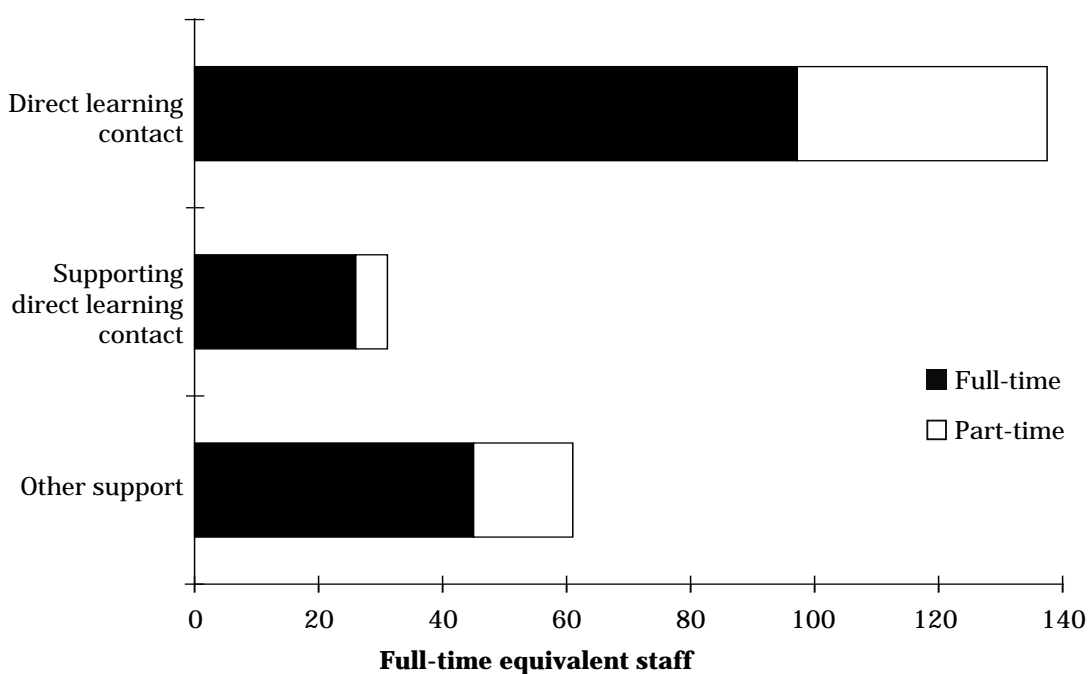Advanced
22%

Student numbers: 5,580

24
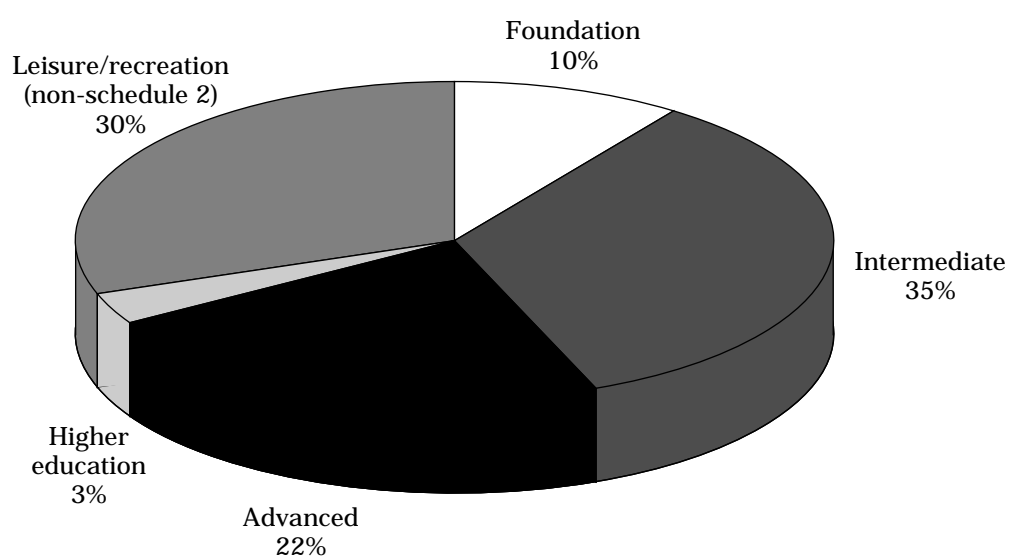
Figure 3

Stroud College of Further Education: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)
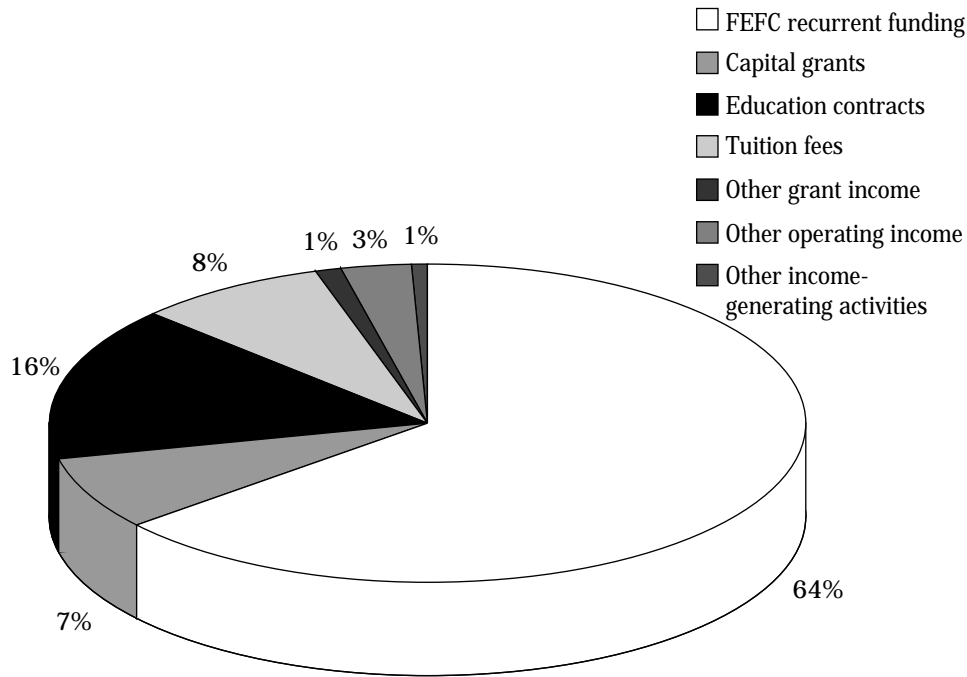

Student numbers: 5,580

Figure 4

Stroud College of Further Education: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)
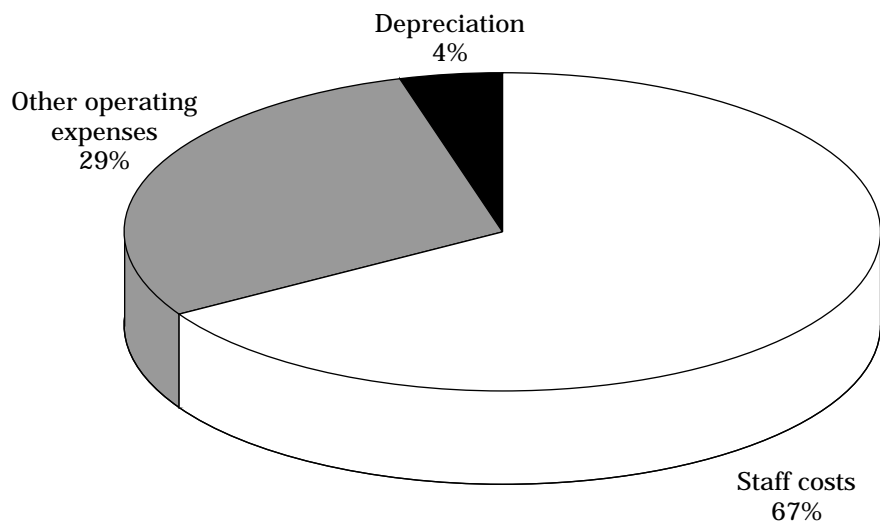

Full-time equivalent staff: 230

Figure 5

Stroud College of Further Education: income (for 12 months to July 1995)

Legend:
- ☐ FEFC recurrent funding
- ▨ Capital grants
- ■ Education contracts
- ▢ Tuition fees
- ■ Other grant income
- ▨ Other operating income
- ▨ Other income-generating activities

Pie chart showing:
- 64% FEFC recurrent funding
- 7% Capital grants
- 16% Education contracts
- 8% Tuition fees
- 1% Other grant income
- 3% Other operating income
- 1% Other income-generating activities

Income: £6,821,000

Figure 6

Stroud College of Further Education: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

Pie chart showing:
- Depreciation 4%
- Other operating expenses 29%
- Staff costs 67%

Expenditure: £7,183,000

26