

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

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# **Amersham and Wycombe College**

**May 1996**

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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 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**

<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%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

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# FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 63/96

## AMERSHAM AND WYCOMBE COLLEGE

### EASTERN REGION

Inspected September 1995-February 1996

#### Summary

Amersham and Wycombe College offers a broad range of general and vocational courses, including extensive provision in art and design. It is expanding its courses for adults. The college is well managed. Governors are actively involved in the life of the college and the senior management draws effectively upon their expertise. The college's mission statement is clear and well understood by staff. Teaching is generally good. Most students work hard and conscientiously. Nearly all full-time students are given work placements. Staff are well qualified and benefit from a comprehensive programme of staff development. Quality assurance procedures are clear and effective. Accommodation and specialist equipment are of a generally high standard. The college needs to address the following issues: there are inadequate social facilities for students; there are few opportunities for students to progress from basic education courses; insufficient support is given to students who need help with literacy and numeracy; on some courses, the retention and pass rates of students are poor; the management information system does not meet the current needs of the college; there is scope for further implementation of policies on the curriculum, tutorial procedures and quality assurance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	2	Art and design	2
Business and management	3	Media and performing arts	2
Office technology	3	Humanities and modern languages	2
Leisure and tourism	2	Basic education	2
Health and social care	2		

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1 Amersham and Wycombe College, in Buckinghamshire, was inspected between September 1995 and February 1996. Enrolment and induction were inspected in September, most specialist programmes were inspected in November and December and cross-college aspects were inspected in February 1996. Inspectors spent 84 days in the college. A total of 224 teaching sessions were observed. Inspectors scrutinised students' work and held discussions with staff, students, parents, members of the corporation and representatives from local schools, industry, the local education authority, Thames Valley Enterprise, the community and higher education.

## **THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS**

2 Amersham and Wycombe College is a further education college with three main campuses in Amersham, High Wycombe and Chesham, respectively. It was established in 1972 by Buckinghamshire County Council as Amersham College of Further Education, Art and Design. For the first ten years the college was based on a single campus in Amersham and concentrated on providing general and vocational courses for school leavers, mainly in art and design and business studies. By the time of incorporation in 1993, it had expanded its provision across South Buckinghamshire, offering a range of general and vocational courses for school leavers and adults. In addition to work funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), the college offers four higher national diploma programmes funded by the Higher Education Funding Council (England). College staff also teach at prisons located in seven English counties.

3 The college serves a diverse community. According to the 1991 census, the resident population in the Chiltern, South Buckinghamshire and Wycombe local authority districts was approximately 310,000. The population is forecast to increase very slightly by the year 2000. The proportion of retired people is likely to grow whilst the proportion of those aged 17 to 28 is likely to remain fairly static. The area is well served by road and rail networks including the M40 and M25 motorways and the London Underground. Minority ethnic groups represent over 8 per cent of the population in the local authority district of Wycombe and between 2 and 4 per cent in other areas from which students are recruited.

4 The college competes with four other further education colleges and 20 schools with sixth forms within a 16-mile radius. In 1994, the percentage of 16 year olds continuing in full-time education in Buckinghamshire was just under 80 per cent. There are several major providers of higher education within the area. Links have been established with Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education, Brunel University, North East Wales Institute and Oxford Brookes University. Two of the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) higher national diploma courses are franchised from Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education.

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5 There have been major changes in the local economy during the last 15 years. During the period 1981-91 the number of jobs in Buckinghamshire increased at a higher rate than in any county in the south-east. There was a growth in employment in service industries such as insurance, retail distribution and hotel and catering but a contraction in employment in manufacturing. This coincided with a rapid expansion in part-time employment. In October 1995, unemployment in Buckinghamshire was 4.9 per cent which was below the national average of 7.8 per cent. Unemployment in the local authority districts served by the college ranged from 3.7 per cent in South Buckinghamshire to 4.8 per cent in Wycombe.

6 At the time of the inspection, the college had 8,134 enrolments of which 2,131 were full time and 6,003 were part time. During the last three years, enrolments of adults have increased but there has been a decline in enrolments of students aged 16 to 18. Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The curriculum of the college covers nine of the FEFC's programme areas. There are 378 full-time equivalent staff of whom 214 are teachers, 34 directly support learning (for example, technicians) and 130 have other support roles. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7 The college's mission is 'to produce and deliver learning programmes and related services which meet customer, market and business requirements'. The strategic plan 1994-97 places great emphasis on developing more efficient and effective business procedures which meet the needs of staff, students and external customers including employers and community groups. The aim of increasing the enrolments of part-time and adult students is also stressed.

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

8 Substantial progress has been made towards achieving the above aims. Customer services units located in the main reception areas of each campus were opened in April 1995. They provide a single point for responding to requests from students and other users of the college's services. Advice on education and training opportunities is also available through the college's guidance shop which is located in the central shopping area at High Wycombe and opens from Monday to Saturday. In 1994-95 over 6,000 people made use of this facility. During the inspection, community representatives, such as youth leaders, spoke positively about this service and its role in widening knowledge of training opportunities in the area.

9 In 1995-96, students aged 19 or over accounted for over 60 per cent of total enrolments. Modes of attendance and teaching methods on some courses have been designed to meet the needs of adults. For example, there is a series of intensive six-week courses entitled 'IT for women' which operate during school hours and enable adult students to improve

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their computing skills. There is also an established access to higher education programme which allows students without traditional entry qualifications to specialise in particular subjects such as art and design and social sciences. There is, however, scope for the college to develop more flexible ways of offering and timetabling its curriculum. More provision of open learning, for instance, would promote even wider participation, enabling some students to study, at times convenient to them, materials matched to their individual needs. There are no creches on any of the campuses.

10 The college's strategic plan places emphasis on the need to meet the national targets for education and training. With the help of one of the local training and enterprise councils (TECs), Thames Valley Enterprise, the college has refined its approach to gathering local labour market information. The TEC has conducted a survey of the ways in which local companies are making use of information technology so that the college can improve its response to current needs. Projects supported by the TEC have also led to the development of National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programmes involving joint training and assessment in the workplace. Examples include an NVQ in sports and recreation based at local leisure centres, an NVQ in retailing offered in conjunction with a local supermarket and an NVQ in caring provided through a consortium with 18 members from the private and public sectors. The college also has a substantial contract with Thames Valley Enterprise and a smaller contract with Hertfordshire TEC for youth training and work preparation.

11 Staff maintain effective liaison with industry through their supervision of students on work experience. Through a local Business Education Partnership scheme, the majority of full-time students obtain work placements. Students and employers are provided with clear guidelines on their respective roles and responsibilities during work placements. Four programme teams, business, media and performing arts, information technology, and leisure and tourism, benefit from having advisory panels which include employers. In most of the other curriculum areas such links are less developed. There is no overall co-ordination of liaison with employers.

12 Students are offered a wide choice of General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) courses in art, design, media and humanities. In these subject areas, students are able to combine related subjects and elements of vocational courses. For example, there is a pre-degree film and drama programme which enables students to combine theatre studies and film studies, at GCE A level, with the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 7700 course on video production and performance skills. All GCE A level students can also take English and mathematics at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level.

