

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

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# **Stoke-on-Trent College**

**April 1997**

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**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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**THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

*College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge and experience in the work they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member who does not work in education and a member of staff from the college being inspected.*

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# CONTENTS

	<b>Paragraph</b>
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	2
Responsiveness and range of provision	8
Governance and management	18
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	30
Teaching and the promotion of learning	40
Students' achievements	53
Quality assurance	65
Resources	75
Conclusions and issues	87
Figures	

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## **GRADE DESCRIPTORS**

*The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circular 93/28. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also use a five-point grading scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.*

*The descriptors for the grades are:*

- grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*
- grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

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

### **College grade profiles 1993-96**

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

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# FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 45/97

**STOKE-ON-TRENT COLLEGE**

**WEST MIDLANDS REGION**

**Inspected May 1996-January 1997**

## Summary

Stoke-on-Trent College has an extensive range of academic and vocational programmes, including a large provision for community education. There are good curriculum links with local schools. Most curriculum managers are experienced. They have developed strong teams and have the support of their staff. Systems for the guidance and support of students are effective. Most staff are well qualified. Standards of teaching are good in a number of subjects. On some courses students achieve significant success but there are also many instances of low achievement. Learning resources are generally of good quality. Substantial investment has improved the accommodation, most of which is now of a high standard. At the time of the inspection there were serious failings in the leadership of the college. The college has severe financial difficulties. The corporation board has been slow to realise the full extent of the college's problems. Despite all of these difficulties the governors have continued to support the college and remain committed to its future. A new chairman is now in post and since his appointment the former chief executive and a senior manager have been dismissed. A recovery plan is being established. The corporation needs to act quickly to ensure that it fulfils its responsibilities. It should review its organisation and operation. Governors and staff should be involved more closely in strategic planning. The management information supplied to corporation members and college managers requires urgent improvement. There has been some ineffective and inefficient deployment of staff. The quality systems of the college should focus more directly on teaching and learning and students' achievements. The self-assessment report, prepared for the inspection, had many shortcomings.

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

<b>Aspects of cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Responsiveness and range of provision	2
Governance and management	5
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	4
Resources: staffing	3
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	2

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Mathematics and science	3	Art and design	4
Computing	2	English and other humanities	3
Construction	3	Modern foreign languages	2
Engineering	3	Basic education/provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities/ESOL	2
Business and administration	2		
Leisure and tourism	2		
Health care	3		
Hairdressing and beauty	3		

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1 Stoke-on-Trent College was inspected between May 1996 and January 1997. Inspections of subject areas were carried out in May, October and November; the college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected during September and October; and nine inspectors spent a week inspecting aspects of cross-college provision in January. In total, inspectors spent 149 days in the college. They visited 391 classes and examined students' work. They held meetings with governors, staff, students, and representatives of the local community, employers, schools and the Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

## **THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS**

2 Stoke-on-Trent College is one of the largest colleges of further education in England. By the early 1960s, three colleges had been established on the present Cauldon Campus: the College of Commerce, the College of Building and the Elms College. In 1977, after successive mergers, the amalgamated colleges became the Cauldon College of Further Education, Stoke-on-Trent. The Stoke-on-Trent Technical College at the Burslem Site was founded in 1966 from the amalgamation of the City Technical Schools. It specialised in engineering, technology and associated fields, and merged with Cauldon College in 1991 to form Stoke-on-Trent College.

3 Students at the college are drawn from a wide geographical area, including counties bordering the North Staffordshire region. The Stoke-on-Trent area has a long tradition of employment in the ceramics, manufacturing and coal industries and a history of 'family' trades. There are a number of national and multinational employers. Even though employment rates have fallen considerably in recent years, unemployment is not as high as in other regions. The distribution and service sectors have provided a recent improvement in employment opportunities. The country's major producers of pottery are located in and around the city and this has contributed to increased development of tourism and allied services.

4 Levels of educational achievement at 16 are significantly lower in Stoke-on-Trent than in Staffordshire as a whole. On average, about 20 per cent of 16 year olds in the city's state schools achieve five subjects at grade C or above in the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE). This compares with a figure of 41 per cent for the county as a whole. The percentage of those staying on in full-time education after the age of 16 is one of the lowest in England. It rose from just under 30 per cent in 1989 to about 52 per cent in 1995. The national average is about 70 per cent.

5 Stoke-on-Trent College is a general further education college. It offers a diverse range of programmes at a variety of levels. There is a growing programme of off-site community education and a wide range of higher education courses. At the time of the inspection, the college had 4,950

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full-time and 20,166 part-time students. 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. There has been a significant increase in the number of adult students in the college over the last two years; students aged 21 and above now make up more than 60 per cent of all students. The college has a contract with the local education authority (LEA) to provide recreational and leisure courses for adults. There are a number of overseas students at the college who take English as a foreign language (EFL) together with other academic or vocational qualifications.

6 The college has 905 full-time equivalent staff on full-time or fractional full-time contracts, and 72 on part-time contracts. Of these 469 are teachers, 113 directly support learning and 395 have other support roles. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The college is organised into eight academic schools managed by heads of school and development managers for curriculum and resources. There is also a community education unit which manages off-site provision and weekend activities. The heads of school and the community education unit manager report to the chief executive. Five directors, who are members of the senior management team, manage curriculum and programme planning, marketing and public relations, human resources, estates, and finance and management information systems.

7 The college's mission is to provide excellence in education and training and to be regarded as successful by all who have an interest in and commitment to the activity of the college.

### **RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION**

8 The college's provision is extensive in its range and diversity. It covers over 1,000 academic and vocational programmes, offered at different levels and in a variety of forms and delivery modes. There is provision in all Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. Some programmes, including art and design, have been developed recently to fill gaps in the curriculum. Generally the provision offers clear routes for students to progress from one level of study to another, extending from foundation studies to higher education. Flexible attendance patterns and year-round enrolment enable the college to cater for students with differing study needs. Open and flexible forms of learning are identified by the college as areas for development and this type of provision is growing. Initiatives include the establishment of open access workshops for each curriculum area. The workshops have increased the opportunities for students to work on their own using resources designed for the purpose. They have also helped in the development of students' key skills. The Partnership Trust Beacon Award given to the science school included a commendation for the work of the science skills laboratory.

9 While the growth in the number of adult students has been impressive, the number of 16 to 19 year olds has fallen. The range of

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full-time foundation courses for school-leavers is small, given the low staying-on rates locally and the modest qualifications of many school-leavers. The commitment of the college to introduce new programmes has not always had the support of the teaching teams expected to deliver them. Many courses, some overlapping, have been run with very low numbers and there has been no clear mechanism for withdrawing them. At the time of the inspection the college had no immediate plans to withdraw any of its existing courses.

10 Staff in positions of responsibility within the college schools are aware of the government's aims and policies for further education and the national targets for education and training. Targets are not used consistently in the planning of provision, but there are examples of good practice in a number of areas. Initiatives include support for national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) in local schools. Information technology 'business breakfasts' have been held in the neighbourhood colleges and the Chamber of Commerce to increase awareness of national training targets within the local business community.

11 Links with local schools are extensive and there have been many co-operative activities in curriculum areas. The college has formal links with over 40 schools. More than 2,000 pupils attend events at the college each year, including the well-publicised open days and evenings that take place within subject areas. The college contributes regularly to schools' careers events. Secondary head teachers confirm the value of the college's many activities, which have included a 'women into science' conference for schoolgirls and the 'KickStart Club', which has a membership of over 1,400 local pupils in the 13 to 16 age range. Of particular value are those activities which raise pupils' awareness of further education, such as the practice of pupils shadowing college students over a week of their studies. Recently, the goodwill of staff in the secondary schools has been jeopardised by the insensitivity of some of the college's marketing initiatives. Similarly, some college staff have been frustrated by poor communication between the college's central marketing function and subject areas, notably in the planning and timetabling of college-based activities for school pupils. These concerns are now being addressed.

