

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

East Berkshire College

May 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

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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 68/96

EAST BERKSHIRE COLLEGE

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected May 1995-February 1996

Summary

East Berkshire College is the largest general further education college in the south-east region. It offers a comprehensive range of programmes in Langley, Windsor and Maidenhead. Enterprising marketing has resulted in a substantial growth in student numbers over the last three years. The college is particularly responsive to the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and to those from the large ethnic communities in the area. It has good links with industry. The board of governors is effective and its members are committed to the well being of the college. There is a well-established strategic planning cycle. Managers encourage initiative at all levels of the organisation. The college's commitment to equal opportunities is evident in most areas of its work. The support services division makes an outstanding contribution to the guidance of students. Learning support is excellent. Good teaching, and friendly and effective relationships between staff and students contribute to the students' enjoyment of their work. The range of specialist equipment is generally good. A number of matters require attention. Management information is inadequate to meet increasing demands. The effectiveness of divisional management is variable. Quality assurance arrangements are immature and inconsistently applied. Examination results and retention rates vary between subjects and between different sites offering the same subjects. Student achievement data are often unreliable. Implementation of the tutorial system is uneven across the college and firmer guidance is needed to ensure consistency.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision		1
Governance and management		2
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		2
Quality assurance		4
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science and mathematics	3	Health and care	2
Construction	3	Hair and beauty	2
Engineering	3	Art, design and the performing arts	2
Business studies	2	Humanities and languages	2
Leisure and tourism	3	Adult basic education and SLDD provision	1

INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection of East Berkshire College took place in three stages. Enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the beginning of the autumn term in 1995. Between May 1995 and January 1996, 16 inspectors spent 48 days assessing the quality of teaching and learning in the college's main curriculum areas. They visited 215 classes and examined students' work. In February 1996, nine inspectors spent 27 days assessing aspects of cross-college provision. Meetings were held with members of the college governors, the principalship, directors of academic and support divisions, teachers, staff with cross-college responsibilities, support and administrative staff and students. Inspectors consulted employers, a representative of Thames Valley Enterprise, members of community groups, head teachers and parents of students at the college. They also attended college meetings and examined policy statements, minutes of committees and working papers.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 East Berkshire College is one of the largest further education colleges in England. It was formed in May 1992 by the merger of Langley and Windsor and Maidenhead Colleges. It has a major centre in each of these towns. The college is accessible by road, rail and air, being situated close to the M4, M25 and M40 motorways, and Heathrow airport.

3 The population of the area served by the college is about 750,000. One-fifth of the people are under 15 years of age and half are under 35. Fifteen per cent of local people are from minority ethnic communities of which the main group is Indian. A high proportion of the ethnic community, about 28 per cent, live in Slough where 16 to 19 year olds form 41 per cent of the population. The working population is expected to grow by 4 per cent by the turn of the century. Only 15 per cent of those over 18 years are qualified to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3. In Windsor and Maidenhead, 22 per cent have attained this level but in Slough only 10 per cent. The unemployment rate was 7.5 per cent in August 1994, higher than that for the rest of the Thames valley. The rate of unemployment in Slough was double that in Windsor and Maidenhead. The majority of those unemployed are men. Most students come from east Berkshire, west London and south Buckinghamshire. The staying-on rate for 16 year olds is 73 per cent in Berkshire, and 70 per cent in west London. The proportion of local 16 year olds choosing to go on to further education colleges has risen from 13 per cent to 25 per cent over the past four years. A higher proportion of young people from Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds continue in further education than any other group. The college serves educational or training needs throughout the country as opportunities arise. It has centres in Treforest, Plymouth and at Heathrow.

4 The college operates in a highly-competitive environment. There are five other colleges within easy travelling distance; a significant number of

schools with sixth forms offering both General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes; and a new university that continues to offer many further education courses. As at November 1995, there were 12,283 students enrolled at the college, of whom 2,917 attended full time. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The majority of students are 19 years or over. The college employs over 1,000 full-time and part-time staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The college is organised into five academic divisions: technology, general education, creative and media studies, business and professional studies, and adult and continuing education.

5 The local economy has a large proportion of small firms, mainly in the service sector. They are expected to continue to grow in importance, while manufacturing will continue to decline. Growth is expected in social and community services and in private sector computing, financial and business services. Other predicted areas of growth are retailing and distribution, hotels and catering, and transport. Working patterns are increasingly flexible. The number of self-employed and part-time workers is growing dramatically.