13 There is an extensive range of vocational courses at intermediate and advanced level for full-time and part-time students. The college was one



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of the largest pilot centres for the introduction of BTEC General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes. GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses are now offered in art and design, business, information technology applications, media studies, leisure and tourism and health and social care. There is also a good range of vocational diploma and certificate courses such as BTEC national diplomas in performing arts (music theatre), computer studies and nursery nursing and C&G certificates in photography, manicure, radio and journalism. In many curriculum areas, students can progress from intermediate to higher level courses. There are BTEC higher national diploma programmes in graphic design, textile design, performing arts and travel and tourism management and a BTEC higher national certificate in business and finance. There is a much smaller range of courses at foundation level; only one GNVQ foundation programme was running in 1995-96.

14 Although some students work for more than one award, there is no common timetable across the college which would facilitate study for more than one type of qualification. It is, for instance, unusual for students to combine GNVQ courses with GCE work or NVQ units.

15 Although the college competes strongly with local schools it has maintained co-operative relationships with them. It is a member of two consortia with local schools, one based around Amersham and Chesham and the other centred around High Wycombe. It co-ordinates the activities of one consortium and there are several effective staff and curricular links between the college and schools. For example students from local schools are able to take GCE A level subjects at the college, which are not offered in their own sixth forms. The college provides assessor and verifier training for school teachers involved with GNVQ courses.

16 Specialist programmes have been designed to meet the needs of specific groups in the community. The college has developed special courses in English and information technology for the Asian community in High Wycombe, with which it has strong links. Some of these courses are taught in the workplace. Others take place in community centres and one was taught in the local mosque.

17 The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enrolled on general and vocational courses is small. There are, however, well-established and specific courses for students with learning difficulties such as the 'focus' and 'spectrum' programmes. The opportunity for students to progress from these to other vocational courses is constrained by the lack of suitable provision at foundation level.

18 An extensive programme of education for HM Prisons is a distinctive feature of the college. General and vocational courses in prisons are funded through a substantial contract with the Home Office. College staff have contributed to the development of a proposed national curriculum for prisons.

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19 The college has designed and run several short courses in modern foreign languages for local industry. There is little provision of short courses in other curriculum areas.

20 The college is represented on two local racial equality councils. There is a comprehensive policy document with separate sections on the application of equal opportunities to recruitment, marketing and curriculum development.

### **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

21 The college is effectively governed by the corporation which fully understands its responsibilities. It focuses on strategic issues leaving the daily operation of the college to senior management. Board meetings are held six times a year and are well attended. Members of the senior management team attend corporation meetings to brief governors on specific aspects of the college's work. Governors also ensure they are informed on college matters by observing academic board meetings, attending students' union meetings on a rota basis, and events such as art exhibitions and award ceremonies. Appropriate committees have been established by the corporation covering finance, audit, personnel and remuneration. These committees have clear terms of reference and are responsible for most of the detailed work of the corporation. Meetings are properly recorded and there is a planned sequence of meetings which allows committee reports to be presented to meetings of the corporation.

22 Governors have a wide range of expertise. The corporation has 14 members including the principal, seven independent members from industry, commerce and the community, two co-opted members, one nomination from the local TEC, one member of staff and the president of the students' union. There is currently one vacancy. To ensure as wide a local representation as possible, the board has established a search committee to fill vacancies as they arise. Advertisements are placed in local newspapers and local companies and community groups are contacted. Applicants are interviewed by the committee which then makes recommendations to the board. Most new members receive an appropriate induction to the college. All members have signed an approved code of conduct and a register of members' interests is maintained.

23 The principal took up his post in October 1993. He is supported by a senior management team of six directors. They are responsible, respectively, for: curriculum and quality, estates and central services, finance and information services, marketing and planning, operations and customer services, and personnel. Five of the directors also have line management responsibilities for programme team leaders. There are 13 programme team leaders based on the three campuses, most of whom have a substantial timetable of teaching each week. They are each responsible for planning and resourcing courses and for managing teaching staff in their curriculum area. Over the past year the college has also established a team of managers called the curriculum group, whose

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role is to formulate curriculum, student guidance and quality assurance policies.

24 Progress with implementing these policies has been uneven. Communication with programme team leaders working on three campuses has not always been successful and there is variation in the extent to which common policies are adopted. This is particularly apparent where the same course is offered on different campuses. For example, there is a difference between the teaching of core skills on GNVQ leisure and tourism courses at High Wycombe where communication and numeracy skills are developed and assessed solely through general assignments, and at Chesham, where these skills are taught and assessed through workshop sessions.

25 The senior management team recognises the importance of improving communication throughout the college. There was extensive consultation with staff over the definition of the current college mission and the emphasis it places on responding to the needs of students. The mission is now widely understood by staff. Working groups of teaching and support staff have been created to carry forward initiatives which support the college's mission. For example, a working party led by the quality assurance manager has recently analysed the rates of retention in different subjects and has reported to the principal and academic board. Staff expressed their concern about the need for the proper management of accommodation and equipment on the three main sites. Senior management responded by appointing managers for operations on each campus. These managers are responsible for making the best use of accommodation, improving campus facilities and arranging events such as open evenings. They have been effective in the proper allocation of rooms and facilities to staff and students and their role is widely supported.

26 The senior management team is increasing the involvement of all staff in the development of the strategic plan. Staff below senior management level had little involvement in the production of the 1994-97 strategic plan. The revised planning process incorporates procedures for involving programme team leaders and course co-ordinators. Other teams of staff such as the curriculum group, are also drawn into the process. The college's strategic plan is clear and concise and includes measurable objectives and targets. Corporation members consider the recommendations submitted by senior management and agree the objectives in the strategic plan.

27 The college achieved growth in funding units of just over 6 per cent in 1994-95. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 is £19.09 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £17.84. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. In 1995-96 the college has enrolled fewer full-time students than it expected and recognises that it may not fully achieve its target for growth. Adjustments have been made to this

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year's proposed expenditure to reflect the expected loss in income from the FEFC.

28 The corporation chairman and members of the finance committee receive regular financial reports. Money for small items of equipment, for materials and for part-time teaching staff has been allocated to programme team leaders based on a formula weighted according to student numbers. Programme team leaders also make bids for allocations from the capital budget. Budget holders receive monthly financial reports.

29 The college acknowledges that its management information system needs improvement. The senior management team has identified the requirements for a new computer system following extensive consultation with different groups of users. Currently there are separate systems for enquiries about students, enrolments, registers, finance, personnel and staff development. Not all of these systems are linked and there is no electronic transfer of data. As a result, it is not always possible to track students from application and enrolment to completion of their courses. Relevant and reliable student data are not yet available to managers and teaching staff throughout the year.

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

30 Responsibility for ensuring that students have access to effective guidance and support is shared by several managers. Programme team leaders are responsible for the induction of students and the operation of the tutorial system. Staff from the customer services units provide initial advice on choice of courses and deal with enquiries, applications and enrolments. Within this unit there is also an additional needs co-ordinator who organises support for students with disabilities or dyslexia. In addition, there is a manager of additional support for learners who is responsible, to the director of curriculum and quality, for developing common tutorial and guidance procedures. This division of responsibilities makes it difficult to ensure that students receive a consistently high standard of support.

