

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Swindon College

April 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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.

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.*

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 52/95

SWINDON COLLEGE SOUTH WEST REGION

Inspected October 1994 – January 1995

Summary

Swindon College is the largest provider of post-16 education in Wiltshire. It offers a wide range of provision including courses for adults and in particular students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Approximately 11 per cent of enrolments are to higher education courses. The college's strengths include: effective quality assurance procedures; course developments which are supported by successful marketing and market research activities; and effective and well-informed governors. There is an effective strategic planning process which involves all staff teams. Decision making structures and channels of communication within the college are clear. All agreed policies and procedures, including those for quality assurance, have been documented systematically. The admissions system is well organised and provides impartial guidance to prospective students. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced and appropriate systems are in place for their appraisal and professional development. Accommodation is efficiently used and the main sites are accessible to students with impaired mobility. Standards of teaching and learning vary, although there were examples of good practice within every division. The college should address the unsatisfactory retention rates on many courses; the wide variations in the effectiveness of the college's induction and tutorial programmes; the low number of students benefiting from additional learning support; the further development of the management information systems; the organisation and provision of information technology; and the continued upgrading of its accommodation.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Health and social care, hairdressing	2
Construction	2	Art and design	2
Engineering	3	Humanities	2
Business, management and administration	2	Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and adult basic education	3
Hotel and catering, leisure and tourism	2		

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	4
Responsiveness and range of provision	10
Governance and management	23
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	34
Teaching and the promotion of learning	44
Students' achievements	58
Quality assurance	68
Resources	80
Conclusions and issues	97
Figures	

INTRODUCTION

1 Swindon College was inspected between October 1994 and January 1995. The team of full-time and part-time inspectors spent a total of 95 days in the college.

2 Enrolment and induction procedures were inspected during August and September 1994. Subsequently, during the autumn term of 1994, a team of 19 inspectors inspected courses in science, mathematics and computing, construction, engineering, business, management and administration, hotel and catering, leisure and tourism, health and social care, hairdressing, art and design, humanities, adult basic education and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors visited 302 classes, met with college managers, teaching staff and students, and inspected a wide range of students' written work and course documentation.

3 In January, a team of eight inspectors spent a week in the college inspecting cross-college provision. Inspectors had access to a wide range of college and course documentation. Meetings were held with governors, parents, local headteachers, employers, community representatives, the careers service, college managers and staff, and a representative from Wiltshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

4 Swindon College is the largest of six further education colleges in Wiltshire. It serves primarily the area of north-east Wiltshire, including the borough of Thamesdown, although its specialist courses and higher education programmes recruit from a much wider regional or national base. The nearest further education sector college is New College, a tertiary college approximately two miles from the main Swindon College site. Within the college's catchment area, there are four schools with sixth forms, including St Joseph's School in Swindon itself. Approximately 69 per cent of school leavers in Wiltshire proceed to further full-time study after the age of 16.

5 The population of the borough of Thamesdown is approximately 176,000 and is forecast to rise by approximately 10 per cent by the year 2001. The local economy is strongly reliant on manufacturing, electronics, distribution and financial services industries. There are approximately 100 organisations in Swindon with over 100 employees, and 12 of these employ over 1,000 staff. The largest employers are the Swindon Health Authority, the Rover Group and Allied Dunbar. New companies, including European and Japanese companies, have continued to set up or relocate to Swindon over the past few years. In December 1994 the unemployment rate for the Swindon travel-to-work area was 5.1 per cent. This is below the rate for Wiltshire of 5.3 per cent and both these figures are significantly below the average for the south west of 7.1 per cent.

6 At the time of the inspection, the college had enrolled 23,510 students of whom 10 per cent were full time. Ninety per cent of the students were aged 19 and over. Percentage enrolments by age are shown in figure 1 and enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area in figure 2.

Sixty-nine per cent of students were enrolled on programmes leading to nationally-recognised academic or vocational qualifications, with the remaining 31 per cent following recreation or leisure courses. Enrolments by level of study are shown in figure 3. The college employs 455 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 290 are teachers and 165 are support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7 The college management team consists of the principal, the vice-principal, four directors of faculties and four directors of cross-college functions. The four faculty directors are each responsible for a major area of the college's teaching programme. These are the faculties of art and sciences, business, creative and community studies and technology. Each faculty consists of three or four divisions. Cross-college directors head the four functions of curriculum, staffing and learning resources; marketing and business development; student services; and physical resources.

8 The college's main campus, Regent Circus, is located in the centre of Swindon. This houses much of the General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) work, and accommodation for science, computing, humanities and modern languages, business, management, construction and administration. Art and design courses are housed at Regent Circus and in the nearby Euclid Street annexe. A second major site at North Star is situated on the outskirts of the town, approximately two miles from Regent Circus. The North Star site is primarily used for work in engineering, hotel and catering, leisure and tourism, hairdressing, social care and specialist provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Nursery nursing courses and some adult basic education classes take place at the Ferndale Road annexe, which is within walking distance of the North Star site. Students with profound or multiple disabilities are provided for at the North Star site and at the Wyvern Centre in Pewsey. Adult education work is undertaken at the college's main sites, at the Marlborough annexe and in over 100 schools, halls and youth clubs across the region.

9 Sixteen aims of the college are set out in the strategic plan 1994-97. They are concerned with maximising opportunities for participation in all levels of education and training for school leavers and adults, maintaining close links with schools, higher education institutions and employers, and managing resources efficiently. The strategic plan places emphasis upon the need to invest in the continued training and updating of college staff and to keep abreast of new developments in education and training.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

10 The college provides a broad range of academic and vocational programmes from foundation level through to higher education. Thirty-three GCE A level subjects, 17 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects and 24 GCSE subjects are currently on offer to full-time students. Courses leading to General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) or nationally-recognised craft, technician and professional qualifications are offered in all major curriculum areas.

There are access to higher education courses for adult returners in humanities, science, art and design and social sciences. Specific programmes to encourage adults back into further education include those in technology, interior design and leisure and tourism. There is a substantial programme of adult basic education in literacy and numeracy, including full-time courses and a family literacy project. There is a programme of additional activities aimed at full-time students which includes team games, water sports, art and design work and information technology training.