12 Full-cost training work is growing. Staff are responsive to requests from companies for education and training. A designated member of staff in each school has responsibility for the generation and co-ordination of commercial work, and specialist staff visit employers to discuss their needs. The college has provided several tailor-made courses, including a course on information technology skills for the local fire service. An important development has been the design of a model for delivering NVQs on the premises of a major local company. This is attracting interest from other organisations and has the potential for wider application. Business and industry links are varied. In some vocational areas they are well developed. Industry task groups have replaced advisory committees.

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In construction, a continuing professional development club encourages regular contact with those working in the industry, through activities such as lectures and discussion of current issues. Overall, while employers' representatives are supportive, some are critical of deteriorating relations with the college. Concerns include the quality and promptness of the printed information employers have received and the quality of some of the NVQ provision in engineering.

13 Work with the Staffordshire TEC is being established on a sound footing after a period of difficulty. Representatives confirmed that the college was flexible and responsive in developing courses for industry and business. The college and the TEC co-operated in a successful competitiveness fund bid to establish the college's centre for advanced technology and manufacturing. The college makes good use of TEC survey data for assessing training needs. Open learning packages are being developed to meet a need identified for technical and managerial training in the ceramics industry. There has been a vigorous response to TEC priorities in respect of modern apprenticeships. Recruitment targets for apprenticeships have been exceeded and there are apprenticeships in engineering, construction, hairdressing and childcare. The college has encountered some difficulties in meeting its current TEC contract. Recent problems of communication between the college and the TEC, including the lack of consultation over the college's strategic plan, are now being addressed.

14 The college is responsive to the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In addition to the provision on the main campuses, which includes the separate specialist learning programmes called 'guidelines', there is significant provision in the neighbourhood colleges and outreach centres. The college works closely with support agencies and with four special schools. Link courses with special schools provide pupils with an introduction to a variety of craft skills, and help them make a smooth entry to further education. The college has successfully developed provision in basic skills and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Courses are offered on the main campuses and in over 30 of the outreach centres. There is scope to broaden the provision to include, for example, family literacy and work-based skills.

15 The college has a professional central marketing unit. Its staff have expertise in clearly differentiated areas, including market research, design, promotions and publicity. There is also a separate public relations function. The marketing unit has generated valuable data, which are available to inform planning at college and school levels. Recent marketing efforts, based on a substantial marketing budget, have succeeded in creating a coherent corporate image and a high local profile for the college. The marketing of individual programmes has not been a priority. This, and poor communication between the central marketing unit and teaching staff, have been unhelpful during a period of difficulty in the recruitment of school-leavers. Development managers in each of the college's eight

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academic schools hold a marketing responsibility, but these responsibilities have not been exercised effectively. The college is beginning to address these problems.

16 Since incorporation, the college has developed a major programme of community education, 90 per cent of which is now funded by the FEFC. The programme has been carefully designed through an effective consortium arrangement with the youth and community service of the local authority. By 1995-96, enrolments to the programme had grown five-fold to more than 12,000. Courses are offered in 70 outreach centres and three conveniently-situated neighbourhood colleges. Many of the courses in outreach centres have been developed co-operatively with individuals and groups from the local community. Information technology courses are widely available and include the 'totally bewildered' programmes that offer a confidence-building basic introduction to information technology. The pattern of recruitment and feedback from community representatives show that the provision is meeting local needs. The intention of attracting adults from poorly-represented areas of the community is clearly being fulfilled. The head teacher of a local secondary school spoke enthusiastically of the impact that community education courses are having. For example, some parents, after successfully completing courses, take a more active interest in the life of the school and in their children's progress.

17 The college has a clear equal opportunities policy, which is understood and supported by staff. In addition to central college initiatives and training events, individual college schools take action to ensure equality of opportunity. Examples include the publication of community education notices in minority ethnic languages, the emphasis on role models to encourage women to study information technology, and the choreographing of dance to enable students with disabilities to make their own distinctive contributions to performance.

#### **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

18 Stoke-on-Trent College faces severe management and financial problems, which it is now beginning to address. Immediately following incorporation it was in a healthy financial position. The new chief executive appointed in 1993 set ambitious targets for growth which the college exceeded in 1993-94. In 1994-95 the college achieved 97.5 per cent of its target, representing a further significant growth in units of funding. However, in 1995-96 the college significantly underachieved the funded units allocated by the FEFC. Staff and some governors expressed mounting concerns about the way the college was being managed but the corporation board as a whole was slow to respond to the growing disquiet. A number of managers left, among them the director of finance. This key post remained unfilled from May to December 1996. Governors and college managers did not receive reliable and timely management information. Governors failed to investigate fully indications of weakness in the college's computerised management information systems. The full extent of the

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underachievement against targets was not revealed until November 1996. In September 1996, the corporation declined to renew the chairman's co-option and he resigned. A new chairman took up office immediately.

19 In late September, the chief executive and the director of marketing and programme planning took leave of absence on grounds of sickness. The corporation board set up a special committee and in December 1996, after considering the report of this committee, the board decided to dismiss the chief executive and the director of marketing and programme planning. The board of governors and senior managers of the college are now having to make reductions of some £8,000,000 on a budget of £30,000,000. The college's recovery plan sets out the intention to make over 200 redundancies. Staff have been informed of this intention. At the time of the inspection there was an urgent need for the corporation board to appoint a new chief executive and to develop a recovery plan that will ensure the solvency of the college.

20 The corporation board is not fully representative of all of the college's interests. The college has recognised that it would be beneficial to have members with expertise in higher education and from the local community. There are 14 members, including the chief executive. Six are independent members from the business community and one is nominated by the TEC. Attendance of the business members has been low at a number of meetings of the corporation held since November 1995. Of the remaining six corporation members, excluding the chief executive, three are co-opted, two are members of staff and one is a student. Governors consider that the corporation board is too small and are seeking to appoint additional members. Only two members of the corporation are women. Nine of the members have been in post since before incorporation. Shortly before the new chairman took up office the corporation board appointed a permanent clerk, after almost a year of working with a series of temporary clerks. The new clerk has a background in the law and is well qualified for the post. Two main committees support the work of the corporation: general purposes and audit. A remuneration committee meets as required. The two main committees have not met regularly enough to deal with the volume of business arising from corporation meetings and they have sometimes worked outside their terms of reference. Until recently, a substantial number of governing body papers were designated as confidential; board meetings were divided into two parts with student and staff governors excluded from the second part. Even now, minutes of board meetings are not available for public scrutiny. Staff see the majority of governors as remote from the college and its business, despite recent efforts to improve communications.

21 The board of governors has consistently failed to fulfil its duties in a number of key areas. It has not ensured that its proceedings are in full accordance with the instrument and articles of government. Little training has been provided to help governors understand their role and meetings of the corporation have been infrequent. Some meetings have had

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excessive agendas, comprising over 30 items, and papers on important issues have not always been circulated before meetings. Governors have played little part in strategic planning, and have not monitored the achievement of the college's plan. They have not formally considered academic issues and students' achievements.

22 The management structure of the college reflects the importance the former chief executive accorded to the business aspects of the organisation, and particularly to marketing and programme planning. When at full strength, the senior management team included the deputy chief executive, six directors and a 'quality projects' manager. All of these managers reported directly to the chief executive. A management information systems manager, who was not a member of the senior management team, also came under the direct management of the chief executive. The management and development of the curriculum was the responsibility of the eight heads of school and the community education manager, who reported to the deputy chief executive. One of the directors had functional responsibility for curriculum development but there was no forum in which heads of school could engage directly in curriculum debate with this director and the rest of the senior management team.

23 Pending the appointment of a new chief executive, the management structure remains in place, although depleted. The deputy chief executive is currently acting as chief executive. Vacant posts for senior managers have not been filled, and the team now has six members rather than nine. The director of finance only joined the senior management team in December 1996, on a six-month contract. There has been a reallocation rather than a reconsideration of duties and responsibilities. As a result senior managers bear a very heavy workload.