31 Procedures for admissions and providing advice to students before they enrol on courses are generally effective. Advisers from the customer services units assist students with applications for grants and provide advice on courses, accommodation and transport. Guidance interviews are carried out for all full-time students using a common recording system to ensure that the details of individual students are efficiently recorded. Application and enrolment forms contain special symbols to alert specialist staff about students' needs for additional support. Students can also enrol at the guidance shop in High Wycombe. Information on courses is contained in leaflets and a part-time course directory but there is no single college publication which describes the courses, campuses, and facilities of the whole college.

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32 The transition of students from school to the college is eased through a series of 'taster days'. These are designed for year 11 pupils in order that they can sample courses and gain an appreciation of the specialist subjects and facilities offered by the college. Tutors and staff from the customer services units also attend open evenings in local schools to publicise courses. Through its membership of schools consortia, staff from the college are able to meet careers teachers to discuss provision for school leavers and the arrangements for their progression from school to college.

33 There are common guidelines for the induction of students which include a checklist for tutors and a questionnaire for students. During induction students receive information on the student charter, college regulations, the tutorial system and the teaching and learning standards the college seeks to uphold. The effectiveness of induction sessions observed was variable. College guidelines were not always followed. In some lessons, specialist teaching commenced immediately with no overview of the course or explanation of assessment requirements. In the better lessons, tutors made skilful use of the college guidelines and group discussions were employed to clarify issues and build up the students' confidence. If necessary, students may change courses or subjects with relative ease and are helped to do so, in the early stages, by the study tutors.

34 Although the college has developed a common process for accrediting the prior learning of students, its use is only evident in a few curriculum areas such as business administration.

35 Additional support for students requiring specialist help with basic literacy and numeracy is limited. A screening test to determine literacy and numeracy ability was introduced for all full-time students in 1995-96. As a result of this, over 1,000 students were screened at induction and almost 250 were identified as requiring support in numeracy or reading. Study tutors were informed about the needs of their tutees but there has been limited specialist follow-up support to improve students' capabilities.

36 There is good support for students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are one-to-one tutorials and examination dispensations are arranged for students with dyslexia. Regular use is made of specialist assessment by an external educational psychologist and there is a specialist tutor for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

37 There is a tutorial policy which sets out the duties of tutors and a handbook to assist with the planning of tutorial activities. The college charter makes a commitment to providing students with help and guidance throughout their programmes. The quality of tutorial support provided for students is variable. The central guidelines are implemented by programme teams who decide the frequency and content of tutorials. This leads to good practice on some courses. For example, on many GNVQ advanced courses, students' progress is reviewed systematically and they

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are set clear objectives. In contrast, on many part-time courses, little time is devoted to tutorial activities despite the evident needs of adult students for help with the development of study skills. Procedures for monitoring the quality of tutorials have not yet been introduced.

38 Students are able to make appointments to see the college counsellor or a careers adviser through the customer services units. The college counselling service is well publicised and provides a confidential and flexible service to students. Students can also seek advice from a specialist careers adviser from Buckinghamshire Careers Service. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have access to a careers adviser who specialises in this area.

39 Students do not receive systematic guidance about progression to higher education or employment as part of their tutorial programme. They are reliant on their study tutors for references and for advice on how to apply for university entrance. This system works effectively when students are clear about their career goals and tutors have a good knowledge of specific courses in higher education. The resource centre at Amersham contains a section which contains appropriate information on careers, including computer-based data on university courses.

40 Procedures for monitoring attendance and dealing with persistent absence are unclear. There is inconsistent practice amongst teachers. At the start of the 1995-96 year, the college introduced a central monitoring system. This produced regular reports for study tutors and ensured that full-time students with three or more unexplained absences received a standard letter. At the time of the inspection, this practice had ceased and teaching staff were adopting different approaches to following up the absence of students.

41 The work of the students' union is well supported. It has a growing role in encouraging the participation of students in social activities. The president and student committee members are advised by a student liaison officer.

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

42 Inspectors observed a total of 224 teaching sessions. In 59 per cent of the sessions the strengths outweighed the weaknesses. In 12 per cent of the sessions the weaknesses outweighed the strengths. The following table summarises the grades given for the teaching sessions inspected.

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

<b>Programmes</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Totals</b>
GCE AS/A level		10	21	13	7	1	52
GCSE		3	7	2	0	0	12
GNVQ		10	24	23	12	2	71
NVQ		2	1	1	0	0	4
Vocational diploma and certificate		13	20	11	2	0	46
Higher education and access to higher education		4	12	8	2	0	26
Basic education		1	5	6	1	0	13
<b>Total</b>		<b>43</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>224</b>

43 During the inspection, the number of students attending classes as a percentage of those on register varied from 58 per cent on GCSE courses to 77 per cent on basic education programmes. The average attendance was 71 per cent. Work of a consistently high standard was observed in courses for teacher trainers and in English for speakers of other languages. The standard of teaching was more varied on the GNVQ and GCE A level programmes.

44 In mathematics and science, teaching on GCE A level and GCSE courses was supported by comprehensive schemes of work. The explanation of theory was handled skilfully to meet the needs of students with a wide range of ability, and attractive handouts were employed to clarify difficult concepts. Work was regularly set and marked and returned to students with helpful comments. The work of some students taking GCE A level science subjects was sometimes incomplete and used scientific terminology inappropriately. In practical sessions, teachers did not always fully explain the task at the beginning of experiments and consequently students did not gain maximum benefit from work in the laboratory. Little use was made of information technology facilities to analyse experimental data in science teaching. There is scope for greater integration of information technology applications with the teaching and learning of GCE A level biology, chemistry and physics. In some mathematics lessons, computer applications were used to good effect. For example, a spreadsheet was used by a teacher to demonstrate the principles of multiplying matrices. By projecting the spreadsheet from the computer onto a large screen, the teacher was able to show the effects of different calculations to the whole class. Most teachers presented their subject matter in a stimulating way. In a small number of lessons, the teacher did not give enough attention to checking that the students understood what they had learnt. In such lessons, the majority of students remained silent

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and the teacher made little attempt to encourage participation by asking questions or organising work in groups.

45 Students on courses in computer studies had good access to modern equipment and industry-standard software. As a result, they were able to carry out useful assignment work on their own with helpful guidance, when necessary, from their teachers. Adult students were highly motivated by this method of organising and directing their own learning and they developed good analytical and practical skills. There was a friendly and relaxed atmosphere in the lessons and students felt confident of securing help and guidance from their teachers, when required. In a few classes, however, teaching and learning were disrupted by the late arrival of some students.

46 In several lessons on management courses, teachers drew upon the work experience of students and the expertise of local employers. For example, two employers from the local branch of the Institute of Personnel and Development organised a business game during an evening class for part-time students studying for the certificate in personnel practice. Competing teams of students were given the task of designing a simple product. To complete this successfully, each team had to analyse data on human and physical resources, work to an agreed budget and present their proposals to a panel comprising tutors and the employers. Students participated enthusiastically and learnt about the importance of cost constraints and human factors in decision making. Teaching was less imaginative and varied in some accountancy and marketing lessons and students were not always given homework.