6 The college's mission is to foster the economic, social and cultural well-being of the region by improving the knowledge and skills of its people and promoting life-long learning for everyone. The college intends that its character should be shaped by the needs of industry and commerce, particularly by the high-technology businesses in the Thames valley, and by the needs of its multicultural community.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 The college offers a wide range of vocational courses in science, mathematics and information technology, construction, engineering, business studies, leisure and tourism, health and care, hair and beauty, art and design, humanities and basic education. Courses include a growing number of GNVQs, five at intermediate level and six at advanced level. NVQs are also available in an increasing range of areas at levels 1 to 3. Examples of new courses are a Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma in performing arts specialising in circus skills, and a part-time beauty therapy course modified to include Asian applications and cosmetics. The wide range of specialist courses in counselling allows progression from an introduction to counselling skills to a postgraduate degree in human sexuality and relationship psychotherapy. The higher education courses in the college are offered in conjunction with two neighbouring universities.

8 The wide choice of general education courses includes 38 GCE A levels, 22 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects and 35 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects. GCE A level subjects

are offered as a two-year programme for school leavers and most are also provided as one-year courses for mature students or for students who have failed to achieve the desired grade at the first attempt. Students are able to combine GCE A level and GCSE subjects, or to mix them with GNVQ programmes. Part-time day and evening access to higher education programmes for mature students are offered at Langley and Maidenhead. The wide range of options includes business studies, art and design, engineering, humanities and social sciences.

9 There is a strong marketing unit with clear objectives and a detailed operational plan. Its budget of £450,000 covers market research, publicity and promotional literature. The marketing team has a range of expertise including public relations, graphic design and research. The quality of the full-time and part-time prospectuses and of course leaflets is high. The college also promotes its courses through regular advertising in the local press and on radio. The research aspect of the unit's work is still underdeveloped but the unit has yet to establish strong and effective links with teaching divisions.

10 The college has developed close links with local minority ethnic communities. It held a successful 'one community' day last summer to celebrate the cultural diversity of the area. In response to the needs of people who would not otherwise enrol in further education, courses are now offered at over 40 out-centres, including youth and community centres, nursery and primary schools, and a health clinic. Distance learning programmes enable all students, and particularly those from minority ethnic communities, to study at home with the occasional help of a tutor. Students can also attend workshops so that they benefit from contact with teachers and other students. The number of students on these courses rose to over 500 last year.

11 Schools liaison staff keep in touch with 170 schools within a radius of about 25 miles of the college, and 19 schools are visited regularly. Staff are not allowed access to all schools in the area. Their service to schools includes speaking on further education in general as well as on East Berkshire College in particular. Liaison staff attend some 20 careers conventions each year, and the marketing section organises two sets of public open days. Nearly 1,200 potential applicants attended an open day in spring 1996. The high-standard literature designed by the marketing unit helps liaison staff to provide a professional service. The marketing team is strongly committed to the continued growth of the college. Nevertheless, schools, students and parents confirmed that advice given to prospective students is impartial. Some schools would appreciate more information about the careers of their former pupils.

12 Parents praise the opportunities offered to discuss the progress of their children with teachers and they find the written reports that they receive helpful. The promptness with which they are informed about any poor attendance is welcomed. Parents are invited to events such as higher

education briefings, prize-giving and open days. The college provides translators at parents' evenings for those whose first language is not English. It is also prepared to write reports in the first language of these families, where this is requested.

13 There are good relations with local employers and the college is a member of the chamber of commerce. Its training and enterprise unit has been successful in mounting tailor-made courses for companies. It also offers employees assessment of their prior learning. The college earned £573,000 from courses for business and other enterprise activities last year, and it is likely to earn over £800,000 this year. Teachers have links with employers at consultative committees and directly through employer based initiatives. Most companies value their association with the college and regard the quality of its work highly, although some are critical of the speed of the college's response to enquiries.

14 Courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and for adults seeking basic education, are of a high standard. The college is able to work with students who have a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including some students who are blind, deaf, diabetic, dyslexic, dyspraxic or who have restricted mobility. There are separate specialist courses for some students. Others join mainstream courses where they receive additional support. The college has sign-language communicators to help profoundly deaf students to join mainstream courses. Its work is monitored by a consultative committee of representatives from the social services, the local training and enterprise council (TEC), special schools, the careers service, employers and parents. There are courses at all three centres for English as a foreign language, English for speakers of other languages, and for teaching numeracy and literacy.

15 Relations with Thames Valley Enterprise are generally good. The college is also developing links with the West London TEC following the acquisition of a training centre near Heathrow airport. Thames Valley Enterprise has provided funding for numerous projects, including an audit of facilities for visually-impaired students and development of vocational access routes for adults from minority ethnic communities. The TEC and the college share a view that lifetime learning targets are a priority. They have found it easy to work together.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

16 The board of governors has 12 members. There are seven business members, including one from the TEC, who are experienced in financial, legal and personnel matters. Other members include two from higher and secondary education, a governor from a local minority ethnic background, a member of the staff, and the principal. Governors are aware of national policies for the further education sector. The chairman and principal hold annual meetings with local members of parliament (including the

European parliament) and with chief executives and councillors from local authorities.