24 The present senior management team intends to reduce the number of schools in the near future and to reduce the number of managers within the schools. Currently, each head of school has responsibility for the school's curriculum and resources. In each school, working both to the head of school and the senior management team, there are two development managers. Their responsibilities include curriculum development and resource management. Within the schools a number of programme managers are responsible for the day-to-day running of 'sections' which comprise teachers associated with particular curriculum areas. Many of the managers associated with the operation of schools are experienced and work effectively when allowed to do so. They have developed strong teams and most enjoy the support of their staff. The job descriptions of some managers have not changed for three years. Their roles lack clarity and their workloads are uneven and generally very heavy. The acting chief executive has retained line management of the heads of school, and is seeking to restore regular meetings with the group. He and his team are working hard to review the responsibilities of heads of schools and redress some of the difficulties they have experienced in carrying out their duties.

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25 Members of the senior management team are having to work hard to establish lines of communication with staff throughout the college and to overcome their reputation for remoteness. Their task is made more difficult because all have offices on the Cauldon Campus. Staff commented that senior managers seldom visited the college's other sites. Staff welcome the regular newsletters and bulletins that now keep them informed of developments in the college. Increasing numbers of them have access to electronic mail.

26 The influence of the academic board has been weak in the past. It had little influence on the curriculum and was not chaired by the chief executive. The acting chief executive is now taking steps to review its over-large and unrepresentative membership and to ensure that it is able to work effectively.

27 The insufficient involvement of the corporation, of the majority of college managers and of teaching staff has made strategic planning in the college very weak. The present plan focuses heavily on marketing and reflects the former chief executive's desire for growth. It is not accompanied by a detailed operating statement with measurable targets and clear timescales. It does not relate its objectives to the deployment of staff and it is not integrated with the college's 1996 to 1999 financial forecast. School and programme area plans are similarly imprecise. They were subject to enrolment targets which many managers considered unrealistic and which were imposed rather than negotiated.

28 The college's management information systems cannot support accurate planning. New software was installed in May 1996. The change of system was poorly managed, to a timescale that was unrealistic. There are still serious shortcomings in the quality and quantity of the management information provided to the corporation and to the college's managers. Programme leaders and their teams monitor retention rates at programme level but the corporation and senior managers do not monitor retention rates for the college as a whole. They do not monitor the success rates of students in examinations. Monitoring of students' destinations is very limited in scope and the data produced are unreliable and incomplete.

29 The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £17.55 per unit compared with an average for general further education and tertiary colleges of £17.97 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The criteria against which budgets are allocated to heads of school and other managers are unclear. Heads of school have, as yet, little experience of or training in financial management, and little understanding of funding methodology. Controls are lax despite the college's severe financial problems. Expenditure against devolved budgets is not being monitored.

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## **STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

30 In line with its curriculum strategy, the college has developed a comprehensive range of support services for students. The strategy emphasises individual learning needs and the guidance and support required to identify and meet these needs. Support services are provided by a number of units within the guidance development team: study supervision, student support, learning support, careers and employment advice and customer services. The units are well managed and co-ordinated. Their performance is carefully monitored and the outcomes of this monitoring contribute to plans for development. Use of the services has increased substantially over recent years. Student feedback shows a high level of satisfaction. A separate unit is responsible for the college's 'learning resource centres'.

31 Information about the courses available to students is extensive, well designed and attractively presented. Some of it is translated into minority ethnic languages. The enrolment system is sensitive to the needs of students. Enrolment takes place at more than 70 centres and it is possible to enrol at any point during the year, although not all students are aware of this. Students receive effective advice and guidance during the enrolment process, although subject specialist advice is not always available. Students value the information and advice they receive but many feel the enrolment process is too long.

32 Induction follows a common framework for all students, including those in community education. A student handbook containing information about courses, guidance and college services, together with a statement of students' rights and responsibilities, is provided for all students during induction. The induction programme is largely successful in familiarising new students with important features of the college and enabling them to establish contact with their study supervisors. Feedback from students indicates that they value their induction. However, a substantial minority of part-time students do not go through the process and induction for students returning to the college is not as effective as it is for new students.

33 The college has established a common system of academic support and guidance for all full-time students and part-time students who study for six or more hours a week. Support is also offered to other part-time students on a more limited basis. Students have a specified entitlement to support encompassing all phases of their course of study. This is provided by an enthusiastic team of study supervisors, most of whom have no teaching function. They comprise a centrally-managed team whose members are allocated to schools and work closely with programme managers. The system is well documented. Manual procedures for tracking students' attendance and progress have been introduced recently but the accuracy of information cannot be cross-checked against data on the college's student database. Study supervisors, teachers and programme managers all play a role in providing academic and pastoral

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support. On occasions, however, confusion has arisen over the aspects of support for which each is responsible. The study supervision system has been introduced with considerable success in some areas of the college, but progress in others has been slower. Revised arrangements have been introduced recently in community education. Many students spoke highly of the value they attach to the system, although feedback from student questionnaires shows that only 55 per cent of students expressed satisfaction with the service provided. Some part-time students say they have difficulty in establishing contact with study supervisors. Data on retention, transfer and progression are gathered by the study supervision team but these do not yet give a clear picture of the impact of the new system. Further systematic monitoring is needed. The study supervisors meet regularly as a team and have been involved in relevant staff development which has helped to improve the effectiveness of the system.

34 The college has a well-planned and carefully-implemented process of diagnostic testing to identify the need for additional support in numeracy, literacy, information technology skills and study skills. This forms part of the service to which full-time students and those studying for more than six hours a week are entitled. The results of the tests enable study supervisors to produce study programmes for each student. However, only 25 per cent of students take advantage of the additional help which is offered to develop their numeracy and literacy skills. As a result of the assessment of their needs, appropriate support is provided for those with dyslexia and those with impairments of hearing or vision. Established college procedures for accrediting students' prior learning operate effectively in several areas including engineering, construction, and hairdressing and beauty therapy. They are less well developed in other areas including basic skills, ESOL and science. There are also effective mechanisms for enabling students to transfer between courses within the same school and between schools. Study supervisors play an essential role in this, interviewing students and referring them as necessary for careers advice or directly to other study supervisors.

35 The college has made a significant investment in the development of learning resource centres. These help students to develop a range of skills. They include workshops for mathematics and numeracy, English and literacy, and information technology. There are separate workshops for science, construction and engineering. The college has recently taken steps to strengthen the links between the learning resource centres and its schools. At present these links are weak. For example, in basic education, there has been some duplication of testing and some learning support is not well co-ordinated with the students' study programme. In mathematics, the learning resource centres have not been effective in supporting students taking GCSE and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses. Procedures for monitoring the attendance, assessment and achievement of students using the learning resource centres are not well developed.

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36 Three qualified college counsellors and a welfare and accommodation adviser provide an increasing range of services to students. The number of counselling interviews increased by 40 per cent between 1994-95 and 1995-96 and students are highly satisfied with the service. Counsellors also hold group sessions for students and provide counselling and staff development for teachers. Hardship funds are administered by the welfare and accommodation adviser who also provides advice on benefits and grants.

37 Students have access to effective information and advice on careers. Careers education and guidance are provided by three careers advisers and one employment adviser. They are available at enrolment and students can consult with them throughout their courses at scheduled interviews, 'drop-in' sessions and group sessions. The number of individual careers interviews has increased substantially with the introduction of 'drop-in' sessions. Part of the careers provision is supplied under contract from external agencies.

38 The two nurseries on the main campuses and the creches in neighbourhood colleges are highly valued by students. The nurseries provide a total of 56 full-time equivalent places. Approximately 400 students make use of them in the course of the year. There is a waiting list and, where necessary, students are referred to other agencies which provide these facilities. The nurseries are also used for work placements, especially for students following nursery nursing courses.

39 Limited progress has been made in introducing records of achievement. The college is planning to introduce the national record of achievement across the college in September 1997. A pilot scheme is in operation and accreditation is being sought through Staffordshire LEA.

#### **TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING**

40 Strengths outweighed weaknesses in 57 per cent of the 391 teaching sessions which were inspected. Weaknesses outweighed strengths in 10 per cent of sessions. These percentages compare with 63 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1995-96, according to figures published in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. Overall levels of attendance were low, ranging from 61 per cent to 89 per cent. The average was 73 per cent. On average, there were 11 students in each of the classes inspected. The grades awarded to the teaching sessions inspected are summarised in the following table.