47 Students were given a clear understanding of the teaching, learning and assessment methods on the courses for GNVQ business. Students were encouraged to work on their own and to develop comprehensive and well-organised portfolios of their projects and assessed work. In the best practice, teachers ensured that the students' work, carried out individually and in groups, was properly structured and that the students fully understood their objectives. In one example of imaginative lesson planning, students on a course leading to qualifications of The Chartered Institute of Marketing carried out a project in which they identified the marketing role within their own companies. After completing an investigation, students compared the management structures of their own organisation and extended their knowledge by drawing upon one another's experience. In a few lessons, teaching and learning were inadequately planned and the tasks carried out by the students did not sufficiently match the course objectives. The quality of teaching in GCE A level business studies was variable. In one particularly effective evening class, the teacher sustained the interest of the adult students by skilful questioning technique and dexterous use of highly-effective visual aids. By contrast, in some full-time GCE A level lessons, the teacher spent most of the time dictating notes on information the students could have discovered for themselves. Attendance was often poor at such lessons; the students who were present



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were subdued and the teacher made little attempt to check if they understood the notes they were taking down.

48 The teaching on secretarial and office technology courses was generally methodical and well organised. Workshop activities in wordprocessing, audio typing and information technology were well structured, giving students the opportunity to enhance their skills in information technology. Teachers provided detailed and careful assessment to part-time students following NVQ programmes and co-operated with supervisors from the workplace to assess the students' competence against NVQ standards. Some full-time secretarial programmes were too fragmented and teachers made insufficient effort to help students relate different course elements to one another. In some lessons, the layout and presentation of handouts were poor and unbusinesslike.

49 Assignments on the GNVQ courses in leisure and tourism were carefully prepared to ensure that the students exercised a range of practical and analytical skills. The students' assignment work was attractively presented. Through effective timetabling, there was a proper balance between presentations by the teacher and sessions when learning was reinforced and consolidated by students, working on tasks individually or in groups. For example, following a presentation by the teacher on tourist attractions, the students were required to work out the meaning of 35 international tourist symbols. Students benefited from a programme of work placements, visits to industry and a residential event. There is scope for teachers to ensure that the core skills of the application of number, communication and information technology are more fully integrated with the whole course. The separate timetabling of core skills on a rota system by which students are given alternative blocks of 'communication' and 'application of number' needs to be reviewed. There is some absenteeism by students from these core skill lessons. Furthermore, the emphasis given to core skills as separate, rather than integrated subjects, means that some students are disenchanted by having to do work they have done before or are unable to develop these skills progressively.

50 Core skills in communication and information technology were taught as an integral part of many other GNVQ courses. Some GNVQ students worked on their own in information technology workshops using wordprocessing, database and spreadsheet applications. The development of the core skill in the application of number was less effective on all GNVQ courses and students were often given numerical tasks which were unrelated to a vocational context or occupational area.

51 On health and community care courses, teaching was well planned. The assessment of students' work was careful and thorough. Students displayed enthusiasm for their subject and a strong motivation to learn. Group activities had clear objectives and they were well managed to ensure that students exercised and developed an extensive range of practical

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skills. In a lesson on lifting patients, the class saw and discussed a video on the dangers of bad techniques in lifting. The teacher then made good use of role-play to reinforce learning. Students worked in pairs and in turn acted the respective roles of patient and nurse. The teacher drew upon her professional experience to highlight actual problems in the world of work. In a few instances, learning was not effective because the content of the lesson was insufficiently related to the overall aims of the course. For example, in a lesson on the use of statistics in health research, the teacher described techniques for measuring standard deviation. Little attempt was made, however, to show how this measure could be employed for analysing patterns of illness. As a result, the students failed to see the vocational relevance of what they had learnt. The attendance rates for a few classes were poor.

52 Students on GNVQ advanced and BTEC foundation courses in art and design had good opportunities to develop expertise and skills in specialisms such as photography, fashion and three-dimensional design. Teachers ensured that their students had plenty of experience in working with different materials. Projects and assignments were generally demanding and gave the students scope to be creative within the limitations of time and available resources. Students were encouraged to prepare portfolios of their work to show future employers and admissions tutors in higher education. Teachers gave students detailed feedback on the quality of their work. In some lessons, insufficient attention was paid to the planning and review of project work.

53 Lessons in the performing arts and media studies were well planned. The tone of lessons was relaxed and friendly and led to effective discussion and good teamwork. Students on the GNVQ advanced course in media studies made good use of the well-equipped television studio to plan, produce and present a programme. Students on GCE A level film and theatre studies courses gained valuable experience through performing in theatrical productions both in the United Kingdom and abroad. For example, one student group took part in an open air production in the amphitheatre at Epidauros in Greece. On the GNVQ programmes, insufficient attention was devoted to the development of core skills in communication and numeracy.

54 Many English and modern foreign language classes were enriched by lively teaching and the use of challenging learning materials. Teachers of French, German and Spanish often conducted sessions in the language being studied, encouraging students to build up confidence in their conversation and oral skills. Students made good use of audio and video tapes and extracts from foreign newspapers to develop their vocabulary and gain a familiarity with contemporary usage of the language. Handouts and visual aids were also used to good effect in English and communication. For example, GCE A level English students benefited from a detailed study guide to one of Shakespeare's plays. The guide contained suitable

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quotations, summaries and a critical commentary. GCE A level English students produced original pieces of writing of a high standard. A few lessons lacked variety and did not hold the students' attention. In some lessons, learning would have been better enriched and consolidated if teachers had made fuller use of the wide range of resources available for English and modern languages. There is scope for more sharing of good practice and ideas on effective teaching and learning between experienced teachers and new members of staff, including those who are employed part time.

55 In history and archaeology, copies of maps, original documents, and slides were used to give students a deeper understanding of the period being studied. For example, photographic slides of archaeological excavations illustrated the importance of site and situation in determining the location of human settlements. Nineteenth-century maps and documents were used in a GCE A level class on North American history to show how quickly frontiers changed during the period of western expansion in the United States. In GCE A level psychology presentations by students on different theories of human perception formed the basis of some lively class discussion. Although many lessons in sociology and psychology were well managed, schemes of work were usually little more than lists of topics and contained no guidance to students on homework or assessment. On the full-time GCE A level and GCSE programmes, there was an inconsistent approach to developing study and essential skills, such as note taking and information technology.

56 The development of skills in numeracy, literacy, information technology, research and private study were an integral part of the access course to higher education and fostered the students' self-confidence. Students on the access course established targets for themselves against which they compared and evaluated their progress. In teacher education, students were encouraged to assess their work critically. The teachers on the teacher education course served as role models of good practice for their students. For example, in a lesson for teachers of students with learning difficulties, the lecturer effectively demonstrated how repetitive and visual techniques can improve basic spelling and grammar.

