

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**Thomas
Rotherham
College**

March 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

By June 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-95

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 19/96

THOMAS ROTHERHAM COLLEGE
YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE REGION
Inspected September-November 1995

Summary

Thomas Rotherham College is one of four further education providers in the borough of Rotherham in South Yorkshire. The college concentrates on providing a wide range of GCSE, GCE A level and vocational courses for students aged 16-19. It has also more recently introduced GNVQs at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, together with a number of evening courses for adults. Enrolments have grown significantly over the past three years. The college benefits from the close involvement of governors in key aspects of decision making, and an open management style which provides strong support for subject departments. The schools' liaison team is effective and provides students with clear and impartial guidance before entry. The student review process is thorough. Standards of teaching are generally good and there are high levels of achievement in some GCE A level subjects. A rigorous quality assurance system has been introduced which includes a timetable of curriculum audits and lesson observations. Staff are well qualified, experienced and enthusiastic. They work in a learning environment which includes a modern and well-equipped learning resource centre. Links with industry require strengthening at course level. Some staff in vocational areas would benefit from industrial updating. The college should also address: the absence of reports to governors on equal opportunities and health and safety issues; the coverage of personal and social issues in tutorials; students' achievements in some GCE A level subjects; a process for reviewing and updating the college charter; the lack of social and recreational areas for students; and poor signposting around the college.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Sciences	2	Health and social care	2
Mathematics and computing	2	Art and music	2
Business and economics	2	English and modern foreign languages	2
Sport, leisure and home economics	1	Humanities	2

INTRODUCTION

1 Thomas Rotherham College was inspected between September and November 1995. In September, enrolment and induction procedures were inspected. During October, a team of 10 inspectors spent a total of 29 days inspecting subject areas. Inspectors visited 119 classes, held meetings with college staff and reviewed students' written work. The inspectors also had access to an extensive variety of documentation relating to the college and its courses. In the week beginning 20 November 1995, four full-time and one part-time inspector with experience from outside the world of education spent a further 25 inspector days examining aspects of cross-college provision. During this period of inspection, there were meetings with governors, representatives from the Rotherham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), headteachers, local employers, parents, students, college managers and teaching and support staff.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Thomas Rotherham College was established as a sixth form college in 1967 on the site of a boys' grammar school, itself established in 1483. The main building is a grade II listed Victorian gothic building which has had later additions in various building styles. The latest addition, in May 1995, is a purpose-built classroom block for mathematics, business, economics and General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes. A new sports and fitness centre is scheduled to be completed in the summer of 1996. The college is located on a single site, one mile from the centre of Rotherham. It is voluntarily controlled by the Feoffees of the Common Land of Rotherham, who are currently represented by two foundation governors.

3 Historically, the college has concentrated on providing full-time General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) courses for 16-19 year old students. It has more recently introduced GNVQs at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. A range of programmes for adults is offered, mainly on a part-time evening basis. The college also runs a small number of courses for industry. The majority of the college's students reside in Rotherham, but significant minorities come from Sheffield, Doncaster and the surrounding villages.

4 The metropolitan borough of Rotherham has a population of 254,000. Minority ethnic groups represent about 2 per cent of the local population and about 8 per cent of college students. Rotherham's traditional economy was built on coal, steel and associated manufacturing, glass production, heavy engineering and processing industries. A sharp reduction in employment in these industries began in 1980 and continues to the present day. Current employment opportunities are almost exclusively in the service sector. Unemployment in the borough is 14.8 per cent, compared with an average of 9.5 per cent for the Yorkshire and Humberside region. Of the students at the college, 12 per cent have a free meal entitlement.

Central Rotherham is served by eight schools for pupils aged 11-16, whilst the outer areas are served by eight schools for pupils aged 11-18. During 1995, 60 per cent of school leavers stayed on in education or training after the age of 16. The borough has three other colleges of further education, one in the town and the others in the Dearne and Rother Valleys.

5 At the time of the inspection, 1,024 students aged 16-18 and 324 students aged 19 or over were enrolled at the college. Nine hundred and twenty students were following advanced programmes, 130 of whom were taking GNVQs. Enrolments by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

6 As at July 1995, the college employed 90 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 59 had direct learning contact and 31 had a support role. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The major cross-college roles are undertaken by: the principal; a vice-principal responsible for quality, marketing and personnel; a manager of finance and resources; two assistant principals responsible for student services and for staff and curriculum, respectively; and two other senior staff responsible for management information and administration, and for enrichment and vocational courses. These seven staff represent the senior management team. Academic staff are grouped into 19 departments whose heads report to the assistant principal responsible for the curriculum.

7 The mission of the college is 'to be a leading provider of a high-quality learning experience in a supportive and stimulating environment in order to enhance the educational, vocational and personal development and attainment of post-16 students'. The college states that its key targets are: to increase provision for local businesses and mature students; to build a sports hall/fitness studio; to extend information technology provision and improve kitchen/dining facilities; to continue to develop flexible approaches to teaching and learning; and to enhance further student achievement through the application of the quality assurance system.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The college has a well-established and wide-ranging programme of 28 GCE A level and 18 GCSE subjects. Some revisions have been made to this portfolio to reflect changes in demand. For example, GCSE and GCE A level courses in design technology have been discontinued in favour of GNVQ programmes in manufacturing and engineering. The college does not offer GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects as a matter of priority; only one GCE AS course, in religious studies, is currently running. GNVQ programmes were first introduced in 1993. In 1995, they were offered in six vocational areas at foundation and intermediate levels, and four vocational areas at advanced level. The college also offers word and text processing courses at different levels and basic support programmes, which are externally accredited, in number and language. There are some

gaps in provision. For example, there is no GCSE in media studies and there are only tentative plans to offer a vocational programme in sports sciences when the new sports and fitness centre is complete. This September, for the first time, a specific programme to prepare adults for entry into higher education was offered in science. Classes for adults are currently available on two evenings per week providing a total of 25 vocational and recreational programmes.

9 A considerable growth in enrolments has taken place over the last three years. The college records an increase of 46 per cent over its 1992 baseline. Full-time enrolments are now close to the current capacity of existing buildings. A significant contribution to this growth has come through the introduction and/or expansion of GCE A level courses in philosophy, psychology, English language, sports studies, further mathematics, business and economics. Numbers on GNVQ programmes have also expanded from 39 in 1993 to 242 in 1995. Although overall growth targets have been achieved in 1995-96, there were some shortfalls against targets in specific areas this year. For example, the foundation GNVQs offered in business, leisure, engineering and science did not run, and there was no take up at either foundation or intermediate level in GNVQ manufacturing. Adult education numbers have expanded by 20 per cent since courses were first offered in 1994, although not all of the planned courses recruited in 1995.