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**Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programmes of study**

<b>Programmes</b>	<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Totals</b>
GCE AS/A level	1	16	15	2	0	34
GCSE	1	14	7	0	0	22
Basic education	8	22	17	3	0	50
GNVQ	9	25	17	9	2	62
NVQ	3	18	18	3	0	42
Other vocational	27	38	27	12	0	104
Access to higher education	2	5	8	3	0	18
Higher education	3	6	9	4	0	22
Other	9	15	13	0	0	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>391</b>

41 There is a good standard of teaching in some subjects, and teaching on the large community education programme is generally sound. Course programmes are well planned. In the majority of cases, there are clear schemes of work and lesson plans. Teachers are knowledgeable and show a good understanding of their subject. Most use a range of effective teaching methods and provide students with helpful resources to support their learning. However, the teaching methods used in further education classes containing students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not always suitable for these students. Positive relationships with staff encourage students to gain confidence in contributing to lessons, asking questions and voicing opinions. Adult students and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support from teachers. Procedures for organising and monitoring work experience are well managed. In a number of subject areas, some teachers have poor teaching skills and others lack appropriate experience.

42 In some science lessons, students were not given enough opportunity to make their own contributions. Some lessons were taught at too slow a pace and did not provide enough challenge for the more able students. Teaching in science did not make enough use of information technology. Some chemistry teachers lacked appropriate training or experience for the courses they were teaching. Marking procedures in science were generally reliable and GCSE practical assessments were marked with particular rigour. The teaching of specialist mathematics was competent and thorough but rarely imaginative. Teachers managed classes skilfully and enabled all students to work confidently. They achieved some success in making mathematics specifically relevant to vocational subjects where it was taught as a supporting study. However, poor links with the mathematics workshop in the learning centre have had an adverse effect on the quality of support in mathematics for GNVQ students.

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43 The teaching on computing courses was of a consistently high standard and was supported by well-developed course documents. Lessons were well organised, consistently well managed and inventive. Teaching methods were varied and succeeded in motivating students. Teachers had high expectations and students responded accordingly. Learning materials were practical and interesting, and related clearly to classwork. Assessments were effective and schedules were well planned. Teachers marked work regularly but there was no clear policy for ensuring that students received effective written commentaries on their work.

44 Lessons in construction have clear aims and objectives. Teachers successfully linked the aims and objectives of theory classes to practical contexts. In some lessons, teachers successfully related the work to students' own experiences. Most supporting materials were of good quality. In some lessons, little attention was given to checking that learning had taken place and teachers sometimes failed to provide a summary of the key points. Lessons in construction crafts were generally satisfactory. Within the craft provision, lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were of excellent quality and carefully structured to meet students' individual abilities. Adult students received active encouragement and support. A few craft lessons failed to challenge or to stimulate students sufficiently. Classroom-based learning in construction crafts was generally less successful than that based on workshop activities.

45 Teaching standards in engineering are generally sound. Teachers usually prepared useful and informative lesson notes for students. Some drew effectively upon their own industrial experience to enhance students' learning. Most used information technology and other aids constructively. The tutor packs given to students to use in conjunction with computer software were of high quality. Teachers devised a variety of assessments and helped students to monitor their own progress. There was scope for improving the management of some practical classes. Some students disrupted classes by arriving late. The development and assessment of key skills are poorly co-ordinated. Further development of the GNVQ programme is necessary to redress poor planning in this and other aspects of the programme.

46 Business administration teachers are particularly skilful at supporting groups where there is a wide range of age and ability. Some made good use of the experience of students who were in paid employment. They marked work supportively and had a thorough approach to the management and assessment of students' NVQ portfolios. There was significant variation in the quality of teaching and learning on some basic courses. Some teachers were inexperienced and used inappropriate teaching methods; some had difficulty in pacing the progression of students within large groups. Teachers in business studies courses had detailed files for each topic, unit or subject they taught. Classes were well managed, although, on some courses, teachers relied too much on group work. There are good opportunities for GNVQ students to undertake work experience and residential and overseas visits.

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47 In leisure and tourism, most teaching was of a good standard. The majority of teachers gave helpful guidance to students and were careful to share the learning aims of the programme and the lesson with their students. Some teachers gave insufficient attention to checking that learning had taken place and in a number of lessons teachers failed to provide an effective summary of what had been covered. Occasionally, lessons were too long to sustain students' interest. There were clear written and oral briefs for tasks and assignments, but teachers' comments on students' work often lacked sufficient detail.

48 Teaching in health and care reflected current policy and practice in these areas. Teachers used varied and effective teaching methods, including much successful group work. Staff monitored students' progress well. The quality of marking on the professional studies courses was notable for the useful commentaries provided for students. Teachers' marking on GNVQ coursework lacked appropriate criticism or suggestions for improvement. In a few health and care lessons, the work was not challenging enough. Some teaching in sports, holistic and complementary therapies was stimulating and well managed. Study programmes for hair and beauty students placed too little emphasis on hairdressing and most sessions failed to provide appropriate reference to vocational experience.

49 Most of the teaching in art and design, with the exception of media and fashion, had little evident structure. Lesson plans were variable in quality and some were poor. Concepts were described inadequately. There was little or no use of directed questioning to check that students had understood and kept pace with the work. Little or no use was made of visual aids. Problems arose because students in different years of the same course, or from different courses, had to be taught together. Staff lacked curriculum models or teaching techniques to cope with these problems. Some of the teaching was undemanding and there was a tolerance of modest performance from students. In some classes, a slavish adherence to the GNVQ unit specification led to dull teaching and mundane project design. Mature students form a significant proportion of many groups, and in some cases, a majority. They are well integrated with other students and prosper. There was some excellent teaching for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly in dance and movement.

50 Programmes in English are well organised. Teachers plan and prepare lessons based on well-devised schemes of work. The assessment, record-keeping and marking systems help students to improve their learning. Students with learning difficulties are well supported though there is little use of differentiated learning materials. Much of the teaching was competent but students were not always fully involved in the work. In some cases, teachers did not state clearly the aims of the lesson and the learning objectives. There were few opportunities for students to study on their own or to be involved in planned group work. There was a lack of intellectual rigour in some classes and a general over-reliance on the

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teacher talking at length, question and answer sessions or the use of handouts. The quality of teaching in psychology and sociology was sound. Teachers motivated their students, using varied methods of working and effective learning aids. There was good encouragement and support for adult students. Only a few of the teachers provided a summary of the work at the end of lessons. Teaching schemes and records of students' work were of variable quality. Some question and answer sessions were made that much less effective by teachers answering their own questions. The extensive use of handouts overwhelmed some students.

51 In modern languages and EFL courses, enthusiastic and skilful teachers successfully encouraged students to develop a range of linguistic and related skills. Some language teachers were particularly good at organising tasks for pairs and groups of students. Exemplary use was made of the foreign language assistants who helped students to develop confidence in communicating in the foreign language. In some lessons, good use was made of audio-visual and other teaching aids. A few lessons were pedestrian or relied too much on the use of English.

52 Specialist courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were well planned. Teachers gave positive feedback to students. The teaching for students with dyslexia was particularly effective. In the separate specialist programmes there was imaginative teaching of literacy and numeracy. In adult basic education, the teaching of basic skills was generally effective. Some teaching was of high quality. Teachers kept meticulous records which helped them to tailor the work to the needs of individual students. They made good use of authentic materials and real-life tasks. In language and communication classes, teachers helped students to enrich their vocabulary and improve their grammatical skills. There was some over-reliance on one-to-one teaching. Activities involving students working in pairs or groups were not always well managed. Some classes were too long and this resulted in a number of the students losing interest. The quality of marking varied. Some work was well marked. In other cases, teachers provided little or no written comment. The teaching of basic skills in support of other programmes of study is poor.

### **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

53 Many students spoke with enthusiasm of their courses and clearly enjoyed their work. They were generally well motivated and responsive, but students in a few GCE A level classes lacked commitment. Business studies and computing students took an evident pride in the appearance of their work. On some administration and science courses, students displayed poor written language skills. Most work in art and design was badly presented and disordered. Poor skills in aspects of numeracy were evident in some biology and business courses. There were outstanding examples of the creative use of information technology in some students' portfolios, especially in English and childcare studies but modern language and adult basic education students made little use of information technology.