57 Teachers of students with learning difficulties have positive working relationships with the students. The separate specialist courses for students with moderate learning difficulties, such as the 'focus foundation' and the 'spectrum programmes', include a period of work placement to prepare students for employment. Students were provided with challenging tasks and teachers used direct questions skilfully to make them discuss their work experience and life in general. In some instances, the students' assignments were not broken down into manageable tasks and were pitched at an inappropriate level. Some classes involved teachers from the college working with staff from external agencies and although this resulted in good pastoral support for students it did not always promote learning. For example, during a practical cookery class, students were

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given assistance by accompanying officers from daycare centres. This resulted in too much emphasis being placed upon the completion of the tasks set by the teacher and insufficient emphasis was given to helping the students to learn from their own mistakes. English for speakers of other languages was taught skilfully and sensitively. For example, in a lesson on a course designed specially for Asian women, the teacher's knowledge of the students' language and culture led to a valuable and exciting discussion in class. Students participated in this confidently and, as a result, they improved their pronunciation and grammar.

### **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

58 Students enjoyed their work and in most classes applied themselves conscientiously to it. On GNVQ and NVQ programmes, they were encouraged to set their own targets against the assessment requirements for the course. Tutors worked closely with them and provided constructive advice on how to record their achievements using portfolios of evidence.

59 Pass rates for full-time students on vocational courses were variable in 1995. Results on two-year diploma courses were generally good. An average of 93 per cent of students in their final year of BTEC national diplomas in information technology applications, computer studies, media studies and foundation art and design gained the full award. This was significantly better than on GNVQ advanced programmes, where the comparable pass rate was 71 per cent. Pass rates on many one-year vocational programmes were poor. Fewer than 50 per cent of students on GNVQ intermediate programmes in art and design, business, science and information technology achieved the qualification. On the BTEC GNVQ foundation in business, of eight students enrolled on the course, not one achieved the full award. The performance tables for further education sector colleges for 1995 issued by the Department for Education and Employment show that 73 per cent of the 325 full-time students aged 16 to 18 in their final year of study on vocational courses obtained the full award. This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this measure of performance.

60 In 1995, there were 615 entries for GCE A level examinations in 28 subjects. The overall pass rate was 76 per cent. This compares favourably with the average pass rate for further education colleges (not including sixth form colleges) of 72 per cent in 1994, the last year for which this figure is available. Pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 at GCE A level, where 138 students were entered for two or more GCE A levels, varied considerably between subjects. Pass rates were above the national average in art, biology, computer studies, English language, mathematics, media studies, psychology and physics. In GCE A level art a 100 per cent pass rate has been achieved for each of the last three years. Pass rates were below the national average in business studies, chemistry, dance, French, geography, history, law, sociology and sports studies. Students aged 16 to 18 who entered for GCE advanced supplementary (AS) and GCE A level

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examinations in 1995 scored, on average, 3.4 points per subject entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this measure of performance, based on the data in the 1995 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. Adult students performed significantly better in GCE A level examinations. Thirty-five students aged 19 or over were entered for two or more subjects. They scored, on average, 4.2 points per subject entry.

61 In 1995, there were 254 entries for GCSE subjects from full-time students aged 16 to 18 and 279 entries from part-time students. Full-time students included those on GCE A level and vocational courses retaking English and/or mathematics. Success rates were poor for this group. Thirteen per cent obtained grades A to C in mathematics which compared with a provisional national average in 1995 of 26 per cent, for this age group in further education and tertiary colleges, and a rate of 35 per cent in English compared with a corresponding national rate of 44 per cent. Part-time students, mainly adults studying GCSE courses during the evening, achieved good results in many subjects. For example, 74 per cent of the 51 students entered for English and 45 per cent of the 53 students entered for mathematics obtained grades A to C. Levels of achievement were high in French, German, Spanish and psychology where over 70 per cent of students achieved grades A to C. All of these results were at or above the national averages for students aged 19 or over.

62 Adults on the counselling, teacher education and personnel management courses also achieved some good results. For example, there were pass rates of over 85 per cent on the C&G further and adult education teaching certificate, the certificate in personnel practice and on many individual counselling awards. Pass rates for students following marketing, legal executive and accountancy qualifications were more variable. For example, only a fifth of students enrolled upon the Institute of Legal Executive's (part 1) course gained the award. In contrast, pass rates for examinations leading to the Chartered Institute of Marketing certificate were well above the national average.

63 Figures provided by the college show that the overall retention rates on two-year full-time programmes in 1995 were 68 per cent on GNVQ advanced courses and 79 per cent on GCE A level and BTEC national diploma courses. These percentages are based on measuring student retention over a two-year period. The retention rates on one-year vocational programmes varied from an average of 72 per cent on GNVQ intermediate courses and specialist secretarial diplomas to 81 per cent on the access to higher education courses.

64 Many groups of students from across the college gained experience of participating in major national events during 1994 and 1995. Students following advanced GNVQ courses made presentations to national conferences of university admission tutors on their experience of

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assessment and also took part in BBC radio and television productions. Media and performing arts students were selected from over 200 entries to the Lloyds Bank Theatre Challenge to perform *Marat Sade* at the Royal National Theatre. There were also some examples of outstanding individual achievements. For example a student from the focus course was selected by the UK Sports Association for People with a Learning Difficulty for the English Athletics Team competing in the Four Nations Championship.

65 There were good rates of progression to further education, higher education and employment in many curriculum areas. For example, over 79 per cent of students completing the access to higher education programme in 1995 progressed to degree or higher diploma courses. Sixty-five per cent of students who successfully completed GCE A levels progressed to another further education course or to higher education. Just under half of the students completing advanced GNVQ and BTEC national diplomas went on to higher education. Most students completing vocational programmes at foundation and intermediate levels continued in further education. The destinations of students in further and higher education and employment are published annually, together with information on examination results.

#### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

66 There is a strong commitment from senior management to improving the quality of provision. There are well-documented policies and systems for reviewing courses, subjects and the services provided by the college. The director of curriculum and quality has overall responsibility for quality assurance and is assisted by a quality assurance manager who liaises with programme team leaders and other staff.

67 A self-assessment report for the college as a whole was produced by the senior management team under the headings in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report is a long and substantial document which clearly identifies the evidence on which judgements are based. It identifies strengths and areas for development although these are not placed in any order of priority. Most of the judgements arrived at through self-assessment concurred with the findings of inspection.

68 During the last year the quality assurance system has been extended and linked more closely to strategic planning. Each programme team leader is required to produce an annual self-assessment report which draws upon annual review documentation from course teams. These reports use a common format based upon the headings and criteria in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Self-assessment reports have also been produced for many areas of activity across the college such as student services and staff development. The presentation of these reports in a common format of strengths and areas for development provides clear benchmarks with which to chart progress over the year. To

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improve the process further, the college recognises that it needs to measure its progress against clear performance indicators for each programme area, supported by reliable management information.

69 The reports from each programme area are scrutinised by a standards committee which takes an overview of quality issues. During 1995-96 this committee has played a useful role in identifying common issues of concern and working with programme teams to improve practice. A recent example is the attempt to introduce common tutorial procedures by agreeing new guidelines and mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of tutorials. The committee reports formally to the academic board but the role and influence of the board in taking these issues forwards are unclear.