10 With the aim of expanding its services to business, the college has recently appointed a business training officer. Successful full-cost programmes have already been run in modern languages, information technology and Training and Development Lead Body assessor courses in schools. The training officer has been set income targets and has a remit to expand short courses to local businesses. In partnership with Doncaster College, a successful £200,000 bid has been made to the competitiveness fund to support the development of electronically-delivered training programmes to local small and medium-sized enterprises. Good links are maintained with Rotherham TEC which is providing finance for the business training officer post. The college has received £50,000 from the European Social Fund to assist training for the unemployed. This has enabled 35 unemployed people to join GNVQ programmes. Links with industry at course level are less comprehensive. During 1994-95, few representatives from industry were invited to contribute to classroom learning and there was a relatively small number of organised visits to local companies. This was particularly notable in the case of GNVQ business programmes. Plans are in place to improve this position during 1995-96.

11 Liaison with the eight partner schools is effective. Teams specific to each feeder school regularly attend parents' evenings and careers events. All year 11 pupils have the opportunity to attend a presentation about the college and receive course information. Links at subject level are less consistent and not all departments at the college make direct contact with

their counterparts in the schools. This is perceived by headteachers to be a problem, particularly in ensuring curriculum continuity in science.

12 Students supplement their main learning programmes with additional studies. Of the GNVQ advanced students, 73 per cent take a GCE A level course and all intermediate GNVQ students take GCSE English and mathematics, if they have not already achieved these awards at grades A-C. Twenty extension activities are currently offered. Some, however, are used as extra GCE A level support lessons, for example, creative writing for English students and mathematics for biologists. This restricts the choice for other students. In total, only 112 students take part in extension activities. The college has 18 clubs and societies, and 12 different sporting teams compete in local and regional leagues. One hundred and eighty students undertook work experience during 1994-95. However, less than 40 per cent of these were from GNVQ programmes. The college aims to increase this percentage during the current academic year. European exchanges are undertaken with French and German students. Numbers are currently relatively small and confined to modern languages students. This is in spite of a key college objective which aims 'to raise awareness of international interdependence with a particular emphasis on the European Union'.

13 The vice-principal chairs the work of the marketing committee which met eight times during the 1994-95 academic year. The annual report produced as a result of the committee's activities is supported by an action plan for 1995-96. The action plan is appropriate and contains different marketing strategies for the various client groups of the college. Clear, informative publicity material has been produced. The college recognises the benefits of having professionally-produced publicity materials for marketing courses for adults and short courses for business.

14 A college co-ordinator and a committee with student representation are responsible for promoting equal opportunities issues. The college policy is clear and is supported by a current action plan which includes an in-service programme for staff designed to raise awareness about equal opportunities issues. The monitoring and evaluation of departmental and college responses in relation to equal opportunities is not yet in place. Departments, for example, are not required to comment on the promotion of equal opportunities in their action plans.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

15 The governors have a strong commitment to the college and share with the staff a clear vision for its future direction. They understand their role and that of college managers. Together they bring expertise from a variety of backgrounds, including business, law, building, personnel and education. This has served the college well in the period of rapid development since incorporation. The corporation has 18 members, of whom eleven are men and seven are women including one of Asian origin. Its composition includes the principal, business and parent governors,

two foundation governors, and a representative of the Rotherham TEC. One governor is the headteacher of an 11-18 school. There are two staff governors and one student governor who are fully involved in the work of the corporation and take part in those committees on which they are eligible to serve.

16 The committees of the governing body have clear terms of reference and deal with finance, audit, personnel, buildings and remuneration. Fourteen of the 18 governors are members of one or more of the committees which meet regularly and are well attended. Governors play a significant part in strategic planning through a system in which they act as consultants. Each section of the current strategic plan was drawn up by a working group jointly led by a member of the senior management team and a governor. After consultation with staff, the governors and managers then met in order to finalise the plan and ensure the coherence of the various sections.

17 Governors keep themselves well informed about national developments in further education and about issues concerning the college. They receive regular briefings from appropriate college staff. These have included sessions on the interpretation of GCE A level results by comparisons with students' scores at GCSE, the funding methodology of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), the college's quality assurance system and its management information systems. The college provides new governors with a well-designed training session, which informs them about their responsibilities and gives them an introduction to financial matters and strategic planning. The session is supported by a documentation pack and is evaluated by the recipients.

18 The college provides governors with the information necessary to carry out their duties. This includes regular and thorough financial reports to the finance committee and the full corporation. Governors monitor the implementation of their policies by, for example, scrutinising examination results and seeking reasons for different levels of performance. They receive reports derived from the college's quality assurance system, although they do not receive an annual overview report from the college's quality assurance committee. They have not established a schedule of formal reports on the college's progress in some key areas such as health and safety or equal opportunities. Their detailed involvement in the strategic planning process provides them with information by which they monitor the implementation of the college's mission.

19 The corporation has drawn up a set of 16 performance indicators in order to assess its own performance annually. The indicators relate to the corporation's responsibilities for establishing policies and strategies, and for monitoring their implementation. In its annual review in July 1995, the corporation stated that the majority of the indicators had been satisfactorily met. The corporation has a register of interests and a draft code of conduct. The governors take a keen interest in the life of the college

and attend staff-training events and social functions. The staff perceive the governors to be supportive. The appraisal of the principal by the chair of the governors has also provided a useful insight into the running of the college. However, governors have taken few opportunities to become involved in the work of the various curriculum areas.

20 The senior management team has seven members, comprising six men and one woman. The management style of the principalship is consultative and open. For example, a weekly record of all meetings held between the principal and senior managers, covering both group and individual consultations, is circulated to the senior management team. Senior managers make themselves readily accessible to all staff. There is a strong sense of partnership between senior managers and the teaching and non-teaching staff in the development of the college. As a result, staff morale is high.

21 The college operates a policy which states that 'decisions are taken at the lowest practicable level'. This is implemented through an extensive committee structure which promotes consultation with staff and participation in decision making on college-wide issues. Seventy-nine per cent of teachers and 38 per cent of support staff belong to one or more of the 14 committees. Each committee meets on average eight times a year, and most are chaired by a senior manager. The staff finance committee allocates finance to departments for capital items; the academic board approves all new courses in line with the college's mission; the accommodation committee allocated rooms to departments in the new building; and a specially-convened staff committee planned the new learning resource centre. The staff value their participation in committees. They report that the management takes their recommendations seriously and that they are rarely turned down. Staff appreciate the teamwork and the sharing of ideas which result from the balanced representation of various curriculum areas on committees. The work of the committees contributes significantly to the strategic planning process.

22 Communications across the college are good. A comprehensive staff handbook includes college policies on equal opportunities and health and safety, full details of college procedures and a clear list of management responsibilities. All teaching and non-teaching staff receive a copy of the strategic plan and an update twice a year. The minutes of all staff committees and governors' meetings are held in the staff room. The principal holds a weekly briefing for all staff and a twice-weekly staff bulletin is published. As a result, staff have a good understanding of the issues facing the college and of the lines of management and accountability.