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54 There were many examples of students developing knowledge and understanding, applying it well in classroom tasks and in the production of portfolios. In almost all subjects, students had opportunities to take part in group work. There were examples of modern language students co-operating effectively with each other, although in some lessons they were reluctant to speak the language they were studying. Business administration students working on practical exercises showed a high level of commitment. In laboratory and workshop activities, students handled tools and equipment confidently and safely. In English classes, a significant proportion of the students did not take part in question and answer sessions or discussion and only a minority made notes when the teacher was speaking. Psychology and sociology students often failed to use their 'directed study' time effectively and some of their written work was poor.

55 It is difficult to compare the achievements of students at the college with the performance of students nationally because only a very small proportion of college students follow programmes of study recorded in national performance tables. There is no overall co-ordination of college data on enrolment, achievement and progression. Numbers enrolled on some courses are uncertain, as are some success rates because different sources of data give conflicting information. The college was unable to provide information on the achievements of over a quarter of its students. Almost a third of enrolments are for open college network courses and short courses. Success rates on open college network courses up to a term in length are often high: 100 per cent on the introduction to GCSE programmes (119 students), 81 per cent for emergency first aid (112 students) and 74 per cent for computer courses for absolute beginners (947 students).

56 Of the 235 students aged 16 to 18 in their final year of study on the advanced vocational courses recorded in the tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 60 per cent were successful. This places the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Results have declined slightly since 1995, when 66 per cent of the 352 students were successful. In 1996, there was a 92 per cent success rate on the GNVQ in advanced information technology with eight out of the 12 who passed gaining a merit or distinction. Students finishing the course had developed high level keyboard and software skills. In hospitality and catering and in travel and tourism, examination results were also above average. In contrast, only five of the 18 students enrolled for GNVQ built environment passed and achievements in almost all art and design subjects, except media studies, were poor. Students aged 19 and over achieved similarly poor results in built environment and art and design. In most other subjects, they outperformed the younger students.

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57 Thirty-five per cent of the 131 students, aged 16 to 18, studying on the intermediate vocational courses recorded in the 1996 tables published by the DfEE were successful. This places the college in the bottom 10 per cent of colleges on this performance measure. The 31 students of information technology achieved well above the sector average with a 48 per cent pass rate, as did the 10 business studies students (70 per cent pass rate), and the eight hospitality and catering students (75 per cent pass rate). Results for students in other programme areas were almost all well below average. In 1995, only four out of the 14 students taking science achieved a pass, and in 1996 none of the six were successful. Only 10 per cent of the 39 students enrolled for intermediate health and social care passed and achievements at foundation level were similarly poor. Overall, 74 students aged 16 to 18 enrolled on foundation level courses, and the success rate was 36 per cent.

58 Students entered for NVQs achieved results well below the national average in virtually all subjects. Most entries were at level 2, where 11 per cent of the 597 students aged 16 to 18 and 20 per cent of the 906 students over 19 achieved the awards. On both one-year and two-year courses in construction, few students completed their NVQ awards in the expected timescale. Appropriate levels of achievement were displayed in completed units for business administration. Some portfolios were of a very high standard, showing students' constructive use of their practical work experience. However, a large proportion of the students who started business administration courses did not achieve the qualification. Achievements in childcare and education, and in aromatherapy, were good. Achievements were low on all hairdressing courses and students themselves expressed concern about their lack of skills.

59 Almost 7,000 students, the majority of whom were over 19, enrolled for other awards, mainly at level 1. Many of these courses, for example in computing and in electrical installations and electronic servicing, produced good results. In some cases, there was a 100 per cent success rate. All students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities following some of the specialist programmes and the horticulture courses achieved accreditation. In contrast, a low proportion of students on adult basic education courses gained formal accreditation of their achievements.

60 On some part-time courses, for example in sports and beauty, students achieved good results. In other subjects such as office studies results were more variable. There were very good results on some secretarial diplomas, but results on shorthand courses have fallen over the last three years. Similarly, results on courses leading to professional qualifications included high levels of achievement on some courses for the Institute of Builders, but low levels of success on Chartered Institute of Management Accountants modules and some Institute of Quality Assurance modules. Although almost half the students enrolled on access to higher education courses withdrew, over 90 per cent of the remaining 136 passed. Of the 49 students on the access 'fast track' anatomy and physiology module, over half obtained the top grade.

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61 The students aged 16 to 18 who were entered for GCE A level examinations in 1996 scored, on average, 2.2 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This places the college in the bottom 10 per cent of colleges on this performance measure, based on data in the 1996 tables published by the DfEE. Out of 512 entries for all ages, many were in subjects with 10 or fewer entries. The larger entries were in English, modern foreign languages, psychology and sociology. Pass rates in all subjects other than Italian, where there was a 100 per cent pass rate, were well below the national averages for general further education colleges. The performance of students aged 19 and above, most of whom take only one subject on a part-time basis, is better than for 16 to 18 year olds in most subjects.

62 Entries for GCSE have declined significantly in recent years. In 1996, there were 434 GCSE entries from students aged 16 to 18. Thirty-five per cent achieved grade C or above. Results were well below the national average in virtually all subjects. The college was unable to provide an overall summary of the number of GCSE successes achieved by each student. Over three years, entries at 19 plus have remained almost constant, around 800, and in 1996 success at grade C or above was achieved for 62 per cent of the entries. In 1996, half of the entries for all ages were in English and mathematics. Retention on GCSE courses was poor and the overall achievement of students aged 16 to 18 was below the national average. Results for students over 19, who were in the majority, were significantly better. In English, 68 per cent of the 164 students aged 19 achieved grade C or above, which was near the national average for the sector. In mathematics, the 181 students aged 19 and over achieved significantly above the national average, 55 per cent gaining grade C or above. High levels of success were also achieved by 19 plus students in English literature and modern foreign languages.

63 Retention is an issue, particularly for students in the 16 to 18 age range and for almost all two-year courses. Although the college reports 83 per cent retention during the 1995-96 academic year, the inclusion of significant numbers of students on very short courses obscures the magnitude of the problem. Of the 91 students who enrolled on a two-year GCE A level modular mathematics course in 1994, one had achieved a GCE A level pass and one a GCE advanced supplementary (AS) pass by the end of 1996. Lateness for lessons disrupted students' work on many courses, particularly in construction and engineering.

64 The college was unable to provide reliable data on students' destinations. In 1994-95, the college entered destinations data for 4,294 students on the management information system. The proportion of these whose destinations were unknown, 36 per cent, is high. Although 27 per cent of students went into employment, only 4 per cent obtained full-time posts. The college identified 333 students who progressed to higher education.

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## **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

65 The college views its current quality assurance mechanisms as steps towards its aim of achieving total quality management. There is a well-understood quality assurance system which has brought some clear benefits. However, it has not helped the college to achieve a sufficiently strong focus on key issues such as the quality of programmes and students' achievements. The quality assurance system consists of the International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9001 quality system, programme review and verification, the Investors in People award, and the college's charters. The ISO registration is long-standing, whereas Investor in People status was confirmed on 22 May 1996.

66 The ISO system applies to all areas of work. Staff value the standardisation of procedures across the whole of the college. Approximately 30 trained staff carry out regular and rigorous quality audits according to an extensive schedule. Adherence to procedures is generally good. Operating and auditing the system makes heavy demands on managers at all levels in the college. In recent months, audits have been postponed and review meetings have not taken place. The college recognises that a major review is now required. The college pays too much attention to process and procedures and too little to educational achievements.

67 As part of its commitment to quality the college has placed much emphasis on high standards of customer service but the task of defining these standards is not complete. Some have been defined in the college's charters and some form part of the internal verification system but the college does not have an adequate set of standards to cover services such as learning resource centres, libraries, reception facilities, environment, tuition and programmes of study. Targets for improvement have been slow to develop. For instance, there are no formally-recognised targets for students' achievements. The use of performance indicators to help assess educational outcomes is very limited. In 1995-96, the college subscribed to an independent service which analyses the value added to students' achievements by comparing students' performance at GCE A level with predicted scores based on their performance in GCSE. However, it has not made use of the data provided.