17 Governors have decided to review the scale and operation of the board because of the increasing demands made on their time by its small size. The clerk to the board, who is a senior member of staff responsible for a large support division, has no detailed job description for this role. Concerns about the effectiveness of present arrangements will be addressed as part of the board's review. The board has an agreed code of conduct and it maintains a register of members' external interests. Members serve for four years and a third of the members retire each year. There are explicit criteria for the selection of new governors. New governors receive an induction programme and there are regular training events. The board has agreed recently that all governors should undergo an annual review to evaluate their performance. Governors attend college functions and events regularly.

18 The board has three committees; finance and general purposes, audit, and remuneration. Working groups are formed to address important matters as they arise. They are described as subcommittees of the finance and general purposes committee. The board has received reports on the performance of academic divisions after an audit conducted by an external consultant. Governors attend, and sometimes chair, industrial liaison committees to improve their understanding of curriculum issues.

19 The amalgamation of two colleges with different traditions and practices posed considerable challenges to the new governors and managers. Matters were complicated by the wide curriculum offered at all three centres. The principalship has made substantial progress in building a single college from the two former institutions and has concentrated on establishing financial viability, achieving growth, developing community links and creating new organisational structures that are effective at all three centres. However, this progress has been made at the expense of the systematic development and oversight of the quality of the curriculum.

20 A comprehensive staff handbook provides clear definitions of the role of the governors, the principal and of other senior managers. The distinction between governance and management is properly understood. The chairman and principal meet regularly and share a vision of the college's future and role in the community. An open management style encourages initiative at all levels. Staff consider that the principal is accessible. He holds regular meetings with small groups of staff at which discussion is informal. The principal is assisted by two vice-principals, one of whom is the deputy. The deputy principal is responsible for planning and resources; the vice-principal for curriculum and quality. Their job descriptions do not accurately reflect their current responsibilities. The directorate, comprising the principalship and the directors of five academic and three support divisions, works well. The academic board, which advises the principal, meets termly. It has an appropriate membership

which includes academic and support staff. Minutes of directorate and academic board meetings are available in all staff common rooms and in the college libraries.

21 Management of four of the five academic divisions is based on programme areas and course teams. In the division of general education, which is concerned mainly with full-time students on GCE A level and GCSE courses, management is based on subjects. The adult and continuing education division co-ordinates full-cost courses offered by all the divisions. Divisional directors have an appropriate degree of autonomy, but the quality of their management varies. Sharing good management practice within and among divisions would help. The three support divisions are organised in sections; they provide good service to senior managers, staff and students.

22 There are clear procedures for the development of the strategic plan. Preparation of each new plan begins with a review of progress against the targets set previously. At the end of each autumn term, all staff spend two days drafting divisional plans to inform the college plan. Each spring term, governors receive a detailed report on the achievement of targets set for the previous year and the progress made towards preparing the new plan. The draft plan is submitted to the board of governors during the summer term, prior to a final meeting at which formal approval is given.

23 The procedure for delegating budgets to academic divisions is clear and understood by all staff. Divisional directors can transfer money between programme areas or sections. If an academic division does not meet its enrolment targets, money is reclaimed. There is a central budget to deal with unforeseen problems. Although the college cannot yet determine unit costs, directors know their direct costs and take responsibility for improving efficiency. Divisional and programme area financial reports are provided monthly. There are tight controls on all elements of expenditure; a Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) audit conducted in 1995 identified no major problems. The college is in a sound position having achieved its growth targets over the last three years. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 is £16.91 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £17.84 per unit.

24 The college has well-established policies for health and safety, and equal opportunities. Responsibility for their implementation and monitoring is clearly allocated. The college received an award from Thames Valley Enterprise for initiatives in equal opportunities. The college has a tradition of concern for the environment which has been recognised by regional awards. An environmental policy was formally adopted in 1995.