23 The delivery of the curriculum is the responsibility of the heads of department, who meet as a group once a month. The assistant principal responsible for staff and curriculum has overall line management of the heads of department and chairs the monthly meetings. In addition, each head of department has a termly meeting with the principal, the

vice-principal or assistant principal to conduct reviews of the department, draw up action plans and prepare financial bids. The heads of department value the high level of senior management support. The senior staff are able to keep in close touch with teachers and with curriculum issues. They meet formally once a month in their role as curriculum managers and issue the minutes of their meetings to heads of departments. Departmental management is effective. Members of the departments meet regularly and there are detailed minutes and agendas. The strong focus on subject departments has led to some fragmentation, for example, between GNVQ and GCE A level business studies and between the separate science subjects. The college is addressing this by creating structures to encourage better collaboration between subjects.

24 The system for financial allocation to departments is clear and open. The staff finance committee is chaired by the principal and includes a range of teaching and non-teaching staff from all levels of the college. This committee administers funds for consumables on the basis of student numbers, adjusted by a weighting factor which reflects the varying costs incurred by different subjects. The allocation is revised termly to reflect student retention. Bids for additional finance are evaluated by the committee, using clear and published criteria, one of which is that the bid must reflect the priorities identified in the departmental action plan. The system is perceived by staff as fair; they understand the reasons for unsuccessful bids. Heads of department receive detailed monthly accounts. Unit costs are calculated and issued to heads of department. They give a financial perspective to curriculum planning.

25 The college has already achieved its target for 17 per cent growth in enrolments in 1995-96. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96, as quoted in the FEFC's *Funding Allocations 1995-96* is £17.88, but due to expansion the average level of funding which the college will actually receive in 1995-96 will be £16.90 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.37. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6, respectively.

26 The college's management information unit provides a good range of reports to management and to subject departments. These include monthly retention figures by subject. Destinations are monitored carefully; the destinations of 87 per cent of those who left college in summer 1995 had been recorded at the time of the inspection. The college sends this information to its partner schools, and uses it in drawing up its needs analysis.

27 The college does not comply fully with the requirements of *The Further and Higher Education Act 1992* with regard to the provision of religious education. A small group of staff and students meet once a week for an act of worship, but religious education is not available to all students.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

28 The college has a friendly and supportive approach to its students and this reflects the college's philosophy that each student is an individual who is to be valued. Students comment favourably on the approachability of staff and on teachers' willingness to provide help and support when required.

29 The policies on selection and recruitment, learner support, careers and higher education, clearly identify the needs of students and the responsibilities of staff. The policies are managed by three student services managers. They hold regular meetings with personal tutors in order to review policy implementation and to inform tutor training needs. There are performance indicators in place to inform the annual review and evaluation of student services. The college recognises the need for a policy on the accreditation of students' prior learning to meet the needs of the growing numbers of students on access and vocational courses.

30 Prospective students receive full information and guidance to enable them to make an informed choice of course. Applicants from the eight partner schools for pupils aged 11-16 benefit from the close links which the college has developed. All applicants receive an interview from the college's full-time careers officer to help ensure consistency and impartiality between subjects. Staff make effective use of the students' records of achievement to inform subject choices. The college organises open evenings for prospective students and their families, and a two-day induction in July during which students can visit the college and sample up to five subjects in which they are interested. All prospective students are entitled to further course advice following the publication of the GCSE results. Students whose GCSE points score is lower than expected are carefully monitored and their progress reviewed in detail at their first subject review. For the current academic year, 57 students were identified as needing this close monitoring.

31 Students are able to settle in quickly to college life through a four-week induction programme and early individual discussion with their personal tutor to help plan their learning. Handbooks provide comprehensive guidance on course requirements and students are well informed about college and support facilities. Students complete an induction review with their personal tutor which informs an evaluation of induction arrangements which is being carried out by student services. During the induction period, each students' numeracy and literacy skills are assessed. This year, however, there were delays in the processing of the assessment tests. Students identified as requiring additional learner support receive a programme of study delivered by teachers from the mathematics and English departments. Not all students who joined the college after the beginning of term were assessed for literacy and numeracy skills. Three identified dyslexia students had not received specialised support.

32 All full-time students have timetabled tutorials. Appropriate support is available for part-time students. There is a team of 55 teachers who act in a specialist capacity as personal tutors. Each tutor group brings together students from different subject areas for two half-hour weekly meetings. These follow a published programme of activities which is issued to tutors by student services. The programmes include higher education and careers guidance but not opportunities for group discussion of social and personal issues such as drugs awareness. Some group tutorials are poorly managed. For example, some are used only to disseminate notices and minutes from student council meetings. The student services managers are seeking to develop greater consistency in the delivery of tutorials.

33 Students meet with their personal tutor twice a term to review progress in their subjects and formulate individual action plans. For those students following a GCE A level programme, tutors make use of predicted grades based on GCSE results to set learning targets. Parents receive copies of the subject reviews and are invited to a parent/student evening to discuss the reviews. These events are well attended. Between the scheduled reviews, subject teachers communicate concerns about any student's progress to personal tutors. Those students who wish to change subject or course are able to do so through a well-understood procedure which ensures that there is full discussion with all teachers involved and, if necessary, with parents. Students maintain a personal portfolio that assists in the completion of their records of achievement and the preparation of references by student services. Some individual action plans lack clearly-stated targets. Only 67 per cent of students leaving college in 1995 had updated their records of achievement.

34 To supplement the support provided to students, the college has recently appointed a part-time college counsellor who is available to both students and staff by appointment. The service is confidential. There is, however, a shortage of suitable accommodation for personal counselling, where privacy can be ensured. The counsellor has access to a range of external referral agencies specialising in, for example, drugs-related and family problems.

35 The careers information and guidance offered to students are good. There are close links with the local careers service and tutors are supported by a full-time careers officer. At all stages of their course, students are encouraged to seek help and advice from their tutors or from careers staff and/or the Rotherham Careers Service. A regular series of careers surgeries and seminars gives extra advice and help. Attendance at these by students has, however, been disappointing. Extensive information is also available in the careers section of the college learning resource centre. It contains computer software designed to help students with information on their career and higher education choices. Students on one-year courses have a careers interview towards the end of their course. Students on two-year courses receive both higher education advice and a careers interview if they are uncertain about their progression routes. College

careers staff are available on a daily basis to provide additional support to students following the publication of examination results in August. Staff from Rotherham College of Arts and Technology are also in attendance, providing information regarding their higher national diploma provision. Staff are insufficiently informed about the qualifications required for mature students to progress to university.