11 In 1993-94, new course proposals totalled 56, including 13 GNVQ and eight NVQ programmes.

12 Higher education provision accounts for approximately 11 per cent of total enrolments. Six full-time higher national diplomas are offered in the areas of art and design, business and finance, and technology. A new modular art and design degree, validated by Cranfield University is currently in its first year. Two women's studies modules are offered from a degree validated by Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education. Part-time higher education courses include higher national certificates in housing studies, building studies, civil engineering, mechanical engineering, electronic engineering, computer technology, business and finance and a diploma in management studies. A new masters degree course in computer-based information systems has started this year.

13 Employers' views of the responsiveness of the college to their training needs are increasingly positive. A business manager co-ordinates enquiries from employers for training and consultancy work. A wide range of short courses and consultancy services are provided for corporate clients, for example, in computing, construction and engineering, and in NVQ assessor training. The college has been successful in attracting industrial sponsorship to support activities such as the graduation ceremony and the family literacy project.

14 A technology open-learning centre has marketed materials developed by college staff in electrical engineering, to customers in Britain and abroad. Substantial income has resulted from this work. Open and distance learning is available in other areas of the college, for example, in management, although across the college enrolments are low. The college assesses the market for open/distance learning on conventional programmes to be small.

15 Accreditation of prior learning is available to individual students at enrolment as well as to employers. The college's own survey indicates that most GNVQ and NVQ programmes are able to offer accreditation of prior learning. A guidance handbook has recently been provided for staff. There have been some examples of successful projects including the accreditation of NVQ units for health workers. However, the total number of students involved in the accreditation of prior learning is small. Variable start dates are available on many courses, and the division of construction has been particularly successful in enrolling students for construction training throughout the year.

16 An exceptionally broad range of provision is available for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Programmes include life skills, preparation for work and a range of courses for those with profound and multiple difficulties. A substantial achievement recently has been the development of an NVQ level 2 qualification in computer maintenance, specifically developed by college staff for these students.

17 Links with schools are developing rapidly. Each school has a college liaison officer. The college is represented at schools' careers evenings, lunchtime careers surgeries and talks to pupils. There is a range of opportunities for school pupils to visit the college, including days when they can try out a range of vocational programmes. Some school pupils attend the college in order to take GNVQ units. Each term, headteachers are invited to the college for a meeting with the principal and members of the college management team to discuss issues of common interest such as new course provision at the college and the destinations of former pupils.

18 Relations with the local education authority (LEA) are constructive. The principal is a member of the Wiltshire Principals' Group which meets with the authority to discuss a range of issues that concern students. The college has a large contract with Wiltshire County Council to deliver leisure and recreational provision to Swindon and the surrounding area.

19 Links with Wiltshire TEC are strong. The principal is a member of the Northern Area Board. The college and the TEC are involved in a number of collaborative projects and joint working parties, for example, in the accreditation of prior learning and in market research. Other examples of links include financial support from the TEC for some students attending the access computer centre, for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for the college's provision of NVQ training in management to TEC employees.

20 Marketing has a high priority within the college. The marketing strategy addresses specific market segments and identifies particular research projects. Recent examples of research include investigations into the job expectations of the unemployed in Swindon and into the training needs of women living in Swindon hostels. These projects directly inform course provision. A college mobile unit is used for marketing activities at industrial and residential locations in the area.

21 Publicity materials are produced to a common specification controlled by the marketing manager. Although the overall standard is high, some information leaflets lack specific information, for example, on progression routes. The leaflets are at present being redesigned. A separate business directory details short course and consultancy services. This directory is used widely by employers.

22 At present, the college is operating to a brief equal opportunities policy in its strategic plan. A new and more comprehensive policy developed by a working party of senior college managers is due to be adopted shortly.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

23 The college has an effective and well-informed corporation board. There are 14 members including representatives from some of the largest employers in the area, two staff representatives and the principal. The newly-appointed chief executive of Wiltshire TEC has recently joined the board. Full meetings and subcommittees are held regularly. Agendas, minutes and supporting documentation are generally of high quality. Good use is made of the wide experience of members. Members are actively involved in approving and monitoring the college's strategic plans. They have a clear understanding of the issues facing the college, including the need to manage effectively and efficiently on the college's unit of resource.

24 The principal and vice-principal provide strong and purposeful leadership. The college management team consists of the principal, vice-principal, the four faculty directors and the four cross-college directors. Although this team is large, it has the advantage of involving representatives from all areas of the college in central planning and decision making. The team meets weekly to discuss general college business and a college-wide system of team briefings keeps staff informed of discussions and decisions taken. Once a month, the college management team meets with divisional and unit heads as a senior management team. Within faculties and cross-college functions there are regular schedules of meetings. Most staff are clear about the management structure and line management arrangements. The divisional structure is generally working well and the increasing emphasis on small working groups is appreciated by staff.

25 Strategic planning is co-ordinated by a group consisting of the principal, vice-principal, director of marketing and a faculty director. There is a comprehensive annual planning cycle which starts by considering market trends and opportunities, and leads through to an evaluation of the current year's budgetary and curricular planning. Teams at all levels have an opportunity to contribute to this process. Divisions and faculties prepare and prioritise their proposals, and the wider senior management team meets in October at a planning conference. At a later date, draft college objectives are published, the course programme is finalised and budget priorities are identified. A separate budget enables staff to bid for specific project-development money. The planning process is effective although sometimes there is insufficient feedback to teams on proposals which have not been successful.

26 A system of manuals includes all college policies and procedures. These manuals are used for immediate reference by staff and cover general administration, health and safety, personnel, finance, student administration, planning, curriculum, quality assurance, the corporation and marketing. The system is co-ordinated by the vice-principal. Co-ordinators, with responsibility for monitoring and updating each manual, are clearly identified. Staff find the manuals useful.

27 At the time of the inspection, the college's average level of funding for 1994-95 was £13.88 per unit. The median for general further education colleges is £18.17. This reflects the level of funding which the college

received from Wiltshire LEA. Summaries of income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

28 Most of the college budget is delegated to nine cost centres. All financial allocations are subject to a written funding agreement which includes the requirement to meet certain objectives including targets for enrolment. Failure to meet targets incurs a financial penalty. Staff understand the basis on which funding is allocated and, although there have been some operational complications in its introduction, they welcome the freedom it provides to plan provision within agreed objectives.