25 When the two predecessor colleges merged, East Berkshire College inherited two incompatible management information systems. Currently,

it uses one system for financial data; another to monitor students' enrolments, retention and destinations; and a third to record staff information. These systems do not meet the increasing demands of external agencies or the college itself. The college is introducing newly-acquired software to remedy the deficiencies.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

26 Many aspects of students' recruitment, guidance and support are the responsibility of the support services division. Its work is organised in six sections: marketing, threshold and administrative services, student services, learning resources, learning support, and staff and curriculum development. The responsibility for each function is clearly placed. Staff work in collaboration with their colleagues from other sections to meet the goals of the division. Relations with other divisions are good. The way in which the services are organised is well conceived and there are clear aims and objectives. Staff in the reception, information and advice centres at each site have obtained qualifications in customer care and the accreditation of students' prior learning. They are skilled in focusing vague enquiries into enrolments, or referring applicants to the student services section or the teaching divisions for more specialised guidance. Comprehensive learning support facilities are integrated with the learning resources centre. Staff are sensitive in providing help to students who have problems with literacy, dyslexia, numeracy, or proficiency in English.

27 Staff in the learning support section are enthusiastic about their work and believe strongly in its importance. Some are well known to specialist agencies such as the Dyslexia Association, and to local schools. Their help has been sought by the two local universities. Students who have been influenced by the work of the unit speak of the college's record in learning support with some pride.

28 The work of the learning support section is excellent. In addition to helping students whose prior education has been poor, it works with over 300 students with moderate or severe learning difficulties and more than 30 who have visual or hearing impairments, or restricted mobility. The Royal National Institute for the Blind has chosen the college to be one of two in the country to specialise in teaching visually-impaired students. The Royal National Institute for the Blind, National Westminster Bank and the TEC are providing substantial funding for this project. The college is seeking funds to support courses to rebuild the confidence, and social and employment skills of students recovering from mental illness. The learning support section provides courses for school teachers. Last year it also carried out more than 200 assessments of students in higher education who were applying for disabled students' grants. Parents of students with learning difficulties spoke warmly of the range of services provided. These included accompanied first bus journeys to college, a parents' support group, provision of sex and health education unavailable at special schools, and an evening youth club. An atmosphere has been created in which students of all abilities are able to work together productively.

29 Enrolment is conducted efficiently. Induction of new students is evolving and a number of changes were made this year. There is a common framework for induction, but delivery is not consistent across the college. In 1995, for the first time, all full-time students took the tests for numeracy and literacy devised by the national Basic Skills Agency (BSA). Some students resented these tests as being inappropriate to their levels of prior achievement. Nearly half the 2,500 students who were tested were identified as needing some help. The college is concentrating on around 400 students whose skills were below foundation level. Those with learning deficits included students entering GCE A level and other advanced courses.

30 Student services are based at each centre and provide personal counselling, welfare advice and support, organisation of work experience and careers guidance. They are provided in welcoming, informal areas in which staff and students gather naturally so that students who need counselling can ask for it without embarrassment. Student services are well resourced. There are four counsellors, whose caseloads accord with the standards of the British Association of Counselling. Counsellors also interview students for welfare support; the college has allocated £42,000 to support students suffering hardship. The college maintains contact with over 200 companies offering work experience and it is mounting a growing programme for over 1,000 students on both vocational and GCE A level courses. Careers guidance is given by advisers who previously worked for a local education authority. The standard of their work is carefully defined in a service contract. Each centre also has computer-based information and university prospectuses for students to consult. There is a careers guidance service for adults that advised 450 people last year.

31 Prior to the merger, one of the colleges controlled its tutorial work tightly. Practice is now less prescriptive, giving course teams freedom to evolve different approaches. Relations between students and staff tutors are generally good at a personal level, but there is now a range of tutorial practice which, at worst, falls below the standard set out in the college charter. Some students reported that they had no tutorials; it was not clear whether this reflected an absolute lack of tutorials or that students did not recognise tutorials when they did occur. Student services provides speakers on themes of general concern to talk to tutorial groups. These are well received by students. A draft tutorial policy has been prepared. It is clear that firmer guidance is required if tutorials are to be provided consistently throughout the college.

32 Each centre has a student council with a representative from each major course. Representatives from each council form a student consultative committee that includes the principal and is chaired by a governor. Students feel that these arrangements are not an effective means of obtaining their views. Some students also complained that their complaints about poor-quality teaching often went unheeded. There is a

complaints procedure run by student services, but students appear hesitant to use it. The college needs to find a way in which its students' concerns about the quality of their courses and the staff who teach them can be addressed quickly and decisively.