36 The student executive makes a valuable contribution to the college, providing an effective channel of communication between the tutor groups and the college's managers. The executive meets monthly and is well supported by members of the principalship. Students report that the senior management take their views seriously. The student executive was consulted when the college charter was drawn up. An 'extra-curricular support group', consisting of representatives from the various student societies and the student executive, meets once a term to organise well-supported social and charity events.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

37 Of the 119 sessions seen, 76 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. The weaknesses clearly outweighed the strengths in 7 per cent of sessions. A summary of the grades allocated for the sessions inspected is shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		23	28	9	2	0	62
GCSE		2	11	3	2	0	18
GNVQ		7	9	5	2	0	23
Other vocational		1	3	0	0	0	4
Other		3	4	3	2	0	12
Total		36	55	20	8	0	119

38 During the inspection, the number of students attending classes as a percentage of those on the register varied from 84 per cent in business studies to 93 per cent in mathematics. The average attendance overall was 89 per cent. The average class size was 14 students.

39 Relationships between teachers and students were good. Programmes of study were coherent, of a high quality and well organised. In the majority of sessions, schemes of work and lesson plans to a set proforma were provided. In the best practice, these made references to previous sessions, the learning aims and methods, resources to be used and expected outcomes. The aims and objectives of the course programmes are communicated to students at the beginning of their course. Students experience a wide and varied range of teaching and learning methods: lectures, practical work, assignments, case studies and

tutorials. A college-wide group looking at different teaching and learning styles has assisted in the promotion of new learning strategies.

40 On all courses, work was set according to planned schedules and with clear deadlines for completion. Records of students' progress were maintained and used to inform future learning. Teachers return work after marking within a reasonable time and add helpful notes on how the work could be improved. In physics, homework sheets have been devised to provide a range of questions that take into account the different abilities of students. In a small number of cases, written comments were of too general a nature to be useful to students.

41 The wide variety of teaching methods used in mathematics included group work, clear and accurate board work, and the effective use of flipcharts. Teachers encouraged students to develop their oral skills in analysing problems. Both in class and in the mathematics workshop, students were given little opportunity to use computers to test their solutions and extend their knowledge further. In computing courses, staff had given considerable thought to the teaching and learning methods used. There were good worksheets to support practical activities. Students' work was closely monitored and they received useful feedback from teachers.

42 Teaching in English language was vibrant and held students' interest. Relationships between staff and students were good. Teachers' subject knowledge and classroom management were thorough and imaginative. Students' work was marked fairly and at an appropriate standard and teachers' comments were constructive and helpful. In GCE A level English language, there was insufficient use of audio-visual aids to assist teaching. In modern foreign languages, teaching material was well prepared and structured. In a GCE A level German class, for example, students simulated a radio programme on the topic of drug abuse. They were allocated roles as drug abusers, parents, social workers and politicians. With appropriate help, they were given time to record an audio-tape in German. After the role play, the teacher led further discussion, in German, to summarise the main points. Students enjoyed the lesson and showed confidence in their use of the spoken language. In some classes, there was unnecessary use of English by the teacher and insufficient student involvement in speaking the foreign language.

43 In business studies and economics, teachers demonstrated sound subject knowledge. The teaching and learning activities were well prepared. Teachers encouraged different types of learning activities, including role-play and discussion. Teachers were skilled at directing their questions to different students and constructive use was made of their responses. The standard of marking was high in economics, where detailed commentaries were provided at different points in student's work, together with a lengthy summative analysis. In GNVQ business, standards of assessment were less satisfactory. Assessment plans were

incomplete and in some cases no summary of agreed activity was shown. In wordprocessing classes, students with a range of different abilities were well catered for through a variety of carefully-structured basic and extension activities. Learning points were reinforced at the end of teaching sessions with the aid of an outline summary sheet.

44 Students in leisure and tourism courses were well motivated and enjoyed their studies. Teachers displayed a thorough understanding of their subject and an up-to-date knowledge of the industry. Lesson plans were well co-ordinated with schemes of work. In sports studies, the teachers employed a wide variety of learning activities and students were engaged in a considerable amount of practical work. After thorough briefing, students were allowed to take a good deal of responsibility for their own learning. They responded with confidence and high levels of motivation. In leisure and tourism, the absence of a planned work experience programme limited students' opportunities to link theory and commercial practice. Information technology was not sufficiently integrated with the subject teaching.

45 The teaching of health and community care was well planned and the pace of the work maintained students' attention. Teachers were enthusiastic and knowledgeable, and students were committed to their work. Students experienced a wide variety of teaching and learning experiences including group work, role-play, and self-directed study. There was a regular schedule of setting, assessing and returning work to students within agreed deadlines.

46 In GCE A level art, students specialised in painting and drawing. Staff worked closely to syllabus guidelines and the content was imaginatively taught through the effective use of visual aids. Projects were staged around a theme to promote and develop the students' skills in visual language. Teachers provided guidance that was supportive but not prescriptive. The GCE A level music programme offered students a broad range of specialist options. Students had access to a recording studio with a range of modern music technology equipment. The staff and students had established positive relationships that promoted learning.

47 In the sciences, students benefited from good subject coverage. Lessons incorporated practical experiments and theory. Worksheets and other support materials were well prepared and provided good guidance for students. The teachers demonstrated a thorough knowledge of their subject area. Students were enthusiastic and highly attentive. In some GCE A level physics sessions, insufficient time was devoted to practical work. In chemistry and biology, the students worked with care in a well-disciplined and supervised environment. As a result, they acquired essential subject knowledge and increased self-confidence. In two practical sessions, teachers failed to enforce the use of safety spectacles. In some classes, teachers relied too heavily on the use of the chalkboard and made insufficient use of additional teaching and learning aids.

48 The teaching of humanities and social science subjects was of high quality. Teachers had high expectations of students. Teaching was well planned, highly informative and had clear aims and objectives. Teachers were knowledgeable and students were committed to their work. In the majority of sessions, students' interest was maintained by the use of a variety of teaching and learning strategies. In classical studies and history, appropriate emphasis was given to the acquisition of study skills and examination techniques. In most subjects, students' work was set regularly and returned promptly with relevant comments from teachers which assisted learning. In GCE A level and GCSE sociology there were sometimes insufficient opportunities for students to contribute to the learning process.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

49 Students spoke with enthusiasm about their subjects, were well motivated and showed a willingness to take an active part in discussions. They worked effectively as individuals and in groups. There were some high standards of debate, particularly in mathematics. In modern foreign languages the discussion was predominantly in the language being studied. Practical work was carried out safely and competently. However, on the GNVQ health and social care programme, the absence of work experience meant that students had more restricted opportunities to develop some of the required practical and vocational skills.