29 There have been some problems in coping with workloads in the financial function of the college. There is a backlog of work, including the entering of the detailed budgets on to the computer financial management system. Temporary staff have been taken on, and a new appointment of director of finance and resources is to be made shortly.

30 There are a number of management information systems operating from different parts of the college. Some of these, for example, an in-house student tracking system which gives up-to-date enrolments are providing useful, reliable information. Some of the systems are linked but the overall position is unsatisfactory. Budget holders maintain their own records and there is limited confidence in centrally-provided computer information. The college has started to address these issues through the recent appointment of a senior member of staff with strategic responsibility for management information.

31 Enrolment targets are set as part of the strategic planning process. The college has set realistic overall targets and in 1993-94 the growth target of 6 per cent was achieved. At the time of the inspection, the college estimated that it would meet its enrolment targets for 1994-95.

32 Retention rates and student destinations are published in the college's annual report. There is a significant dropout of students between year one and year two on the two-year courses, and this has worsened over the last year. Weaknesses in the management information system mean that the relevant figures have to be gathered from tutors' own manual records.

33 For 1993-94, destinations of students were collected through a survey carried out in September. However, 30 per cent of the students failed to respond. Further work is required to produce comprehensive information which can be used both for marketing purposes and to inform programme planning.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

34 The college's admissions unit provides a high-quality service to full-time and part-time students. Students can attend several guidance interviews and defer their choice of programme until entry to the college. This ensures that students are most likely to take up courses which match their achievements and aims. Guidance is impartial. It is delivered in a friendly and non-directive way. Faculty and marketing staff work closely with the admissions team to provide an effective service. Students, their parents and feeder schools are complimentary about the recruitment

procedures and the guidance students receive. Administration is clear, well organised and efficient.

35 All full-time students have a named personal tutor, and there is an expectation that full-time students will receive at least one individual 30-minute tutorial session twice each term. Group tutorials are also held on a regular basis. In practice, however, there are inconsistencies in the aims, frequency, duration and content of tutorials. Sound, centrally-produced tutorial materials are frequently not used by individual tutors and some students do not receive information about college-wide services such as careers and counselling.

36 There is a clear policy for the induction of all students and comprehensive tutor and student induction packs have been developed by student services. However, the induction programme is not delivered consistently. For example, some students did not receive their packs until after the beginning of their second term in college and not all students received basic information or took part in orientation activities. Standards of teaching and of student engagement varied widely during induction sessions.

37 Informally, students can readily transfer between programmes. However, course changes are not always made on the central management information system and the reasons for changes are not systematically recorded and analysed.

38 Personal counselling is available through a qualified professional team of three counsellors. The college nurse provides guidance on health-related issues. These services are available to all students through bases on both main sites. Some students are made aware of these services through the induction and tutorial programmes. There is variation in the take-up of counselling services by students from different divisions.

39 Every student is expected to confirm their college place by signing a student learning agreement. This agreement, together with the college charter, sets out students' rights and responsibilities. Learning agreements are discussed with personal tutors and all students have signed them. There are, however, considerable variations in the understanding of the agreement by students.

40 There is no policy for screening students to establish their additional support needs. Two co-ordinators provide services for a small number of students with specific difficulties with reading and for those with physical disabilities and hearing impairment. A general service is provided at both main sites, but the college has now adopted a policy of integrating learning support with course programmes. On some programmes, for example on GNVQ courses, support has been integrated successfully. However, many staff are unaware of the requirement to deliver additional learning support and some staff lack the skills to do so. Some styles of teaching common in the college such as whole group, teacher-led presentations, do not lend themselves to the provision of individual learning support.

41 Careers education and guidance is of high quality and is readily available to students at all stages of their courses. A team of careers officers with different areas of expertise, including entry to higher education, work

across all college sites. The college has funded additional careers education for the benefit of younger students. The careers team publicise their services widely. However, there is wide variation in the amount of information students receive about careers services through the tutorial system.

42 Full-time students are encouraged to record and demonstrate their individual achievements through the personal development plan structure developed in Wiltshire. This is used effectively with most students, many of whom regard it as worthwhile.

43 The current electronic system for the monitoring of student attendance is not effective and consumes much time and energy without producing usable results. Staff maintain a manual monitoring system. If persistent absence is identified appropriate action is taken through clearly established procedures, copies of which are distributed to every student.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

44 Inspectors observed a total of 302 teaching sessions. In 52 per cent of sessions, strengths clearly outweighed weaknesses and in 12 per cent of sessions, weaknesses clearly outweighed strengths. In the areas of art and design, leisure and tourism, adult basic education and health and social care none of the sessions received a grade of less than 3.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		5	19	24	8	1	57
GCSE		2	8	10	4	0	24
GNVQ		5	16	15	4	1	41
NVQ		1	30	19	6	0	56
*Other		14	57	41	9	3	124
Total		27	130	109	31	5	302

* Note: other includes BTEC national diplomas, BTEC first diplomas, adult basic education and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

45 Teachers in all the areas inspected showed a sound knowledge and understanding of their subjects. Schemes of work and lessons were well planned and closely related to syllabus and examination requirements. In most sessions, teachers had developed an effective relationship with students which encouraged and supported learning. With few exceptions, written work is set and marked regularly, and returned to students promptly.

46 In GCE A level mathematics and the access to science course, teaching and learning was generally of a high standard. Students usually worked effectively in class, although some students repeating GCSE subjects showed a lack of motivation and interest. In some sessions, the pace of work was too slow and activities were insufficiently varied. Overall, little use was made of information technology to support teaching and learning in mathematics and science.

47 Carpentry students work successfully using learning materials produced by college staff and this method is currently being extended to cover students in other construction craft areas including plumbing and plasterwork. Some work on construction technician courses was unimaginative and lacking in challenge. Students spent too much time copying notes from the board rather than applying knowledge to solve realistic work problems.