33 The college charter is published in a pocket diary given to every student. Promises to students are made in plain language and describe what students can expect the college to provide. Several of the commitments are defined as service standards; others are now being defined in this way. An undertaking to provide the charter on tape, in English, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu is given in the student handbook, but this has not been done. The diary also contains a learner agreement, a copy of which full-time students take home for countersignature by their parents. Some college documents, including the prospectus, are available on tape and in Braille. The college respects the various cultural and religious traditions of its students. Divali is celebrated by the students' union alongside the main Christian festivals, and Muslim students are given particular care during Ramadan and permitted to be absent for Eid. Rooms are made available for prayer to students of all faiths.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

34 Of the 215 sessions inspected, 63 per cent had strengths which outweighed the weaknesses. Only 4 per cent of sessions were judged to have weaknesses which outweighed strengths. The following table summaries the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		2	21	11	0	0	34
GCSE		2	1	6	0	0	9
GNVQ		9	15	18	1	0	43
NVQ		5	17	7	2	0	31
Other vocational		24	39	29	5	1	98
Total		42	93	71	8	1	215

35 Teachers in most curriculum areas used schemes of work. Those for counselling courses were detailed; they reflected course and syllabus aims and set out clearly learning objectives and the means of achieving them. Schemes of work for adult basic education courses took account of the ability, prior learning and ambitions of each student. In some areas the quality and usefulness of schemes of work varied; some consisted merely of a list of topics. In engineering and construction technician courses schemes of work were devised by individual teachers and not by course teams. This sometimes led to unco-ordinated teaching and a poor experience for students.

36 Most lessons were prepared thoroughly. In the better lessons, aims and objectives were stated clearly at the start and students were aware that the work was part of a continuing process. Reference was made to previous work, students' knowledge and understanding were checked and precise directions were given for future work. In science, some well-prepared lesson plans helped to ensure that topics were logically developed through a variety of activities. In a science class on genetics, the teacher used a well-presented handout and followed it up with carefully-planned questioning and activity.

37 Relationships between staff and students were friendly. Many students described the environment in the college as an adult one and identified this as the reason for liking their courses and attending the college. In language courses this supportive relationship encouraged students to practise speaking the language they were studying with confidence. In art and design, teachers praised work in a well-judged way which built students' self-esteem and enabled them to produce good work. Good relationships between teachers and students in adult basic education courses fostered trust and enabled students to improve their work.

38 In the better classes, teachers were imaginative in maintaining the interest of their students. They used a variety of techniques such as group work, paired work, brainstorming and plenary discussion. A second-year group of health studies students discussed drug abuse and the damage, including speech impairment in some cases, which drugs did. The teacher's questions were penetrating and brought out well the risks of addiction to prescribed as well as illegal drugs. To test the class the teacher had devised a game which involved matching cards listing the names of drugs with cards which identified effects. The students completed the task quickly and accurately. First-year students in a GCE A level English lesson worked in pairs exploring the connecting themes shared by a number of poems. Each pair read their poems to the whole class who then analysed them. As the lesson progressed, interest grew and by the end all had established their preferences. Many teachers have developed skills in teaching adult students. They are sensitive to the apprehensions of students returning to education and are careful to emphasise the substantial experience of their students as being of value in their learning.

39 In most curriculum areas assignments were set regularly and marked promptly. In the best practice teachers provided detailed and helpful guidance on how students could improve their work. In some areas, the quality of marking was variable. Some teachers provided few, if any, written comments. Grammatical and spelling errors were not always corrected. Teachers kept records of students' achievements and informed them regularly of their progress. The assessment of practical skills was generally good.

40 Practical work was well organised and, in most areas, due attention was paid to health and safety. Students on motor vehicle and construction craft courses, prefer to be in the workshops and they learn more effectively

there. In a motor vehicle repair session, students were achieving high standards of workmanship. At the beginning of one class, the tutor demonstrated the technique of metal shrinking. Then, the vehicle body panel section, previously constructed as part of an assignment, was deliberately damaged and students used the techniques they had learned to restore the panel to its original condition. In hairdressing, students were made aware of the best professional practice, and were expected to achieve it. Work experience, and participation in demonstrations and competitions, help to develop their skills to a high standard.

41 Teaching on foundation courses was thorough. The work was presented at a pace which all students could follow. Teachers of students with severe learning difficulties encouraged students and gave them a sense of security which helped them to achieve. Teachers work to detailed and carefully-structured schemes of work which address each individual's learning needs. The content of the courses is well balanced and pays appropriate attention to the development of core skills. There are opportunities for vocational activities and work placements. Learning support is good. It enables many students to progress to mainstream courses and, subsequently, to employment.

42 In most curriculum areas, there were some lessons in which students learned very little. Common features of such lessons were poor planning, vague objectives, the lack of appropriate pace and challenge in the work, and the narrow range of teaching methods which left the needs of some students unaddressed. In some sessions, teachers missed opportunities to use group work to encourage students to participate in discussion. Excessive note taking from the whiteboard or from overhead transparencies prevented students from thinking for themselves or consolidating their learning.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

43 Most students enjoy their studies and are able to talk knowledgeably about them. They develop their skills in practical areas and they work together willingly to build and share ideas. Most students develop their core skills to appropriate levels.