50 Oral communication was practised to a good standard. For example, in English lessons, students successfully engaged in dramatic improvisation. Role-play activities in business and modern languages were effective in developing students' self-confidence and presentational skills. Written work at GCE A level was often of a high standard. Students were able to demonstrate their ability to apply and synthesise knowledge. Note-taking skills, particularly at GCSE level and on GNVQ programmes, were less well developed. Competencies in information technology skills were not consistently practised across the curriculum. These skills were built into the programmes for GNVQ students, and the use of computers was effective in music technology lessons. However, there was little evidence that students on the majority of academic programmes had similar opportunities to develop these skills. Numeracy skills were well developed in science subjects and appropriately integrated into GNVQ programmes. GNVQ students were not, however, always given opportunities which allowed them to demonstrate the required competencies of action planning and evaluation.

51 Music performances are frequently held at the end of terms, often making use of the college choir and orchestras. Drama productions occur less often. Seven students have achieved high standards recently in sporting activities, representing the college at national level in karate and at regional level in athletics, football, rugby and cricket.

52 The 312 students aged 16-18 entered for GCE A level examinations in 1994-95 scored on average 4.0 points per entry (where A=10, E=2).

This places the college among the middle third of colleges on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1995 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment.

53 Overall, achievements at GCE A level have shown a slight improvement since 1993 when, with 797 subject entries, the overall grade A-E pass rate was 73 per cent. In 1994, with 939 entries, the pass rate was 75 per cent and for 1995, 74 per cent, with 1,024 candidate entries. The proportion of A-C grades has remained relatively constant over the last four years at 40 per cent of total candidate entries. The average pass rates for 18 year olds in sixth form colleges for GCE A level, including general studies, in 1994, were 48 per cent A-C grades and 83 per cent A-E grades. Particularly outstanding results in 1995 were obtained in further mathematics, human biology, German and Spanish, where pass rates at grades A-C, were all 100 per cent. In art, business studies, computing, English language, design technology and sports studies, pass rates at grades A-E were all over 90 per cent. Pass rates of over 70 per cent at grades A-C were recorded in further mathematics, German and Spanish. In philosophy, 89 per cent of students were within this grade band. There were less satisfactory results in general studies, mathematics with statistics and physics, where pass rates were below 60 per cent. Similarly, in chemistry and geography, the A-E pass rates were only 60 and 64 per cent, respectively.

54 Of the 678 subject entries for GCSE in 1995, 56 per cent were graded A-C. The same grades A-C pass rate was obtained in 1994 with 522 subject entries. This compares favourably with the 1994 pass rate at grades A-C of 49 per cent for sixth form colleges nationally. In 1995, A-C pass rates in Spanish, German and psychology were close to 90 per cent. However, in biology and history, the respective pass rates were only 34 and 30 per cent.

55 GNVQ results at intermediate level have been sound. In 1995, the pass rate in health and social care was 89 per cent and for business and leisure, close to 70 per cent. However, at advanced level in health and social care, only two students out of the 15 who completed, achieved the award. For advanced programmes in business and leisure, the first cohort of students are due to complete their programmes in 1996. Foundation pass rates in 1995 for business, and health and social care were 73 and 60 per cent, respectively. Results in wordprocessing examinations have been creditable at all levels; pass rates averaged over 90 per cent in 1995 and were close to this figure in 1994.

56 The college subscribes to the Advanced Level Information System, in order to receive data about how well actual grades at GCE A level compare with those predicted from GCSE results on entry. Using the 1994 measurements, results in geology were significantly better than predicted; those for mathematics, chemistry, physics, business and general studies, slightly worse. In general, according to this formula, actual grades at GCE A level were close to those expected.

57 Departmental targets for course retention are negotiated with senior managers. In a number of curriculum areas, for example, English and modern foreign languages, figures of over 90 per cent were achieved in 1995. On intermediate and advanced GNVQ programmes, course retention has averaged over 80 per cent during the last two years. On some courses, for example, GNVQ foundation and GCE A level computing, for students completing in 1995 it dropped below 70 per cent. In GCE A level economics and modern foreign languages courses, the drop-out rates between November 1994 and October 1995 have been over 20 per cent.

58 The majority of students progress to higher education on completion of their courses. Of the 261 leavers in 1994, 60 per cent entered higher education, 28 per cent went on to further education or training and 9 per cent to employment. Three per cent were categorised as 'other'. Of the 187 leavers who undertook two or more GCE A levels, 79 per cent entered higher education.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

59 There is a strong commitment to quality assurance and staff development throughout the college. The college mission makes reference to this and the strategic plan demonstrates a commitment to continuous quality improvement through systematic planning and review. There are clear overall policy statements on quality assurance and staff development, and two members of the senior management team have specific responsibility for these areas. Committees for quality assurance and staff development support and promote the respective policies and have representation from both teaching and support staff. All members of staff receive a copy of the quality assurance policy. The college has also held a series of staff meetings to explain the philosophy behind the college's approach to quality assurance.

60 An important outcome of the work of the quality assurance committee is a timetable of quality audits to monitor and evaluate academic and pastoral quality within the college. There is a particular focus on departmental action plans, minutes of team meetings, student surveys and annual course reviews. All subject departments are audited on a four-year cycle and pastoral teams such as student services on a two-year cycle. The audit includes an extensive programme of lesson observations undertaken by senior management. A number of other college committees act as quality circles, with a remit to monitor and evaluate their own performance. Annual reports are produced for all college operations to inform the planning process.

61 An extensive framework for setting standards and targets, monitoring progress towards their achievement and ensuring continuous quality improvement has been established within the college. A college curriculum action plan sets the strategic direction for the curriculum and provides the basis for the priorities in departmental action plans. A number of

performance indicators have been introduced to inform the monitoring and evaluation process. These include value-added and retention data. Some performance indicators, such as the monitoring of attendance, are at an early stage of development. The departmental action planning and course review process is effectively managed and, where appropriate, meets the requirements of the examining, validating and awarding bodies. The college has improved its own internal verification process in response to some unsatisfactory monitoring of students' work on GNVQ programmes.

62 Course and departmental team meetings are carefully planned and minuted, and heads of department meet regularly with each other and with their respective curriculum managers. All departments now produce a rolling three-year development plan, and an annual departmental action plan written under the headings of quality assurance, teaching and learning, students' progress, staff development and departmental priorities. In addition, there is a requirement to undertake an annual course review. There are inconsistencies in the thoroughness of some of the reviews. Limited use is made of benchmarking to assist in the setting of realistic targets for evaluating future performance. This formal planning and review process has now been extended to non-curriculum areas, for example, to technicians and administrative staff.

63 The views of students are obtained on a regular basis through departmental and cross-college questionnaires, tutorials, course team meetings, and student representation on the board of governors, the student council and the student handbook committee. A number of surveys are undertaken each year, eliciting students' opinions on the process of transition to college, induction, individual subjects, and their perceptions on leaving college. Surveys are also undertaken to monitor cross-college services such as the learning resource centre. The results of surveys are used by departments in their planning, and students are informed of the outcomes.