48 In engineering, some of the sessions were of a high standard. Students worked at their own pace, using work books which had been prepared by the teacher. Good use was made of the knowledge and experience of part-time students. Practical workshop activities were generally appropriately designed and managed. However, in some classes the material presented was dull and it failed to gain the interest and attention of students. In theory sessions, students often spent too long listening to the teacher and had little opportunity to demonstrate whether they had understood the material presented. In some cases, handouts and visual aids were of poor quality.

49 Teaching on general management and professional courses, including accounting, personnel, marketing and law, was of a consistently high standard. Teachers used well-structured handouts and other learning materials. A variety of approaches, including the use of case studies and discussion of business problems, were used successfully in many GNVQ classes. Teaching and learning in typewriting and wordprocessing was well structured, but the absence of a working office to train and assess students in real office activities limits the effectiveness of learning in this area.

50 On leisure and tourism courses, teachers made effective use of their knowledge of the industry to design learning activities which interested and challenged the students. Tutorial support activities were skilfully undertaken. Assessment and record keeping activities were of a particularly high standard.

51 Assignment work on the BTEC national in hotel and catering operations course was appropriately demanding. However, students working in the college's coffee shop were not always properly supervised. Theory and demonstration classes provided little opportunity for students to contribute.

52 Teaching on the nursery nursing course and the national wardens course, was of a consistently high standard. GNVQ health and social care was introduced for the first time in September 1994. Although the sessions observed were often effective, there were some instances where teachers employed poor question and answer techniques and where the work lacked pace and challenge. All full-time students have been allocated work placements, although the activities undertaken are not always recorded or formally assessed.

53 In hairdressing and beauty therapy, teaching and learning activities were usually well managed. Effective use was made of video and information technology to assess suitable styles for clients and to record evidence of work undertaken. At certain times of the week there is a

shortage of clients, consequently students spend too much time working on each other or on plastic models.

54 In art and design, students work in a wide range of media including painting, sculpture, graphic design, ceramics, textiles, printmaking and photography. The majority of practical sessions were well structured and began with the teacher introducing an activity. The students then worked on the task set at their own pace, with the teacher providing individual support as needed. Although this approach was very effective in most instances, a few students with lower levels of basic drawing and painting skills made insufficient progress.

55 Varied teaching methods were used in humanities and social sciences. There were many good examples of small group work and whole class discussions. In some cases, involvement was limited to a few students and there were insufficient checks by the teacher to ensure that students had understood the material presented. In many humanities and social sciences subjects students are encouraged to read widely. In foreign language work, good use was made of the language which students were learning.

56 Teaching on courses for students with severe learning difficulties is generally effective. There is high-quality individual support and an appropriate focus on self-care skills. However, for students with moderate learning difficulties, the activities set are sometimes not challenging enough and there are insufficient opportunities for students to work in small groups and to learn from each other. Work preparation courses are not sufficiently focused on employment.

57 In adult basic education, a wide range of teaching techniques was used including whole-class discussions, small group work and the use of computers. In a few instances, the pace of work was too slow and insufficient attention was given to planning a programme of assessment.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

58 The majority of students are well motivated. Students on vocational courses in particular enjoyed practical activities. Appropriate attention was paid to health and safety in all practical workshop and laboratory classes.

59 Group work, promoting discussion, developing organisational skills and encouraging support for other students is a strong feature of some courses including those in adult basic education, health and social care, management and humanities. On some courses students are encouraged to participate in team-building activities. For example, full-time motor vehicle students are offered the opportunity to work for a week aboard an eighteenth century sailing brig. Students in leisure and tourism and in hairdressing and beauty therapy, are prepared for additional qualifications to improve their general skills in areas such as leadership and customer care. This enhances their confidence and increases their opportunity of gaining employment.

60 Students on NVQ and GNVQ programmes are required to produce substantial portfolios of their own work as an essential part of their final

assessment. Most student groups are encouraged to make use of information technology to improve the presentation of their assignments and portfolios. This often includes the production of graphs and tables as well as text. The content of portfolios is improving as the college gains experience of NVQ and GNVQ work. Standards are generally appropriate to meet the requirements of awarding bodies. However, opportunities to record achievements on work experience and include these within portfolios are sometimes being missed.

61 At the time of the inspection, there was limited formal evidence of students' achievements on the separate specialist courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, students' achievements are now being recorded and accredited through nationally-recognised programmes including foundation level NVQs and GNVQs, and the foundation level City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) wordpower and numberpower. The percentage of students gaining formal qualifications on adult basic education courses is low at 12.5 per cent.

62 Retention rates for students on full-time, two-year courses are calculated and published. Of the original 185 students who enrolled on a full-time two-year GCE A level course in September 1992, 137 were still on the register in September 1993, representing a retention rate of 74 per cent. During 1993-94 there were 755 entrants for GCE A level examinations across 26 subjects. The overall pass rate was 70 per cent. In 1994, the provisional average pass rate for further education colleges other than sixth form colleges was 68 per cent. The average points score for those 16-18 year olds taking two or more subjects was 12.9 (where A=10, E=2 points). The national average was 15.3. The average point score per entry was 4.5. This places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. Pass rates of over 80 per cent were achieved in a number of subjects including art (85 per cent), mathematics (87.5 per cent), psychology (88 per cent), philosophy (83 per cent) and across a range of modern foreign languages (84 per cent). In philosophy and government and politics, over 25 per cent of full-time entrants achieved a grade A pass. In a few subject areas, for example in physics and chemistry, pass rates were below 50 per cent.

63 There were 36 entries for GCE AS subjects in English, psychology and modern languages. Most of these were part-time students aged 19 or above, and an 83 per cent pass rate was achieved by these students. The provisional national average pass rate in 1994 for further education sector colleges was 56 per cent.

64 There were 1,106 entries for GCSE subjects during the academic year 1993-94 in a total of 27 subjects. The overall pass rate, at grades A-C, for students in the age range 16-18 was 29 per cent, compared with a 48 per cent pass rate for those aged 19 or over. These figures are below the national average GCSE pass rates for sector colleges. The two most popular subjects were English, with 199 entries and mathematics with 361 entries. These subjects achieved pass rates of 51 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively.