68 The systems of course review and internal verification provide a consistent basis for reviewing the quality of academic programmes across the college. They provide a framework for monitoring the quality of teaching and improving assessment, and have helped the college to meet the requirements of external awarding bodies. A major failing of these systems is that they have not had an impact on some poor teaching and on students' low levels of achievement in some areas of work. The information available to support the reviews is not always reliable and programme managers and verifiers have had some difficulty in obtaining it. Data on students' achievements have neither been collated effectively nor well

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used. Reviews rarely consider examination results in relation to targets, look at trends over several years, or compare students' results with national norms. The lack of pertinent and reliable performance data resulted in one school not recognising that it was performing well below its potential. Reviews have not always led to the necessary action.

69 The college has various mechanisms for obtaining students' views but makes limited use of the results. College-wide surveys of several thousand students are carried out twice a year. The analysis of these surveys is improving but more systematic and widespread use could be made of the data. Some schools did not receive information on students' responses to the surveys. The college requires programme areas to involve students in course reviews and staff in several areas have developed their own methods for obtaining relevant information. Most course reviews showed that programme teams had sought students' opinions and considered how to respond.

70 The professional development of staff takes place on a large scale and provides significant benefits for many. Each full-time member of staff has an equal entitlement to at least 10 days of professional development a year. Some non-teaching staff, however, do not understand their entitlement and there is no reference to it in the staff handbook. A considerable amount of staff development is provided through in-house training but the college also spends large amounts on other forms of training. In 1995-96, £437,493 was spent externally on training activities. Over a quarter of this allocation supported staff who were studying for degrees, some of them reluctantly because it had been imposed upon them. The college allocated £250,000 for staff development in 1996-97. The programme of staff development has not helped some managers to understand how colleges are funded and the Investors in People survey showed that many members of staff felt that staff development had not helped them. An action plan has been drawn up to tackle the issues raised by the survey.

71 Appraisals have been completed for over 90 per cent of teaching staff but not for senior managers. Approximately 75 per cent of non-teaching staff have been appraised although some have not been appraised for several years, if at all. Attitudes to appraisal are not uniformly positive and the nature and operation of the scheme are not always properly understood.

72 The college has met its obligations to publish charters. It has four separate charters; for students, employers, the community, and people with disabilities. All are succinct and written in plain English. The charter for students is an example of good practice. It includes 10 precise standards by which the college can be measured. These commit the college to undertake various procedures for students within tightly specified periods. For instance, the college commits itself to send applicants an invitation to interview within 10 days of receiving an application. Although the college

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has revised and improved its charters, it has not measured its success in meeting the standards set out in the charters.

73 The college's self-assessment report had many limitations and did not provide an effective aid to the inspection of the college. It was not possible for inspectors to compare their findings with those in the college's self-assessment report because the format of the report differed substantially from the guidelines for inspection contained in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The self-assessment did not explicitly address issues of governance and management, teaching and learning and students' achievements. The document also failed to provide sources of evidence for the judgements made. The relative importance of strengths and weaknesses could not easily be understood. Governors were not involved in drawing up the report and had not discussed it. Each curriculum area had been required to make its own self-assessment and some of these assessments were useful.

74 There are clear procedures for dealing with any complaints received from students, though little detail of the way they operate is given in the student handbook. The college analyses the complaints it received but they are not always dealt with within the period laid down in the college's service standard.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Staffing**

75 Teaching staff are generally well qualified, a high proportion of them to higher national diploma level and above. At the time of the inspection, the college could not provide full details of the qualifications of some staff. Approximately 85 per cent of the teaching staff for whom details are known have a teaching qualification. Those who do not, have the opportunity to undertake appropriate training. A total of 200 staff currently hold the training and development lead body vocational assessors' award and 210 have obtained the internal verifiers' award. Several programme areas have staff with recent and relevant industrial or vocational experience. In leisure and tourism and in hair and beauty, the number of staff with industrial experience is more limited. Fewer than half the teachers of basic skills or ESOL hold a specialist qualification.

76 Learning is supported by a wide range of appropriately-qualified professional, technical, administrative and support staff. In most cases, these staff work closely and co-operatively with curriculum teams and provide a co-ordinated cross-college support service.

77 Precise staffing requirements are not identified as part of the strategic planning process and there has been some ineffective and inefficient deployment of teachers. According to the college's latest calculations, the average class size in 1995-96 was 8.5, which is below the average of 11 students per lesson recorded in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report*

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1995-96. The very high proportion of staff on fractional contracts in some programme areas places severe constraints on course management. There is no effective monitoring or comparison of staff workloads. The college acknowledges a need to improve procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff. The high level of staff turnover has led to uncertainty within the college and a lack of continuity in the management and operation of some programme areas.

78 There are almost equal numbers of men and women on the teaching staff and in management positions. About 4 per cent of all staff are from minority ethnic groups, a slightly higher percentage than the percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds.

### **Equipment/learning resources**

79 The high standard of most equipment and learning resources reflects the college's commitment to invest in improving the quality of resources for its students. There are four well-equipped learning resource centres which provide attractive and spacious learning environments. Two libraries, at Cauldon and Burslem, are located within two of these centres together with information technology resources and a range of curriculum workshops including an office training centre. There are additional resource centres within curriculum areas. The budget for learning centres has been over £200,000 in each of the past two years. There are shortfalls of library books in some curriculum areas, notably in health and social care, and psychology. The learning resource centres are open all year round and have long opening hours. They are well staffed. The total of 318 study places is sufficient to meet needs. Students, including those at the neighbourhood colleges, can access the computerised library catalogue directly. The college has established user groups to help analyse its resource needs and to monitor the performance of the learning resource centres.

80 Most curriculum areas are well equipped. The college has some well-resourced, realistic work environments including a travel shop and a health and fitness centre. The centre for advanced technology and manufacturing, established with the aid of £500,000 from the competitiveness fund, has modern industrial equipment and a mechatronics laboratory. The modern languages workshop has excellent resources. Staff can access the central reprographics unit directly by computer and they use the facility to produce good-quality learning materials. Most teaching areas are appropriately equipped with basic teaching aids although some rooms have no overhead projectors. The quantity and state of repair of handtools in some engineering workshops is poor. In construction, there is a poor equipment base with which to support some higher education programmes.

81 The college has excellent facilities for information technology. There are almost 1,000 computer workstations, providing a ratio of one computer

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to approximately 7.5 full-time equivalent students. All equipment is of current industry standard. The provision of sets of portable computers for the neighbourhood colleges and outreach centres has led to the rapid and flexible development of information technology programmes in the community. Students have open access to computers within the learning resource centres. The equipment is well maintained and there is good support from teachers and technical staff. Most of the workstations are networked and can provide access to the Internet. The networked computers give direct access to a good range of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database titles. At Burslem, students can use a 'cybercafe'. Staff have access to an internal electronic mail system. Two staff have been appointed as educational technologists to develop information technology in the curriculum. There are some weaknesses in the provision of information technology within individual curriculum areas. There are not enough computers for students with learning difficulties, no information technology facilities for demonstration in mathematics classrooms and only one high specification computer for work in science.

### **Accommodation**

82 The college has two main campuses. The Cauldon Campus, where the college administrative offices are located, is pleasantly situated between a canal and a park. The buildings date from the 1960s to the 1990s. Nearby are two annexes, at Snow Hill and Howard Place, a Victorian house which has not been refurbished, and a newly-opened block of student flats. Burslem is an open landscaped campus which houses the college's engineering and art and design programmes. Both campuses include sports halls. The college rents or leases premises for three neighbourhood colleges in Bentilee, Longton and Tunstall and provides outreach courses in 70 other locations.