64 The college has a staff-development policy which is linked to the college strategic plan, and incorporates a formal system of appraisal for all members of staff. Appraisal and appraisal training is currently under way, and the college aims to appraise all members of staff by the end of the current academic year as part of its commitment to achieving Investors in People status. Staff-development policies and procedures are well understood by staff. A broad programme of training and development opportunities, linked to priorities in the strategic plan, are provided to both teaching and support staff. Formal staff-induction programmes are carefully planned and implemented and have recently been extended to cover support staff. Induction includes staff mentoring and lesson observation for new teachers. All staff training and development activity is formally evaluated, and staff are encouraged to identify different ways in which good practice can be disseminated across the college.

65 A college charter has recently been produced. It explains the college's services and commitments to students and other user groups. A number of commitments have clear service targets; for example, the process of responding to an application or request for information has a target for a response within 10 working days. Students' awareness of the charter, including their rights and responsibilities, is inconsistent. At the time of the inspection there was no procedure in place to ensure that all students received a copy of the charter and that the statements in the charter were explained. There is, at present, no charter working group or other consultation and review process to ensure its continuing development. Copies of the charter have not been issued to all governors and employer contacts.

66 The college produced a self-assessment report in accordance with the inspection headings shown in the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Members of the senior management team and board of governors were involved in the production of different sections of the report and working groups were set up to support this exercise. The summative report identified outcomes and achievements and areas for development, rather than clear statements of strengths and weaknesses. In addition, there were few evidence indicators to support judgements. There was, however, considerable agreement between the statements in the report and the judgements made by the inspection team.

RESOURCES

Staffing

67 Teaching staff are well qualified and have experience relevant to the programmes of study they teach. The majority have a degree or equivalent professional qualification and the full-time staff all have a teaching qualification. They are enthusiastic and committed both to their subjects and to the educational and personal development of the students. Teachers in many curriculum areas are examiners for external validating bodies. Staff are responding positively to the requirements for the delivery of GNVQs and, where relevant, have appropriate Training and Development Lead Body assessor qualifications. Part-time staff are appropriately deployed; they complement the experience of the full-time staff. No member of staff working in the curriculum area of leisure and tourism has current and relevant industrial experience and there is no practitioner in health and social care.

68 The support staff are highly motivated and are valued by the college. They provide good levels of support to teachers and students. For example, faults in information technology equipment are quickly diagnosed and rectified and science technicians effectively prepare and resource the laboratories. Support staff are an integral part of the college and a number play an active role in the committees of the college. In English, staff have increased their teaching commitment by one extra unpaid hour per week,

enabling them to have clerical support. The staff in the department fully appreciate this additional resource.

69 Personnel procedures, including policies on selection and recruitment, are well documented in the staff handbook. There is a computerised staff database. All staff have job descriptions which have been updated since incorporation and are reviewed in line with the needs of the college.

Equipment/learning resources

70 The college has made a substantial investment of over £450,000 during the last two years in equipment and learning resources. A co-ordinated approach to the purchase of computers and the money allocated, nearly £200,000, has resulted in a workstation to student ratio of 1:8.5. Overall, provision is good. The computers use modern software and many are part of a networked system. There is open access to information technology in the learning resource centre. Students sometimes report difficulty in accessing the machines at peak times. Other facilities can be used, subject to the availability of supervision by staff. There are no dedicated computers for use in modern languages and art.

71 The learning resource centre, developed over the last two years, is of high quality and provides students with a number of facilities to support their learning. It is valued by the students. The staff who run the centre are well qualified. The opening hours currently offer students ample opportunities for study. The centre combines traditional library study support with a range of media and information technology services including compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases with their associated software. The range of periodicals is good and there is a section dedicated to providing careers information. In the last two years, the book stock has been increased by some 3,000 volumes. A number of areas, including business studies and history, are still being developed and there is a shortage of up-to-date textbooks in health and social care. Library staff have devised a system to monitor the use of the centre by students. At present, the data which the system provides are not used to inform subject departments. There are no formal links between the resource centre and the different curriculum areas.

72 The quality, level and range of equipment, including teaching and learning aids to support the curriculum areas are at least satisfactory. There has been significant new investment in music and science. In modern languages a new language laboratory has been installed. The majority of classrooms have whiteboards and overhead projectors, and staff have easy access to televisions and video players. In a number of curriculum areas supported self-study materials have been developed. Others have class sets of textbooks which are loaned to students. A good, fast reprographic service aids the learning process.

73 The increase of student numbers at the college has put pressure on some of the resource facilities at certain times, resulting in cramped conditions in classrooms and occasional queuing by students to gain access to the computers and quiet study areas in the learning resource centre.

Accommodation

74 The college is well situated in pleasant grounds surrounded by playing fields. The accommodation comprises one main and two smaller buildings. The listed status of the main building has meant some constraints in the way the college has been able to adapt it for different teaching uses. In the last two years, the college has invested £2.7 million in improving accommodation. New buildings include a classroom block providing modern teaching areas for mathematics, business studies, health and social care. The former hall has been converted into a purpose-built learning resource centre. Overall, the buildings and teaching rooms are well decorated and carpeted and have modern furniture and blinds. The college plans to upgrade the internal and external fabric of the buildings and has engaged external consultants to ensure that cost-effective decisions are made. Standards of cleaning are high throughout the college. Students with restricted mobility can gain access to about 70 per cent of the teaching areas and all new buildings are being planned with these students in mind.

75 The corridors and teaching accommodation provide a stimulating learning environment which includes many displays of students' work. Investment in the security of the buildings, including flood lighting, 24-hour surveillance and additional caretaking staff, has resulted in a mainly vandal-free environment. College entrances are not well marked and signposting to curriculum areas and college services is poor. The main entrance is not welcoming and at times during the day is untidy.

76 There is a lack of suitable social areas for students. The refectory has restricted opening hours; at peak times it becomes overcrowded and there are long queues for food. The college is planning to address these deficiencies by providing new refectory facilities. In addition, new accommodation is planned for completion within the next 12 months which will provide a sports hall with a fitness suite, and social and study areas for students.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

77 The college has made significant progress towards achieving its mission to provide a high-quality learning experience. Its particular strengths are:

- the wide range of curriculum programmes
- the significant growth in enrolments over the last three years
- the close involvement of governors in strategic planning
- the comprehensive committee structure which promotes consultation and participation in decision making

-
- the open management style and high level of senior management support for departments
 - effective liaison with schools
 - the quality of information and guidance provided to students before entry
 - the rigour of the student review process
 - generally good standards of teaching
 - consistently good levels of achievement at GCE A level in sports studies and biology
 - the quality assurance framework which includes a systematic programme of curriculum audits and lesson observations
 - well-qualified, experienced and enthusiastic teaching staff
 - the learning resource centre
 - sufficient provision of modern information technology equipment
 - good standards of classroom accommodation.