70 The views of students are gathered through their answers to questionnaires distributed three times a year. The responses of students are analysed by a computerised optical scanning system and reports are made available to programme team leaders and campus operations managers. Students are also able to discuss issues related to teaching, learning and resources with teaching staff through a system of course committees. There is some evidence of action in response to concerns raised through these channels. For example, disquiet about the lack of specialist resources at the Chesham campus, for the GNVQ intermediate course in art and design, was addressed by transferring the course to the Amersham campus from January 1996. More general disquiet in 1994-95 about the lack of sufficient information technology facilities across the three sites was taken into account through substantial upgrading and expansion of computing facilities in 1995-96.

71 Common procedures have been introduced to check the consistency of internal assessment on NVQ and GNVQ programmes. There is a college internal verification panel which has the remit of standardising assessment procedures across curriculum areas. Guidelines have been developed which identify the roles of internal verifiers and the process for checking standards of marking. There is also a well-defined procedure for responding to the reports of external moderators, verifiers and examiners.

72 The customer services units on each campus play a useful role in responding to students' day-to-day concerns, for example about the allocation of classrooms and refectory facilities. Students' complaints are channelled through these units and there is a well-publicised procedure for handling students' complaints. Complaints are recorded and regular monitoring reports indicate how they have been resolved.

73 As required by the national charter for further education, statements of the college charter are given to all students. Key points from the charter are contained in a learning agreement which students receive and sign during the induction period. Students are represented on a charter panel which assesses the extent to which charter commitments are implemented. There is scope for raising the profile of the charter within the college as a benchmark for assessing standards of provision.

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74 Staff development is linked to the priorities in the strategic plan and meets both institutional and individual needs. The stated aim of staff-development policy is to enhance the quality of service to the customer through the enhancement of staff learning and development. A wide ranging programme of in-house staff-development activities is co-ordinated by the college's staff-development manager. This includes a substantial programme of assessor and verifier training for all staff who teach on GNVQ and NVQ programmes. An emphasis is also placed on updating staff skills through short-term secondments to industry. During 1995-96, 27 staff, including the principal, will be involved in short industrial and commercial placements. Some staff have been involved in curriculum activities at a national level; for example, the curriculum development manager is seconded to the National Council for Vocational Qualifications for two days a week.

75 A staff-appraisal system has been operating since March 1993 and, at the time of the inspection, approximately half of the full-time staff had participated in an appraisal interview. The system has not yet fully been successful in achieving its aims of clarifying individual job roles and identifying staff-development needs. The college has made a commitment to achieve Investors in People status by the end of March 1996. A statement of intent has been signed with Thames Valley Enterprise and work is well under way.

76 Staff are aware of issues related to the promotion of equal opportunities through a comprehensive programme of briefings. The 1995-96 programme has included sessions on dyslexia, deafness and ethnicity.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Staffing**

77 Staff are generally well qualified for the work they undertake. Over 70 per cent of teaching staff and 30 per cent of support staff have a degree or advanced level professional qualification. Approximately three-quarters of teaching staff have a teaching qualification. A high proportion of teachers in vocational areas have achieved, or are working towards, the assessor/verifier qualifications required to support NVQ and GNVQ programmes. In most areas there is an appropriate balance of part-time and full-time staff. Approximately 18 per cent of teaching is by part-time staff, who are generally well integrated with specialist teaching teams. They receive a useful information pack about the college and regular briefings are organised at college and course levels to inform them about current curriculum developments.

78 Well-qualified and experienced professional and administrative staff support the teaching. There is a specialist personnel team which co-ordinates staff development, training and payroll functions. Part-time staff have a named individual in personnel with whom they liaise for advice



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and support. A professional counselling service is provided for staff, including those involved in prison education. Staff value the availability of this support. Technicians are managed centrally and allocated to specialist curriculum areas as the pressure of work demands. Whilst this system provides adequate support for most specialist curriculum areas, there is insufficient technical support for art and design and computing. Receptionists at the three campuses provide a welcoming and efficient service. There is insufficient administrative support provided for programme team leaders.

### **Equipment/learning resources**

79 There are learning resource centres on each campus which contain computing facilities including compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases, audio-visual aids and books and periodicals. Sixty per cent of the total bookstock of 50,000 is held in the resource centre at the Amersham campus. Information on books and periodicals is maintained on a computer database at Amersham and students benefit from an efficient loan system which operates across all sites. A manager for additional learner resources is responsible for co-ordinating resources across the college. The tutor librarian and learning resource assistants liaise with teaching staff on the choice of bookstock and other resources. In many curriculum areas the supply of books and periodicals is adequate for students' needs, but it is too limited in computing, business and management. There is an extensive range of specialist art and design books. There are insufficient facilities for quiet study within the resource centres.

80 Approximately 406 computers of recent manufacture are used by students, giving a ratio of one machine to 6.5 full-time equivalent students. There has been substantial expenditure recently on upgrading information technology equipment. This has led to a good level of support for timetabled lessons and the development of specialist facilities to support art and design, media and specialist computing courses. There is limited access to machines for private study at times convenient to students, and standard software packages such as wordprocessor, spreadsheet and databases are not available on all machines.

81 There is sufficient equipment in most subject areas to support teaching and learning. Teaching rooms are equipped with overhead projectors and whiteboards. Television and video equipment is shared between the campuses. The office technology section at High Wycombe is well equipped with computers and industry-standard software although there is a limited range of general office equipment for use by students. The hairdressing and beauty salons at High Wycombe provide realistic work environments and offer a service to members of the public. At Chesham there is a well-resourced travel information centre. There is generally a good range of specialist equipment to support art and design courses at the Amersham campus. For example, in textile design there is

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good-quality specialist equipment for print, knit and a range of fabric construction techniques. The theatre and television studios are equipped to a professional standard. Rehearsal space and changing facilities for performing arts students are insufficient at times of heavy usage during the day.

### **Accommodation**

82 The college is based on three main sites at Amersham, Chesham and High Wycombe. They are in attractive locations surrounded by grassland and playing fields. There is extensive parking on all sites although it is stretched to capacity at peak times. An industrial unit, the Cressex Centre, at High Wycombe is used for motor vehicle and electrical installation courses. The Amersham campus, which was erected as a purpose-built college in 1972, occupies the largest site (7.8 hectares) and houses the majority of senior managers and administrative staff. The High Wycombe (5.5 hectares) and Chesham (4.4 hectares) sites have been converted from former secondary schools. All three campuses have been extensively refurbished and are well maintained. Classrooms and corridors are generally clean and furniture in most rooms is appropriate. The usage of rooms is monitored on a regular basis and utilisation of space is efficient. The standard of accommodation for teaching and learning at the Chesham campus which was opened in 1993, is particularly good.

83 There is a high standard of specialist accommodation for art and design, media and performing arts at the Amersham campus. This includes television and editing suites and photography, ceramics, sculpture and dance studios. There are also large workshops for fashion and textiles, printing and graphic design. Productions by students are staged in the 'Theatre on the Hill' which seats about 170. The 100-seat lecture theatre is used flexibly and provides a good venue for film shows. There is also an amphitheatre which is used for theatrical productions and by the students' union for concerts. There is a well-resourced music technology studio although there is a shortage of practice rooms for music. Innovative and good use has been made of the available space. A mezzanine was built above reception at Amersham which houses customer services and four small meeting rooms.