83 Since incorporation, the college has given priority to renovation and refurbishment and has transformed the condition of its buildings. The quality of most of the buildings ranges from adequate to excellent. Good examples include the centre for advanced technology and manufacturing at Burslem and the Taylor building at Cauldon, which contains the busy and welcoming main reception area. The college has also opened a new building at Burslem which is used for art and design. Until the end of 1996, a principal objective of the college's accommodation strategy was to develop a third campus. Although this has now been abandoned, pursuance of the plan has had several adverse effects: considerable sums of money were spent on planning, including professional fees of £370,000; there has been uncertainty over the future use of some buildings, particularly on the Cauldon Campus, so that some areas remain badly in need of refurbishment; construction programmes remain in their original premises at Cauldon instead of moving to the new block at Burslem, as originally intended. Buildings are well maintained and the college has recently introduced a new planned maintenance programme. The

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campuses are clean, tidy and free from graffiti. The college has introduced a number of energy-saving measures. There is a 24-hour security monitoring service, closed-circuit television monitors, and external lighting at night. Car parking at Cauldon is very restricted and the college has introduced a free 'park and ride' bus service to a nearby car park. There is ample car parking at Burslem. Each campus is clearly signposted but internal signposting is of variable quality.

84 The accommodation for teaching and learning is of varying suitability. High-quality provision includes the realistic work environments, some attractive modern science laboratories, the centre for advanced technology and some hairdressing salons. Occasionally, inappropriate use of accommodation had an adverse effect on teaching. For example, the school of art and design had to make unplanned adaptations which meant that rooms were inappropriate for the activities being pursued and in mathematics and science rooms were sometimes of an unsuitable size for the classes using them. The quality of display in rooms and corridors varied substantially. The accommodation at outreach centres was generally adequate and sometimes provided a good learning environment.

85 There is limited access for students with physical disabilities. Most buildings at Burslem are open to wheelchair users but at Cauldon and its annexes and at the Tunstall and Longton neighbourhood colleges facilities are poor. The college has undertaken audits to help it plan improvements. There are few recreational facilities for students at Cauldon and the main dining area needs refurbishment. Recreational and dining facilities at Burslem are better. There is good provision of staffrooms throughout the college.

86 A number of changes have improved the college's use of accommodation but the utilisation of space remains low. Timetabling is centrally controlled and this has created some problems in the day-to-day management of space. Some part-time students complained that the rooms allocated for classes were too small and that last minute changes of rooms created confusion. The college recognises the need for further improvements and now conducts termly room utilisation surveys.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

87 The college has much work to do to overcome its current problems. The strengths on which it can build are:

- an extensive range of academic and vocational programmes including work in the community and with local schools
- generally effective arrangements for the guidance and support of students
- good standards of teaching in some subject areas
- good levels of achievement on some courses, particularly short courses and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

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- well-qualified teaching and support staff
  - the good range and quality of much of its equipment and other learning resources
  - the high standard of most accommodation.

88 The college should continue to address:

- serious failings in leadership
- severe financial problems
- the failure of the corporation board to fulfil its responsibilities in key areas
- the corporation board's inadequate level of involvement in strategic planning and monitoring college activities
- the management structure which is in a state of flux pending the appointment of a new chief executive and the establishment of a recovery plan
- serious shortcomings in the quality and quantity of management information provided to the corporation and college managers
- some poor teaching and learning
- poor levels of achievement on many programmes, exacerbated by high levels of absence and poor retention
- the failure of the quality systems to address systematically and improve the quality of teaching and students' achievements
- the weak self-assessment report.

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## FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)

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  - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)

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  - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)

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  - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1996)

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  - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

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  - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

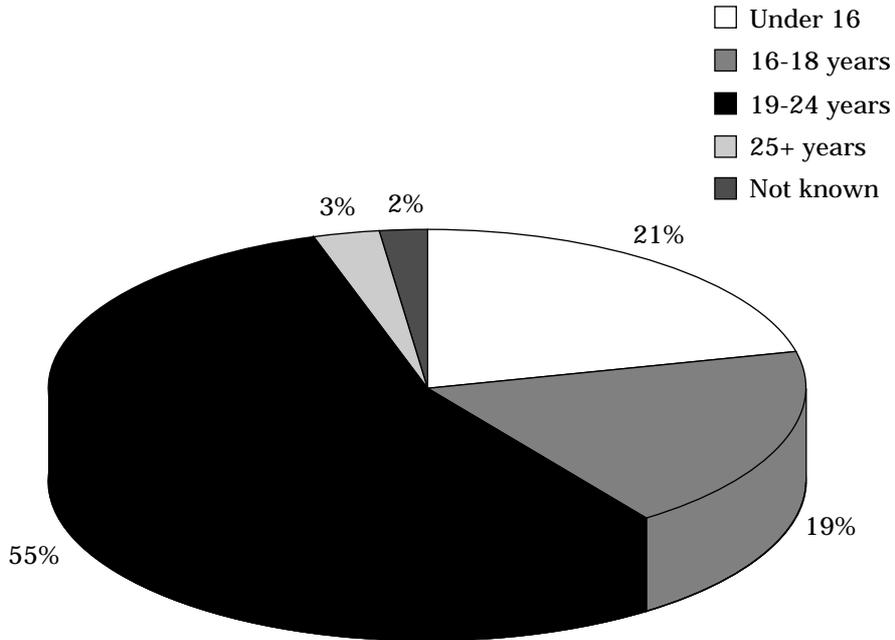
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**Figure 1**

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**Stoke-on-Trent College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)**



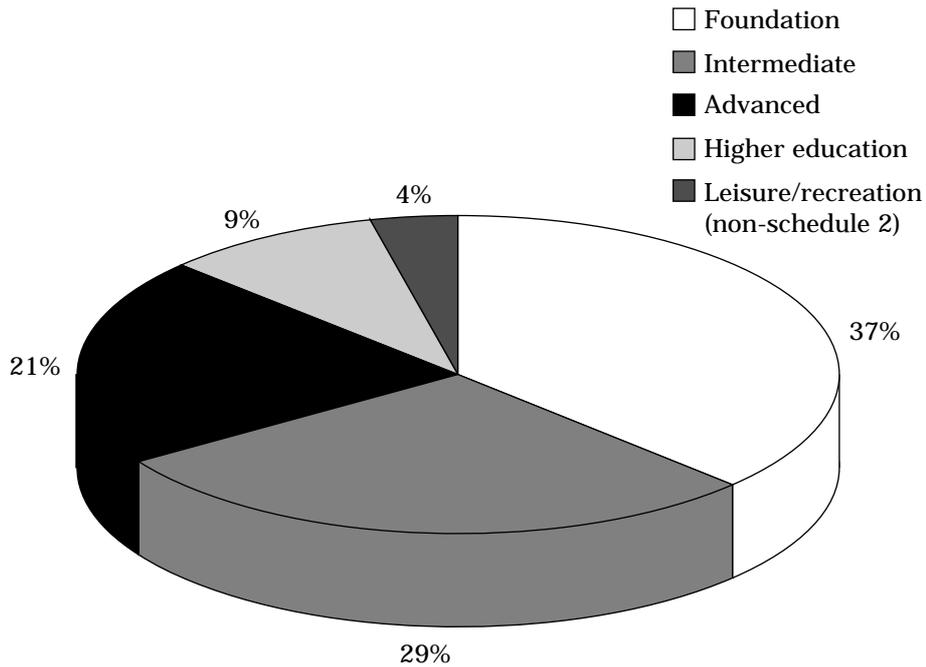
Student numbers: 25,116

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**Figure 2**

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**Stoke-on-Trent College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)**