65 Results of students completing BTEC first and national diplomas in 1994 were variable. An 86 per cent pass rate was obtained in the BTEC first diploma in information technology. On two-year courses, final pass rates in BTEC diplomas in graphic design, business and finance, computer studies, leisure studies, travel and tourism and electrical/electronic engineering were all above 80 per cent, but when measured against initial enrolments only 71 per cent of students who commenced in September 1992 achieved a full award in the summer of 1994. A few poor results were recorded, for example in the national diplomas in engineering and in construction. Of the students taking GNVQ intermediate qualifications in art and design and business, an average of 42 per cent of enrolments achieved the full award. The college was responsible for a counting error which resulted in an inaccurate return to the Department for Education on the numbers of students in their final year of national diplomas and certificate courses. As a consequence, the average college pass rate is recorded as 73 per cent in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education, placing the college in the bottom third of the further education sector. The corrected figures show that in 1994 students in their final year achieved an overall pass rate of 80.8 per cent, placing the college in the middle third of all sector colleges. It compares with the 86 per cent which the college achieved in 1993.

66 Students who complete their courses achieve a high level of success in other vocational qualifications. In 1993-94, students on a number of part-time vocational courses achieved pass rates of 100 per cent, including Association of Accounting Technicians foundation and intermediate level qualifications, Certificate in Personnel Practice, C&G carpentry, plumbing and electrical wiring qualifications and the pre-school playgroup diploma. Pass rates in external examinations in beauty therapy and advanced wordprocessing for all students are consistently above 90 per cent.

67 In 1994, about 70 per cent of full-time leavers responded to the college's requests for information about destinations. Of these, 30 per cent went on to higher education, 29 per cent returned to further education, and 32 per cent entered employment. In the areas of art and design, computer studies, access to higher education and in GCE A levels, over 50 per cent of students proceeded to higher education. Full-time courses where more than 50 per cent of students have entered employment include the BTEC national diplomas in business and finance, hotel and catering and travel and tourism, NVQ level 2 in mechanical engineering, beauty therapy and nursery nursing.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

68 The college produced a 23 page quality assessment report for January 1995. It is intended that the document should act as a summary position statement for internal planning purposes. The format follows the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement* headings, and identifies strengths, achievements and issues to be addressed within each area. There is clear cross-referencing to relevant college documents. Many of the issues raised within this internal report were endorsed by the findings of the inspection team.

69 The college operates an impressive system of quality assurance which involves the identification of standards of performance in all aspects of the college's work, together with the monitoring of performance and review of these standards. The overall policy and the system are understood and supported by staff. Training has been provided through a series of presentations and briefings, and information has been published and circulated to all staff. Procedures are published within the college's system of manuals.

70 The quality assurance process involves staff, students and employers. Cross-college services are included, for example, marketing, refectory services and the staff-development unit. Reports are discussed at appropriate levels within the institution, including the college management team and the academic board. Collecting the views of employers on quality is part of the role of the college business manager.

71 The culture of standard and target setting is developing within the institution. For example, support staff in the Ferndale Road annexe have set themselves standards for answering the telephone and for responding to complaints. Course teams set their own targets and associated performance indicators, although not all course teams are yet at this stage.

72 Within divisions, quality assurance activities include surveys of students. The first survey is undertaken between six and eight weeks after enrolment and deals with students' initial views on issues, including course organisation and teaching quality. The results of a second survey, undertaken at the end of the first term, are shared within course teams.

73 At the end of the course, a comprehensive review is undertaken by course teams. Staff are encouraged to evaluate all aspects of their programmes, with the college's course review handbook and other support material as guidance. To avoid the production of excessive paperwork, teams are required to publish only the action plans which have resulted from course review. Some action plans are of an appropriate quality but a significant number are very brief and fail clearly to identify what improvements are being sought, how these will be achieved and the result expected. In a few cases, course teams failed to complete all stages of the course review procedure.

74 The college has established an internal quality audit team which includes the principal and vice-principal. This group has reported on whether teams have provided information, and the results are published in the college's annual report. A group of experienced staff acts as internal consultants, and undertakes the internal validation and approval of new courses. Without approval being received, funding will not be released.

75 Course teams take account of reports from validating bodies such as BTEC and C&G. In partnership with Wiltshire TEC, a programme of assessor and verifier training has been introduced for staff working on NVQ and GNVQ courses. The college has been using standard paperwork for internal verifiers since 1993. Improved arrangements for internal verification include the development of a comprehensive manual.

76 The college has committed substantial resources to staff development. There is a well-organised and effective staff-development system for both

teaching and support staff. Training is formally linked to institutional plans and to the college staff-appraisal scheme. An induction programme operates for all new teaching and support staff and includes a mentor system.

77 The appraisal scheme includes observation of work activities and interviews. The scheme has been carefully introduced and training has been provided for all staff. Staff, in general, have a positive view of the scheme and they welcome the opportunity which it provides to discuss their personal development. During the first year of operation, 95 per cent of college staff were appraised and it is planned that all staff will undertake appraisal in the current year.

78 The college achieved the national Investors in People award in June 1994. There have been a number of positive outcomes including improvement in communications within the institution, the increased volume and quality of staff-development activities, and staff awareness of, and participation in, college planning processes.

79 The college charter was published in summer 1994. The process of development included consultations with students and staff, employer groups and schools. The charter includes a number of statements which describe quality standards to be met. A group of senior managers has the remit to determine the monitoring arrangements.

RESOURCES

Staffing

80 Most full-time and part-time teachers have relevant academic and/or vocational qualifications for the courses on which they teach. The majority of full-time and regular part-time teachers hold a relevant teaching qualification. At the time of the inspection, 80 per cent of the teaching staff working towards assessor qualifications had achieved their award, although there is some variation in this percentage figure between divisions. Teachers working on vocational programmes generally have appropriate industrial experience, for example in health and social care, and leisure and tourism, although in some areas experience is dated. Despite internal promotion of the TEC-sponsored teacher placement service for industrial updating, no members of staff took advantage of this during 1994.

81 Part-time teachers with current industrial experience are often used effectively in curriculum areas, for example, in hairdressing, beauty therapy and art and design. In adult basic education, good use is made of volunteer tutors. Although general support for new part-time teachers is provided, in some areas further guidance on teaching skills and familiarisation with equipment is required.