84 Access to some parts of the accommodation is limited for wheelchair users. The corridors on the Amersham campus are long with changes in level and heavy doors. There is no lift and in the south block students using wheelchairs are unable to reach customer services and some rooms. All the ground floor areas are accessible on the Chesham campus, but heavy doors impede free movement and there is no lift to the upper floor. Movement around the High Wycombe campus is difficult as there are multi-level buildings located on a sloping site. The tower block which houses many general classrooms and the office technology suite, is inaccessible to students using wheelchairs as it has no lift. The college has undertaken a detailed survey of the three sites and has made a number of alterations to improve access for students with disabilities.

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85 The Amersham and High Wycombe campuses have few recreational and social facilities for students. There are no student common rooms. Refectory services are poor and, as there are no other facilities, they are used as social areas by students and often become overcrowded. There is no sports hall at Amersham and students seldom use the college playing fields for sport.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

86 The particular strengths of the college are:

- its links with local community groups
- its specialist provision in art, design, media and performing arts
- the expertise of its governors and their commitment to the college
- its open and consultative style of management
- its clear mission statement which is well understood by staff
- its effective initial guidance for students
- its well-documented and comprehensive quality assurance procedures
- the successful teaching and learning on most courses
- the high levels of achievement in GCE A level art and media studies
- its arrangements for work experience for full-time students
- the extensive opportunities for staff development
- its well-qualified and committed teaching and support staff
- some high-quality specialist accommodation and equipment.

87 If it is to build upon its existing strengths the college should address the following issues:

- the limited opportunities for students to progress from basic education to foundation level courses
- the partial implementation of curriculum and quality assurance policies
- the variable quality of student guidance through induction and tutorials
- the insufficient specialist support for some students with identified literacy and numeracy problems
- the low retention and pass rates on some full-time courses
- the capacity of management information systems to inform planning and monitoring
- the limited social facilities for students.

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## FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1995-96)

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  - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1995-96)

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  - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1995-96)

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  - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)

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  - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

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  - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

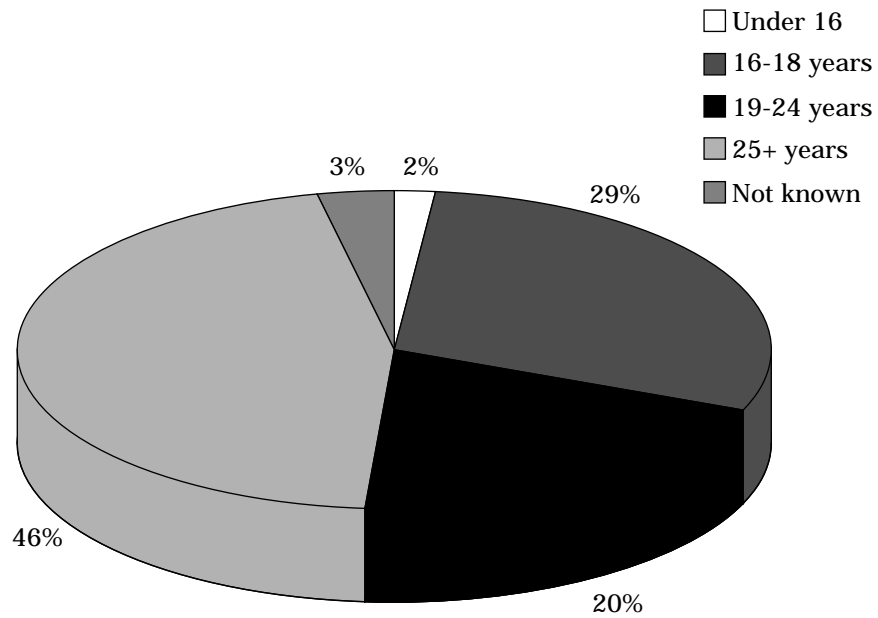
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**Figure 1**

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**Amersham and Wycombe College: percentage enrolments by age (1995-96)**



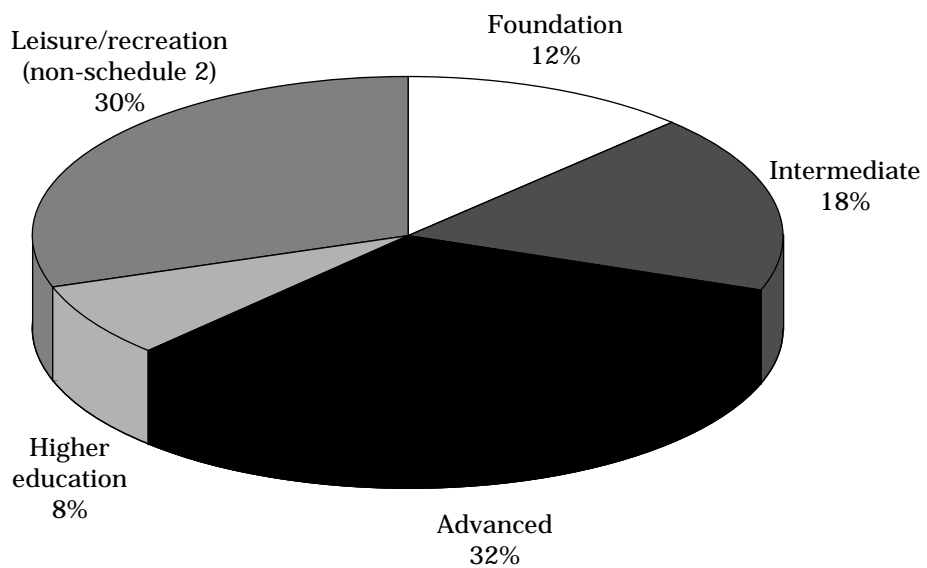
Enrolments: 8,134

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**Figure 2**

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**Amersham and Wycombe College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1995-96)**