44 Students aged 16 to 18 taking GCE AS/A level examinations in 1995, scored on average, 3.0 points per entry (where A=10, E=2), 0.8 points lower than in 1994. This places the college among the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure based on the data in the 1995 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. Sixty-one per cent of students aged 16 to 18 on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment's 1995 performance tables were successful. This performance measure also places the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector. The college subscribes to the national Advanced Level Information System. GCE A level students who took their examinations in 1995 had GCSE scores which were lower than

average in all but two subjects. Together with the information gained from the BSA tests, these data suggest that many students are attempting GCE A levels and advanced vocational qualifications for which they are inadequately prepared, given their previous levels of achievement.

45 The number of students enrolling on the GCSE course has fallen by 30 per cent over the last two years. Students' achievements are poor. In the last two years, only one student has achieved five GCSE subjects at grade C or above. The number of students who failed to achieve at least one A to C grade increased to 32 per cent last year. Pass rates vary between GCSE subjects and between the three college sites offering the same subjects. For example, in 1995 in mathematics the pass rate at grades A to C for students at Langley exceeded the national average of 45 per cent but they fell from 45 to 29 per cent at Windsor. In business studies, the pass rate at grades A to C for students at Langley fell from 57 per cent in 1994 to 14 per cent in 1995. The results for the same course at Windsor also fell in 1995 but they were still significantly above the national average of 62 per cent. English language results at Maidenhead and Langley are above the national average, but poor at Windsor. Subjects in which pass rates have been above the national averages include photography, biology, and travel and tourism. Those below the national average include psychology at Langley and sociology at Windsor, and mathematics for part-time students at Langley and Windsor.

46 Most GCE AS/A level subjects are offered at two of the three centres. Forty per cent of the students taking three GCE A levels and 32 per cent taking two passed in all subjects. Pass rates at GCE A level again vary between subjects and sites. Psychology and sociology are the most popular GCE A level subjects. In psychology at Langley and sociology at Windsor, results are above the national averages. However, in psychology at Windsor and sociology at Langley they are below the national average. The pass rates at grades A to E for English and history at Windsor are similar to the national average, but at Langley they are significantly higher. Pass rates in geography at both Langley and Windsor are significantly below the national average. In mathematics, pass rates are slightly below the national average at Langley but well below at Windsor. The college offers a large number of one-year GCE A level courses. In 1995, pass rates in most subjects were below national averages, but they were good in environmental science and in art and design. The results achieved by students studying human biology in evening classes were also good.

47 The first group of students taking the BTEC national diploma in construction completed their course in 1995. Half of those enrolled successfully completed the course. The results in the first GNVQ intermediate course last year were good and 83 per cent of the students achieved the qualification. For the last three years, construction craft courses have been accredited for NVQ levels 2 and 3. In carpentry and joinery and in painting and decorating, most students failed to achieve the award in the intended time. In bricklaying and plumbing, most students achieved the qualification.

48 Retention and pass rates in BTEC engineering technician courses are low. The lack of teamwork among staff and of a well-thought-out assessment strategy have resulted in too many students failing to achieve their award. In the national diploma in engineering, only 26 per cent of those who started in 1993 achieved the award in 1995. In the national diploma in electronic engineering, 31 per cent of those who originally enrolled gained the award. In the first diploma in electrical and electronic engineering, 59 per cent of the students gained the award last year. In the BTEC national certificates in telecommunications engineering and electrical and electronic engineering half the students successfully completed their courses. There were 100 per cent pass rates on NVQ courses in mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, and fabrication and welding. Students on motor vehicle courses have been generally successful.

49 Courses in business studies are run at every centre. Pass and retention rates vary considerably. The GNVQ advanced level programme in business replaced the BTEC national diploma in 1993. Results for the national diploma had been good, but they fell with the first group of GNVQ students. At Langley, the fall in pass-rates was almost 30 per cent. Pass rates on the part-time national certificate in business and finance dropped at all college centres last year. Pass rates in the first GNVQ intermediate programme in business ranged from 37 per cent at Langley to 59 per cent at Maidenhead. Results on the first diploma course which preceded it had been much better. In the Association of Accounting Technician examinations, pass rates have varied between 35 and 65 per cent over the last two years. An adult part-time student achieved the highest marks nationally in the Association of Accounting Technician final examinations last year.

50 Fewer than half the students on the BTEC national diploma in leisure studies have completed their courses in the last two years. All students who completed the course were successful. In the national diploma in travel and tourism, the pass rate rose to 90 per cent last year.