82 Technicians have appropriate craft and technical qualifications and/or experience. In general, the amount of support provided is appropriate, for example in technology and art and design. However, single technicians are responsible for science and audio-visual services. There are high workloads in both these areas and no additional support to cope during peak periods.

83 Professional and administrative staff, many of whom have been appointed since April 1993, are generally well qualified and often bring substantial experience of working in organisations outside education. The present low levels of staffing limits the speed and range of the management information services provided.

84 All staff work within directorate or faculty teams. The control of resources by faculty heads ensures that they are in a position to influence expenditure on staffing. In some cases, for example in the faculty of business, this has led to the appointment of more non-teaching staff to undertake administrative duties and improve the quality of service to staff and students. In a few areas, for example in care, there is extensive use of part-time staff and substantial administrative loads are carried by full-time teaching staff.

Equipment/learning resources

85 There are libraries at the two main college sites which provide a range of services to staff and students. The services are managed by a library and learning resources co-ordinator who is also responsible for the Regent Circus library. A separate site librarian is responsible for the North Star site. An assistant librarian at Regent Circus and nine part-time library assistants work in the library service. Opening hours provide an adequate level of access for both day and evening students. Study space for students at both sites is very limited.

86 The concentration of divisions on sites has resulted in the need for minimal duplication of library stock. A formal objective of the library and learning-resource centres this year is to establish direct links with course teams and there has been a positive improvement in liaison arrangements, for example, to upgrade books in engineering. In some other areas, such as information technology and science, library facilities are in need of improvement. Project folders with articles and cuttings are kept on request, and a substantial range of material has been collected to support nursery nursing courses. There are limited compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database facilities available in both site libraries, including general and some specialist database material.

87 Some divisions, for example management and construction, have developed their own resource bases for students equipped with CD-ROM and specialised reference materials at Regent Circus. Further development of local library and learning-resource bases has recently received outline approval from the college management team. The staffing and co-ordination implications of this proposal have not yet been considered in detail.

88 There are adequate general purpose teaching and learning aids in classrooms including overhead projectors and video playback facilities. The college's television studio at Regent Circus and audio-visual facilities at North Star are well used. Staff and students are able to book audio-visual equipment, including camcorders, from the library.

89 Levels of specialist equipment are broadly satisfactory to meet current needs, although some items in engineering are ageing rapidly. College resources have been supported through sponsorship and collaborative

arrangements in areas which include information technology, hotel and catering and motor vehicle engineering. For instance, Allied Dunbar have recently provided £85,000 to support further developments in the access computer centre. There are good facilities in woodworking and in modern foreign languages. However, the present training office for the assessment of NVQs in business administration is unsatisfactory and sports facilities to support leisure and tourism courses are limited. In a few areas, there is a shortage of smaller items of equipment, for example, in science.

90 Information technology resources are controlled within faculties, although there are approximately 30 machines available on an open-access basis at site libraries. A cross-college computer users' group and a curriculum working group have been established recently, but central planning, co-ordination and purchasing of information technology is at an early stage of development. Standardisation of core software has started, but a significant number of the existing machines are insufficiently powerful to support windows software. This is limiting the extent to which students may transfer freely between rooms and machines.

91 Informal access to machines outside timetabled hours is available to students on vocational courses who need to complete assignment and project work. Access to information technology resources for students on GCE A level and GCSE programmes is more limited. There are appropriate facilities for students on vocational courses who are required to use computers for specialist work.

Accommodation

92 Some teaching accommodation, such as the business and management suites and the new science laboratories, has been redecorated and refurbished to a high standard. Some teaching accommodation is poor, for example, the general teaching rooms in engineering and the temporary accommodation at North Star. Much of the remaining accommodation is scheduled for redecoration. Some specialist work areas are too small, for example, some beauty therapy rooms and some art and design provision in the Euclid Street annexe. In some areas of the college, little attention has been given to the display of appropriate materials to enhance the learning environment.

93 Despite some upgrading, the quality of accommodation used for central services varies. The reception area at the Regent Circus site has been redeveloped, and the adjacent central location of the student services directorate provides an appropriate focus for students and visitors. This contrasts sharply with the present North Star reception area which is to be refurbished shortly. Library and learning resource accommodation on both main sites is insufficient. The college sports hall is in a poor state of repair. Comprehensive refectory services are available for students, and there is a creche facility at the Ferndale Road annexe. Refectory opening times have been revised to meet demands on the service.

94 Teaching accommodation is allocated to faculties. Overall, accommodation is efficiently used and managed. Day-to-day co-operation between faculties and divisions provides immediate solutions to

accommodation pressures, and a newly-developed space allocation policy will help to maximise use of available accommodation as student enrolment targets increase. With a few exceptions, standards of cleaning are good.

95 The college employs a maintenance team of nine staff. This team, together with students from the college's construction division, has undertaken a considerable number of in-house improvements. A 10-year planned programme of maintenance and accommodation upgrading has been developed, of which years one to six have been costed at £500,000 each year. College senior management and the corporation board have accepted this proposed programme.

96 On the two main sites, access for students who use wheelchairs is good. However, in the annexe buildings access above ground floor level is not possible. This cannot be remedied easily without major structural work. Nevertheless, where necessary and possible, classes have been rescheduled to ground floor accommodation.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

97 Strengths of the college include:

- the wide range of course provision from foundation through to higher education level, including wide provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- responsiveness to the needs of employers and the community
- the successful programme of marketing, and market research activities
- the thorough systems for ensuring quality within all aspects of the college's work
- the effective and well-informed corporation board
- the clear systems to support communication and decision making at all levels within the college
- the effective strategic-planning process
- the consistent, high-quality documentation on all aspects of college policies and procedures, including quality assurance
- the well-organised admissions system
- appropriate standards of teaching and the promotion of learning
- the qualifications and experience of teaching and support staff, together with appropriate systems to support their professional development and appraisal
- the efficiently utilised accommodation, most of which is accessible to students with physical disabilities.