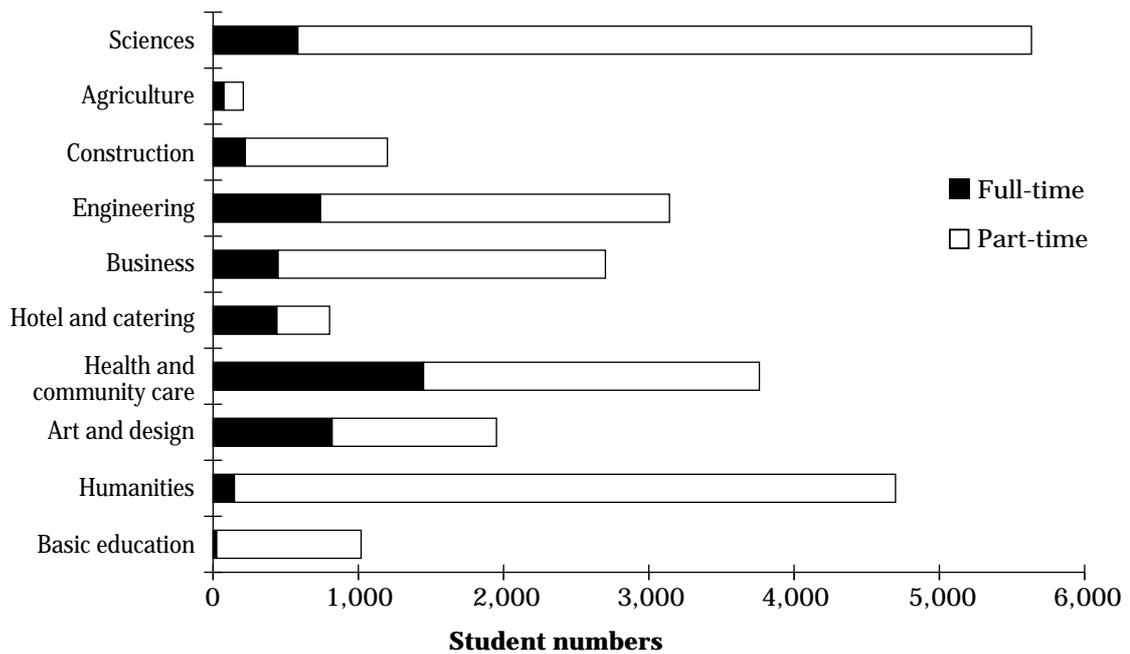


Student numbers: 25,116

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**Figure 3**

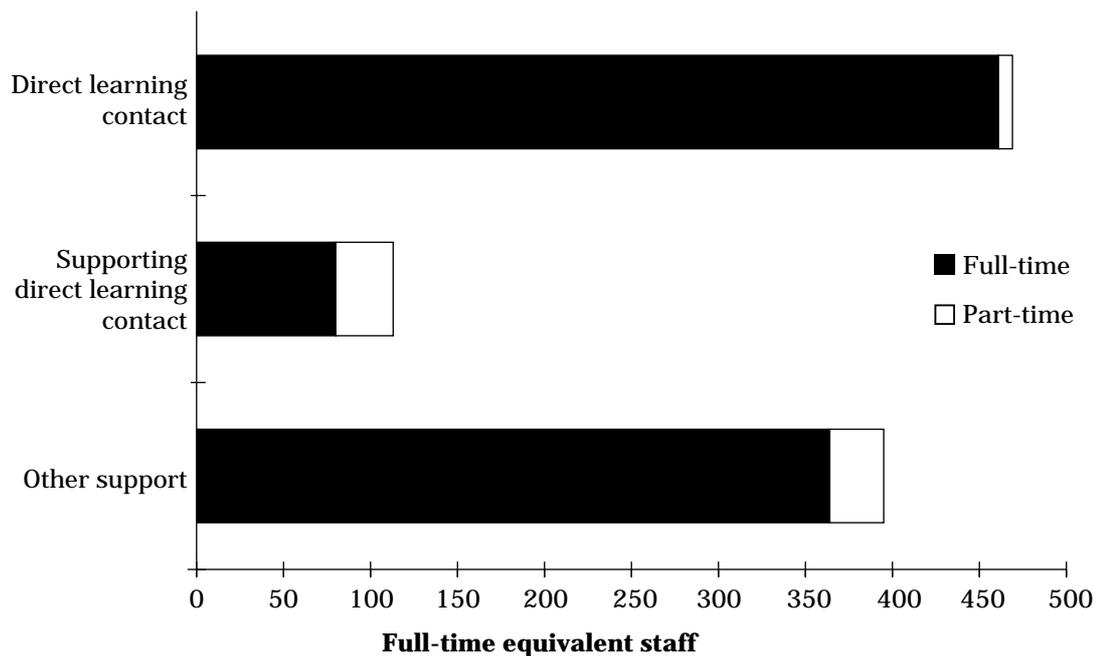
**Stoke-on-Trent College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)**



Student numbers: 25,116

**Figure 4**

**Stoke-on-Trent College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1996)**



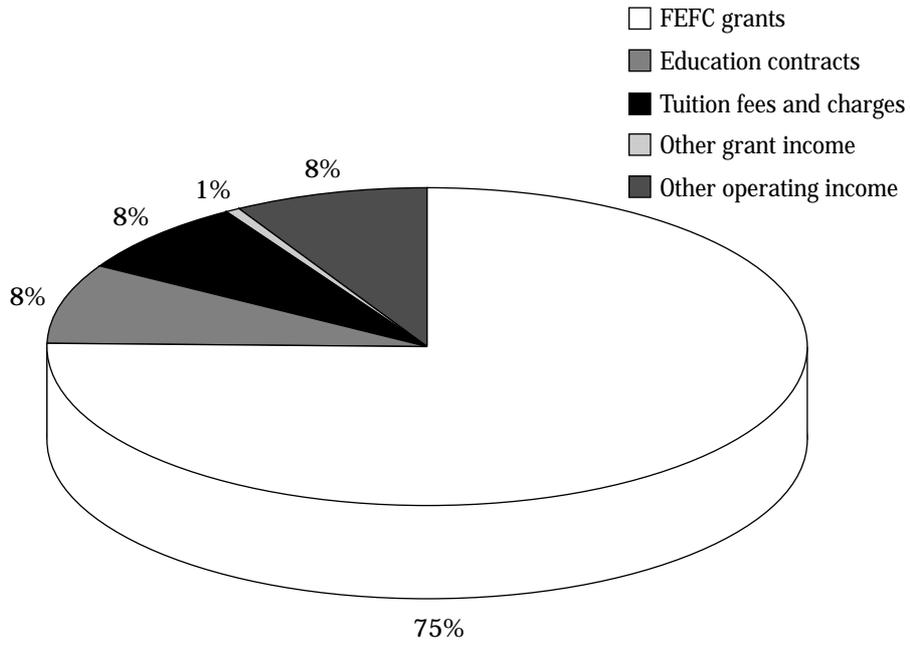
Full-time equivalent staff: 977

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**Figure 5**

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**Stoke-on-Trent College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)**

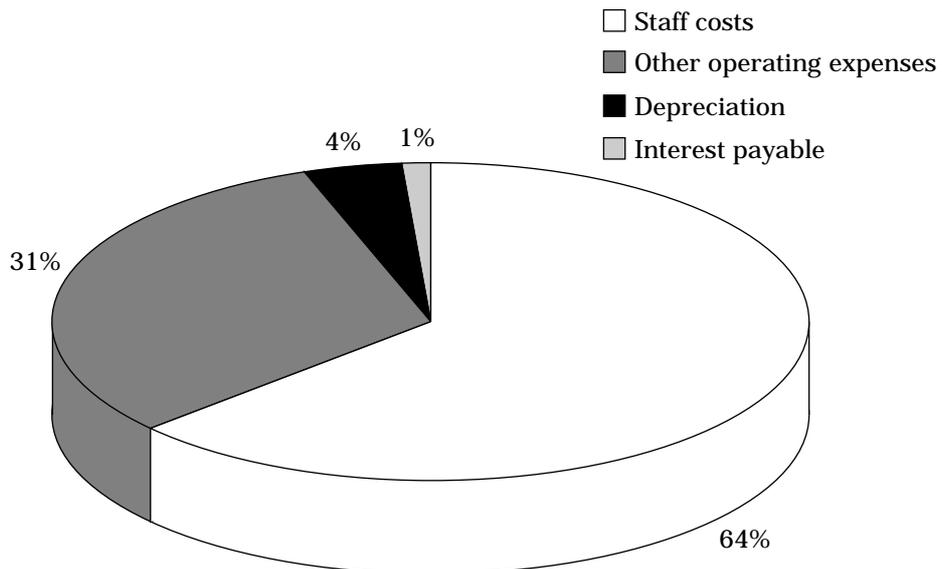


Income: £25,401,000

**Figure 6**

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**Stoke-on-Trent College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)**



Expenditure: £29,878,000

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