51 The number of students completing the National Nursery Examinations Board diploma has increased in each of the last three years. Over 80 per cent of the students have gained the award each year. The pass rate in the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) family and community care certificate rose to 67 per cent. Results and retention rates were poor; in the first intake of students to the BTEC national diploma in science (health studies), and the intermediate GNVQ in health and social care, less than 45 per cent of the students who originally enrolled gained the qualification. The foundation programme in counselling skills attracts a large intake. Retention is good and all the students who completed the course last year were successful.

52 In hairdressing, results on the NVQ level 2 one-year programmes have been good. Over 90 per cent of those enrolled gained the award in

each of the last two years. The number of students successfully completing the two-year NVQ level 2 course has fallen steadily for the last three years. The pass rate was 47 per cent last year. Results in full-time beauty therapy courses are good for those who complete the course, but retention rates are low; 65 per cent of those who enrolled gained NVQ level 3 in 1995. Pass rates and retention rates on part-time specialist beauty courses are good.

53 Results in the BTEC first diploma in performing arts have been good. More than 80 per cent of those who started the course achieved the award in each of the last three years. The national diploma in art and design attracts large student numbers. In 1994, all who enrolled successfully completed the course, but in 1995 the pass rate dropped to 88 per cent. Similar results were obtained in the national diploma in display.

54 The college has a range of accredited courses for adults following basic education programmes, and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They follow courses such as the NVQ level 1 business administration course, the C&G 333 cookery certificate course, C&G wordpower and numberpower courses, AEB achievement tests for literacy and numeracy and the Pitman oral examinations for students for whom English is a second language. Students are entered only when they are ready for examination and the level of success is high.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

55 The college's quality assurance arrangements are at an early stage of development and they are applied inconsistently. Systems and procedures are well documented, but they are not effective. The strategic plan presents sound objectives for quality assurance. However, since its formation four years ago the college has been slow to ensure that reliable data are available on student examination results and retention. It has failed to address adequately students' poor levels of achievement on some of its courses.

56 The college conducts student perception surveys and is in the third annual cycle of surveys for full-time students. There is inconsistency in the way forms are completed and the response rate is below 50 per cent.

57 Course review is at an early stage of development and the rigour with which it is undertaken varies across the college. Boards of study differ in their effectiveness and the understanding of quality assurance among their members is sometimes limited. Membership is intended to include students and employers, but practice varies across divisions. Where students are members, their attendance is often poor. The academic board receives reports from boards of study through its course review and development committee. The timetable for course reviews which the committee laid down has slipped. The academic board will not be able to consider reviews for 1994-95 until its March meeting in 1996 which is too late for effective monitoring and for any action to be taken which would

benefit existing students. A quality group drawn from divisional directors, their deputies and programme area managers is beginning to initiate progress. Its remit has been extended 'to plan the college's quality systems, to establish the necessary procedures, and to monitor the operation of the systems'. Its work is still at an early stage.

58 The college employed a consultant to carry out quality audits of each academic division. These audits covered both teaching and learning and divisional management. Reliance on external audit has inhibited development of the college's own self-assessment procedures. Nevertheless, each division has presented an action plan to the governors in response to the consultant's report and a review of progress will follow. In two divisions, organisational changes have already resulted from the consultant's report. Although the audits included observation of teaching, the college has not finalised its plans to continue this.

59 The staff review and development scheme for full-time staff is well conceived, although development interviews are behind schedule in engineering. Action plans arising from each staff development interview inform staff-development officers of the needs of each division. The head of curriculum and staff development matches these needs to college priorities. The resulting plan is detailed and fully costed. Expenditure this year will be £176,000, or 1.2 per cent of the college's budget. Evaluation of the activities undertaken by individual staff should be developed further.

60 The college self-assessment report uses the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. For curriculum areas, it is presented in terms of strengths and weaknesses, but coverage of cross-college areas is largely descriptive. The report contains a number of realistic assessments, although it is insufficiently rigorous in some areas. The college is working towards the Investors in People award and it plans to achieve this by September 1996. The board of governors has reviewed its role in relation to quality assurance and is taking steps to develop performance indicators.

RESOURCES

Staffing

61 The college employs 239 full-time and 109 full-time equivalent part-time teachers, of whom 60 per cent are women. There are 137 full-time and 49 full-time equivalent part-time technical and administrative staff, of whom 64 per cent are women. Only two members of the directorate of 11 are women. In some curriculum areas such as health and social care, heavy reliance on part-time teachers places an undue administrative burden on their full-time colleagues.

62 Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced for the courses they teach. Sixty per cent of full-time teachers have a first degree and 19 per cent a higher degree. Training and Development Lead Body assessor and

verifier qualifications are held by 39 per cent of the teachers. Three-quarters of full-time teachers have a teaching qualification. Both full-time and part-time teachers involved in courses for adult basic education, courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and in the learning support centre are particularly well qualified.