98 To improve provision further, the college needs to address the following issues:

- the poor retention rates on many college courses
- the further development of management information systems
- the lack of effective systems for identifying and supporting students who require learning support

-
- the variable quality of induction and tutorial support provided to students
 - the extension of best practice in teaching and learning across all course teams within the college
 - improvements in the organisation and provision of information technology
 - the further upgrading and development of the current accommodation to meet changing college requirements.

FIGURES

-
- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

 - 2 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

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

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

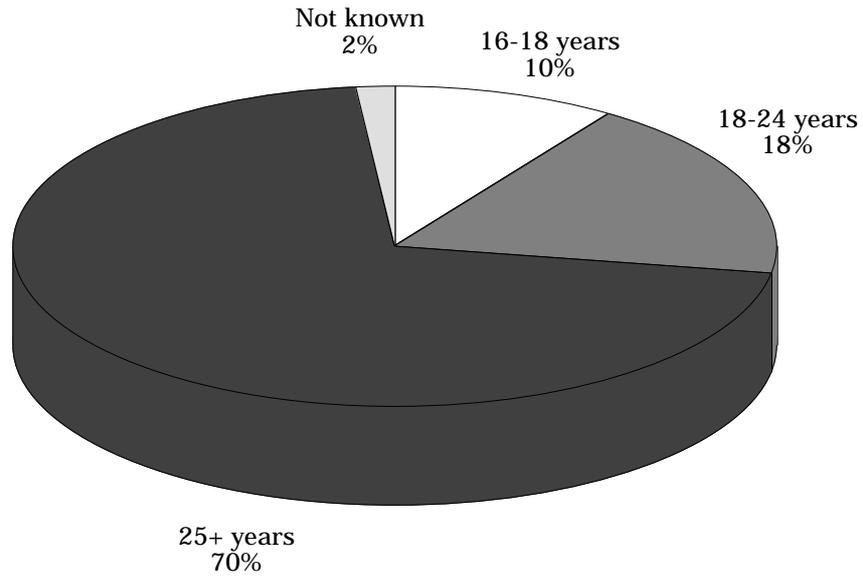
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

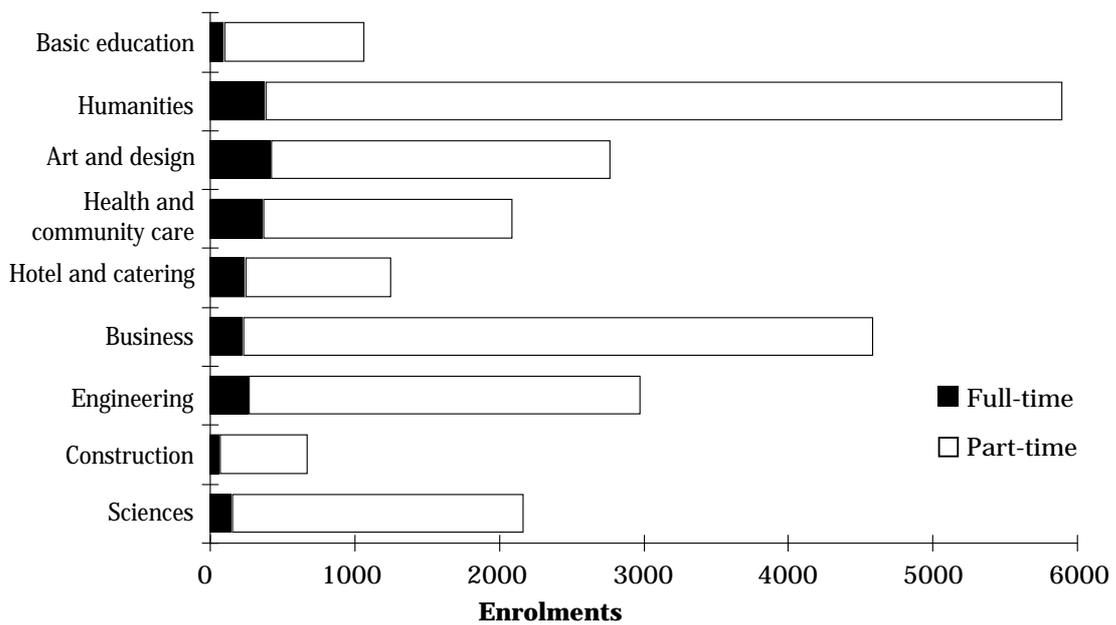
Swindon College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 23,510

Figure 2

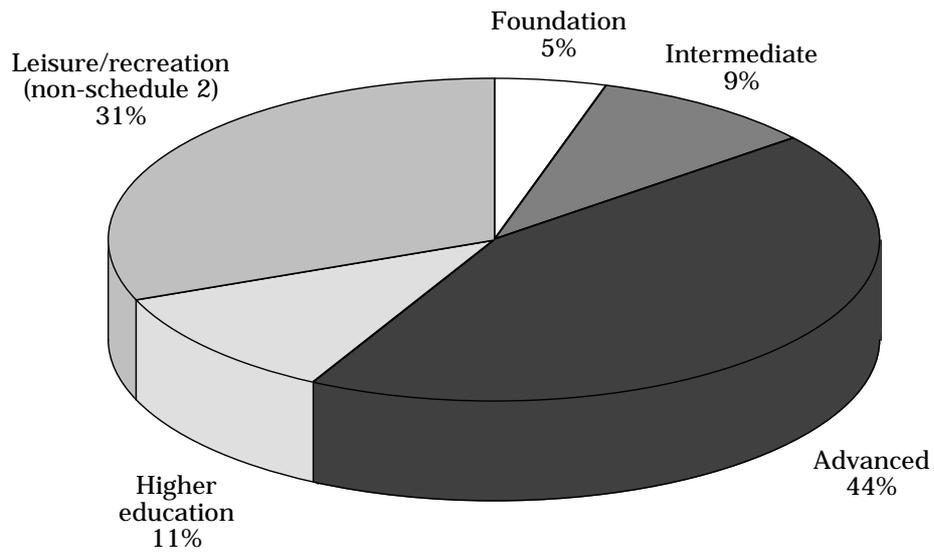
Swindon College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 23,510