78 If the college is to build on these strengths, it should:

- strengthen links with industry at course level
- further develop curriculum links with schools
- expand the number of reports to governors to include equal opportunities and health and safety
- widen the tutorial programme to include coverage of personal and social issues
- improve students' achievements in some GCE A level subjects
- ensure all students receive a copy of the college charter and that it is regularly reviewed
- provide opportunities for staff in vocational areas to receive industrial updating
- improve aspects of accommodation relating to social and quiet areas for students, signposting and the main entrance.

FIGURES

1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at November 1995)

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

3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)

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

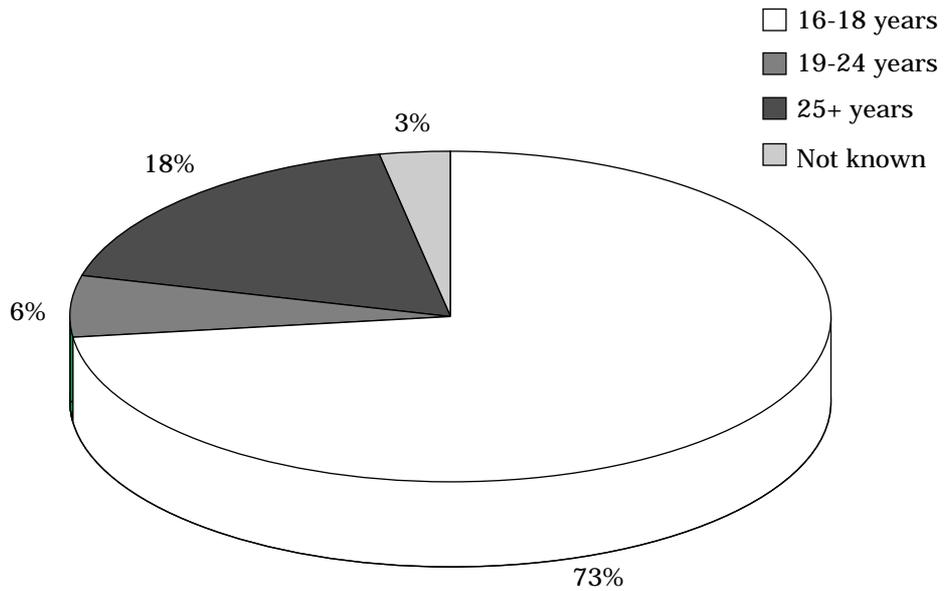
5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

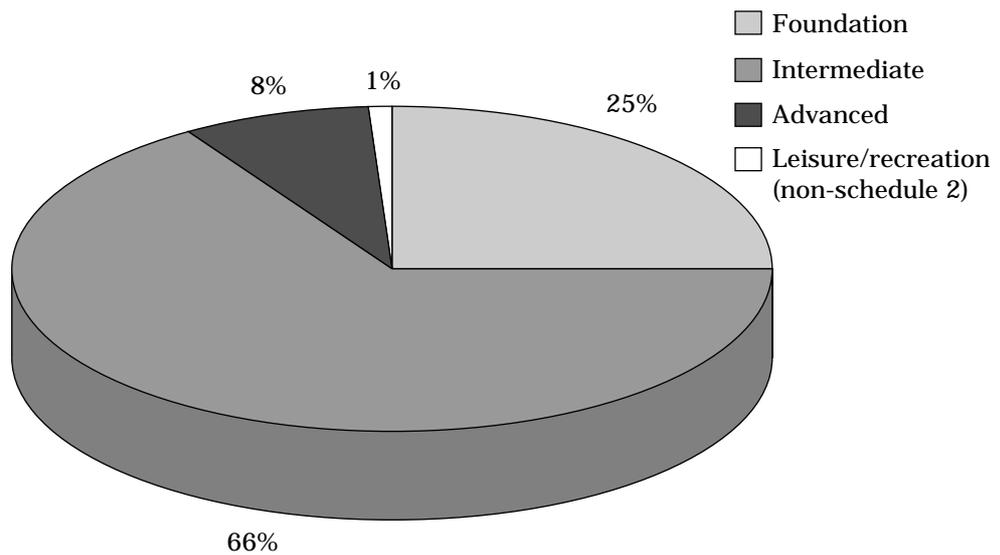
Thomas Rotherham College: percentage enrolments by age (as at November 1995)



Enrolments: 1,387

Figure 2

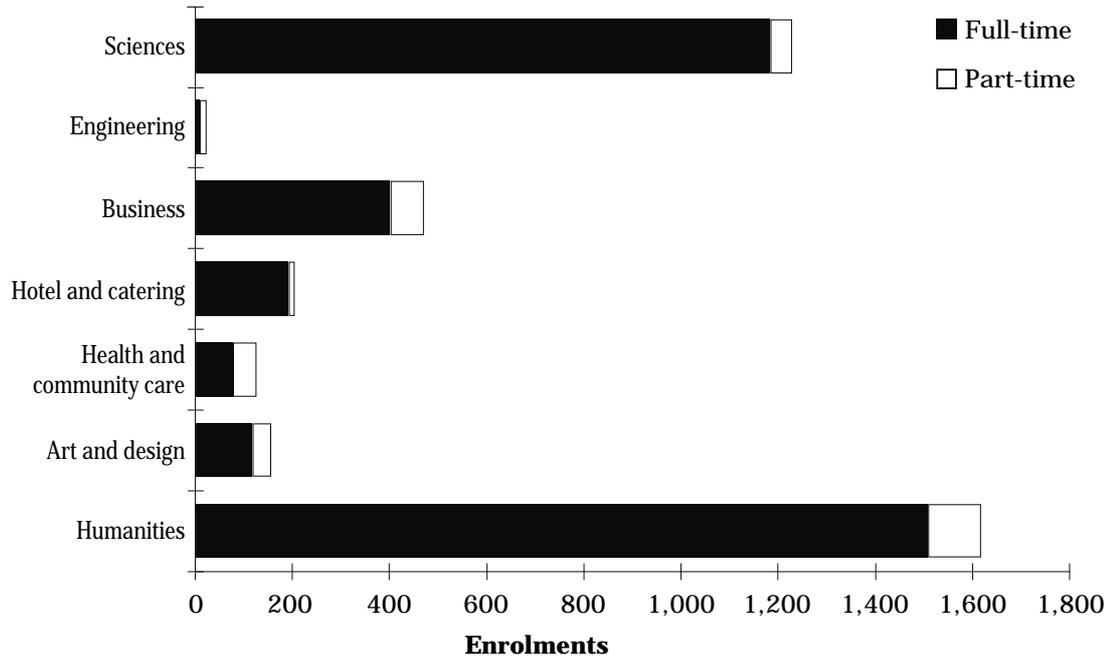
Thomas Rotherham College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at November 1995)