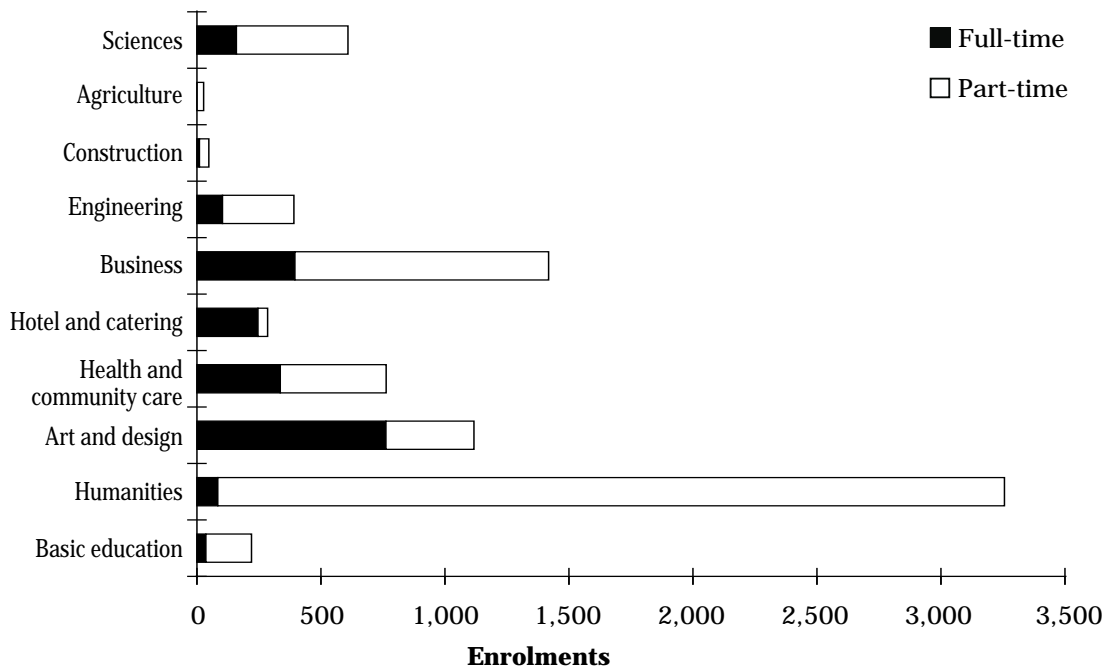


Enrolments: 8,134

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**Figure 3**

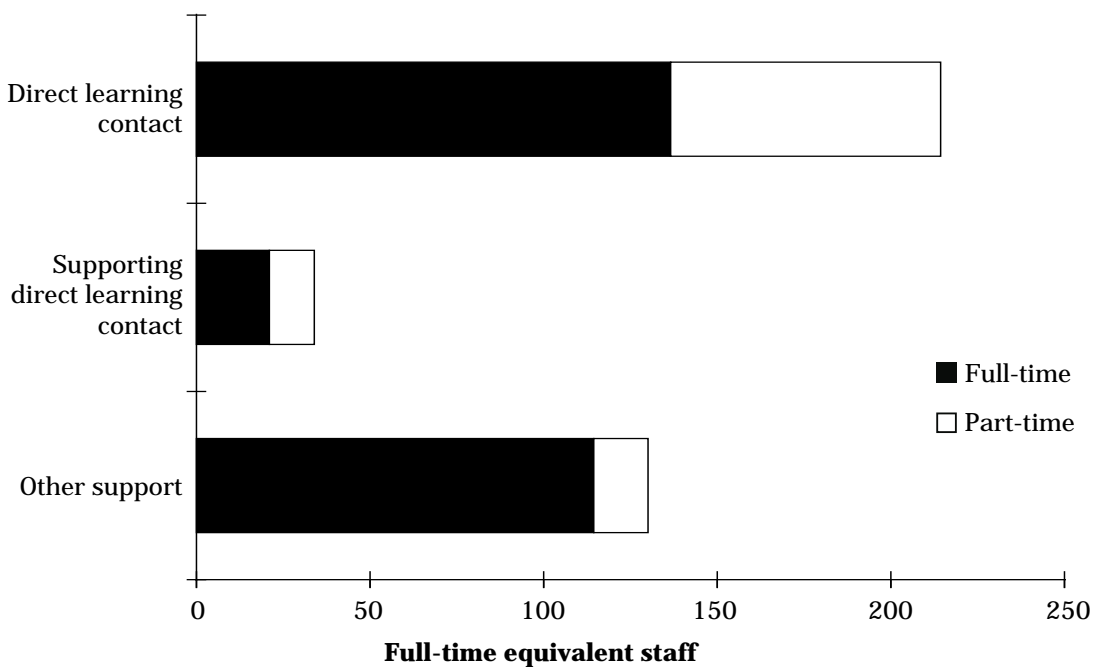
**Amersham and Wycombe College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1995-96)**



Enrolments: 8,134

**Figure 4**

**Amersham and Wycombe College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)**



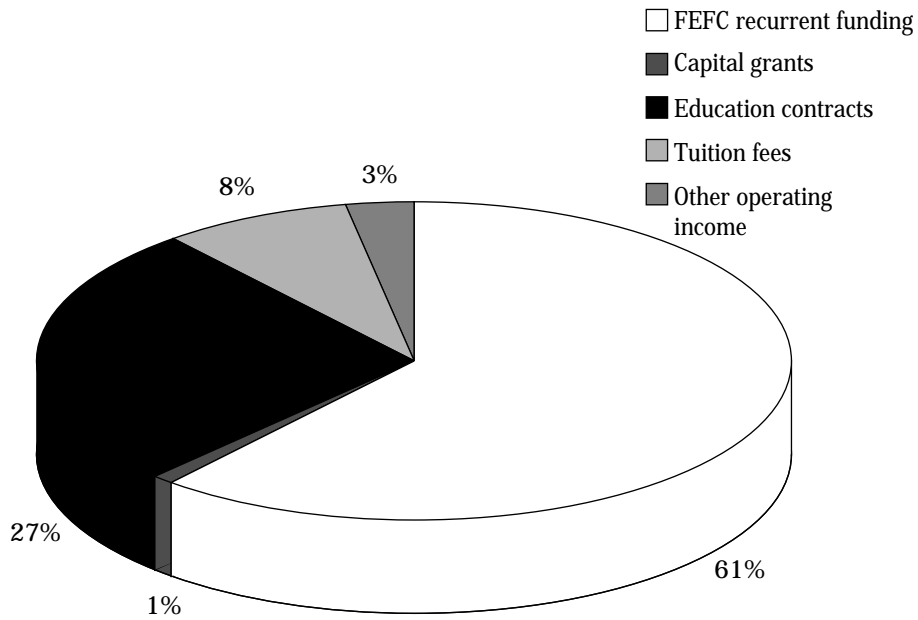
Full-time equivalent staff: 378

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**Figure 5**

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**Amersham and Wycombe College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)**

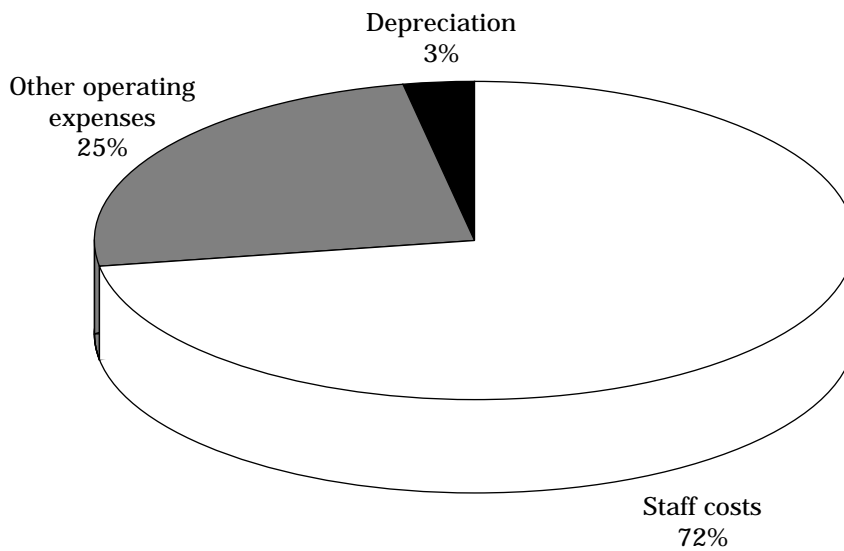


Income: £12,180,000

**Figure 6**

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**Amersham and Wycombe College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)**



Expenditure: £11,752,000

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