Figure 3

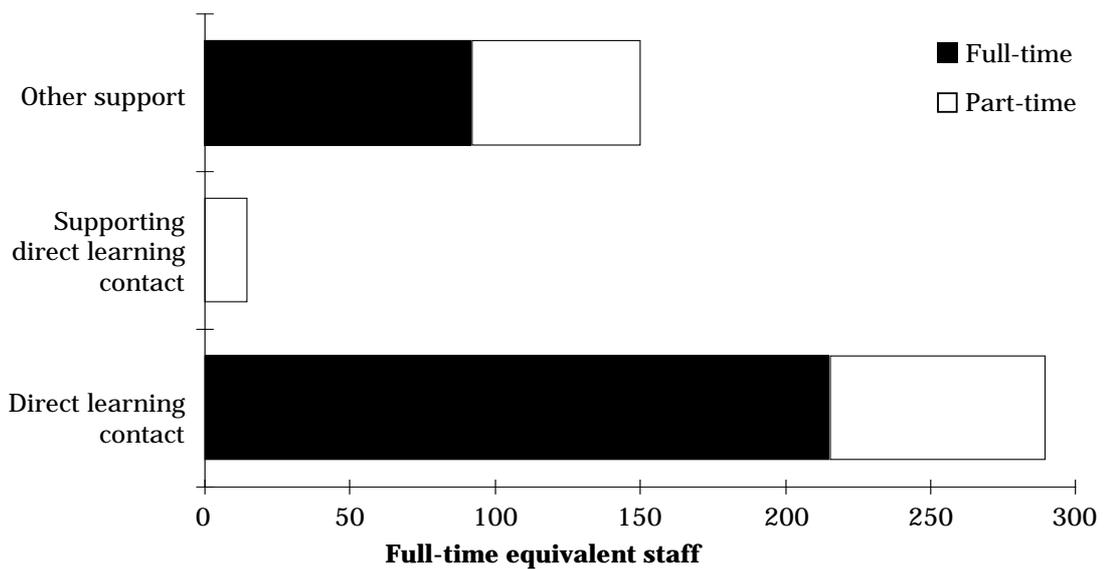
Swindon College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 23,510

Figure 4

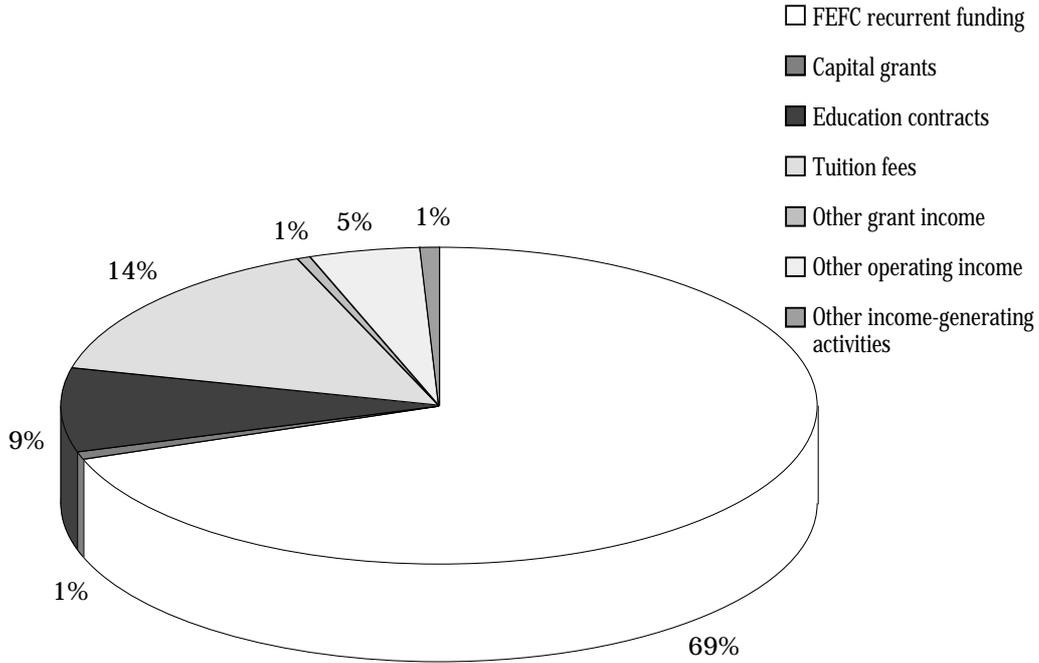
Swindon College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 455

Figure 5

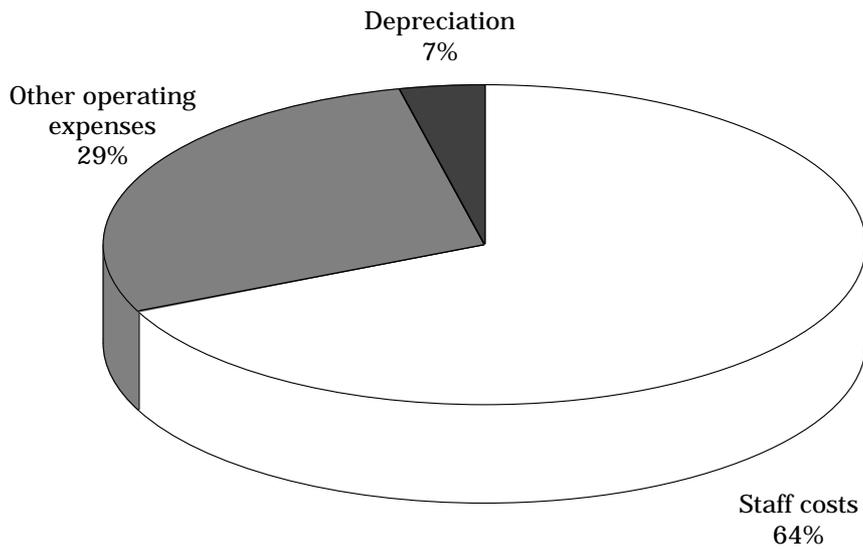
Swindon College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £18,640,000

Figure 6

Swindon College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £18,934,000

Note: this chart excludes £10,000 interest payable

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
April 1995