Enrolments: 1,387

Figure 3

Thomas Rotherham College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)

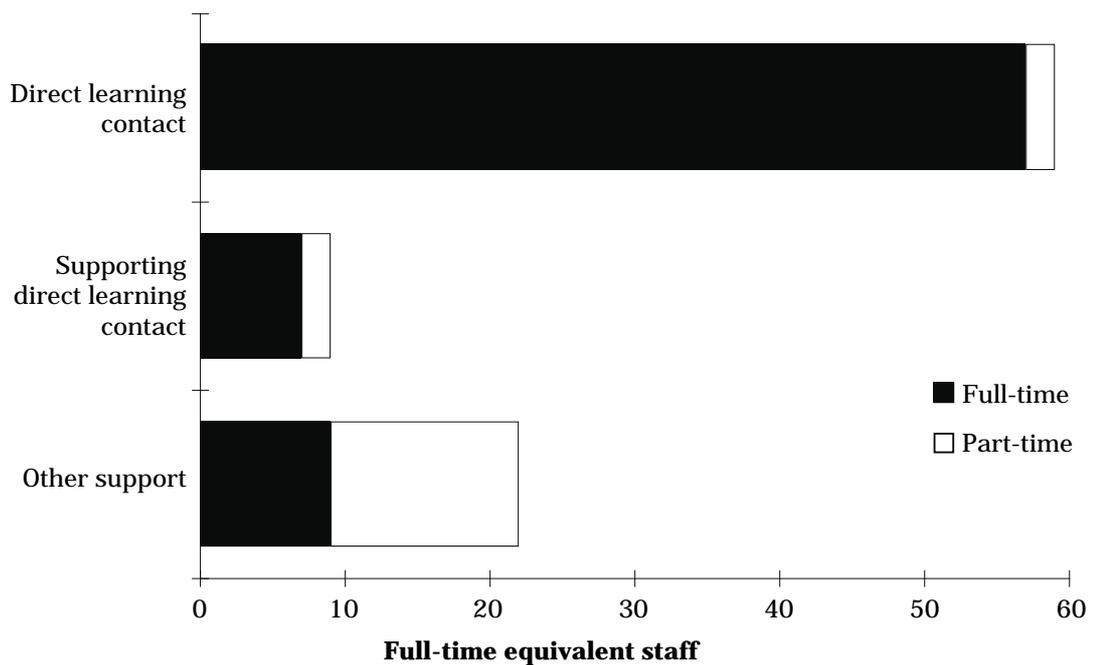


Enrolments: 3,832

Note: students are enrolled in more than one curriculum area.

Figure 4

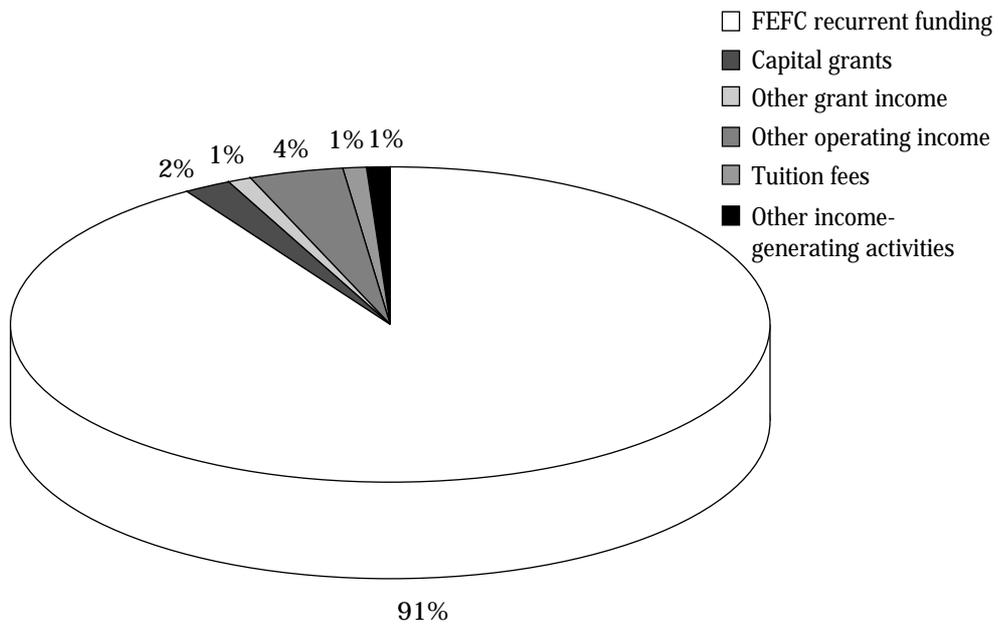
Thomas Rotherham College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1995)



Full-time equivalent staff: 90

Figure 5

Thomas Rotherham College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)

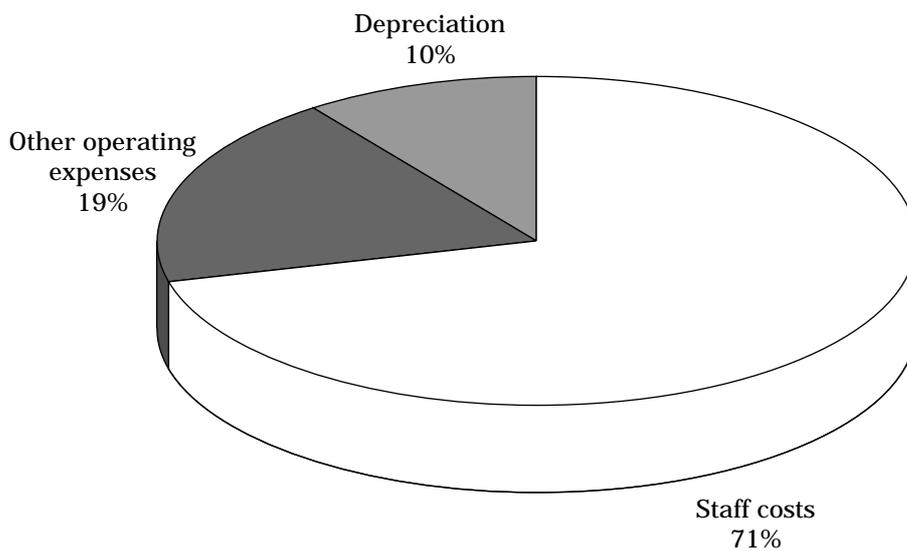


Income: £2,582,000

Note: this chart excludes £6,000 education contracts.

Figure 6

Thomas Rotherham College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £2,522,000

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