63 The personnel section is well managed and organised. Senior personnel staff are professionally qualified. There are informative handbooks for both full-time and part-time staff. Procedures for short listing and recruiting staff are clear, and equality of opportunity is monitored. The college has some way to go in matching its staff profile more closely to that of the local community, particularly in recruiting from minority ethnic groups. The college intends to introduce more systematic manpower planning to help senior staff to identify staffing requirements.

Equipment/learning resources

64 East Berkshire College has a wide range of specialist and general-purpose equipment which is appropriate to its courses. Beauty therapy and hairdressing, motor vehicle engineering, media studies and photography, music studies, the sports fitness centre at Langley, and the language laboratories at Windsor are particularly well equipped. Teaching aids, such as overhead projectors, whiteboards and audio-visual equipment, are accessible and usually of high quality. Some equipment, including machine tools and some science laboratory equipment particularly at Windsor, is becoming dated and will soon need to be replaced. The college should develop a central purchasing policy to provide more effective use of funds and to ensure a consistent minimum standard of equipment across the college.

65 There are 671 computers available for students' use; a ratio of one machine to every eight full-time equivalent students. Of these, 581 are modern and able to run the appropriate software. Laptop computers are available for use by students at outreach centres in the community. Computer provision for students with learning difficulties and students in basic education is inadequate. Students on beauty therapy, hairdressing and motor vehicle engineering courses have limited access to computers. The block booking of open-access computer centres sometimes prevents students from making use of them.

66 There is a learning resource centre (including a library and learning support centre) at each major site. All have an appropriate range of books. Approximately 79,000 books are available to students, half of which are at Langley and the remainder are shared between Maidenhead and Windsor. Over 300 journals are taken regularly. There is a wide range of easy-reader books in several minority languages. Effective arrangements exist for inter-site transfer. The number of disks for the compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database is increasing rapidly. There is a good collection of videos. The learning resource centre at Langley is fully

computerised, but those at the Windsor and Maidenhead sites have yet to complete the process.

Accommodation

67 The college has accommodation on three main sites in Langley, Windsor and Maidenhead. It also occupies an old middle school on a shared site in Windsor. It has recently acquired an industrial unit near Heathrow airport. The college operates at many outreach centres which are mainly in the Slough area, and in Plymouth and Treforest.

68 The estate is professionally managed by an appropriately-qualified team. A 10-year planned maintenance programme for buildings and services has been established. A sites officer with a small team of caretakers, is located at each of the three main buildings to deal with minor repairs. The college annually monitors its use of space. Between 09.00 and 17.00 hours, rooms are used for 63 per cent of the available time. This is a low rate of use. The projected growth in student numbers can be accommodated within existing buildings. The college has prepared outline plans for several substantial capital projects, including enlargement and improvement of the Windsor campus. The recently-improved refectories at each centre are good. There are no creche or nursery facilities.

69 Langley is the largest centre of the college. It has a variety of buildings, all of which are clean and in good condition. The eldest is a grade II listed Georgian building with sections dating back to Tudor times. The site is conveniently situated for bus and rail routes and it has adequate parking. Students with restricted mobility do not have easy access to all parts of the building and the college is dealing with this problem. The college occasionally hires a large community hall nearby for examinations and student functions as required.

70 The main site at Windsor is close to the town centre conservation area. The buildings, which include two tower blocks and adjoining workshops and studios, are in generally poor condition owing to lack of routine maintenance in the past. A new reception area with an information and guidance area has been added recently. Parking is limited, but the college is close to bus routes and the railway station. The college shares a site with a small primary school at Clewer, in a residential area of the town. Access to this site is restricted and the number of parking spaces is inadequate.

71 At Maidenhead, a six-storey tower block, linked to a two-storey block provides most of the accommodation. The entrance has been improved and now includes a students' information, guidance and support centre. An enlarged lift has been installed to enable wheelchair users to gain access to all floors. Engineering workshops are located in an adjacent former school building. A Victorian house and prefabricated timber huts have been renovated recently. Refurbishment of the refectory has resulted

in a bright and open area, and better access for people with restricted mobility.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

72 The strengths of the college are:

- its wide range of courses
- the good provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the work of the support services division
- the good learning support at each centre
- its flexible approach to meeting the needs of minority ethnic groups
- the effective involvement of governors and staff in strategic planning
- its enterprising marketing unit
- its good links with industry.

73 If it is to continue to improve the quality of its provision, the college should address the following:

- inadequate and unreliable data on student retention rates and examination performance
- poor student retention and examination results in some areas
- the poor quality of management information
- inconsistent practice for tutorials
- the under-developed quality assurance system
- standards of management in some academic divisions.

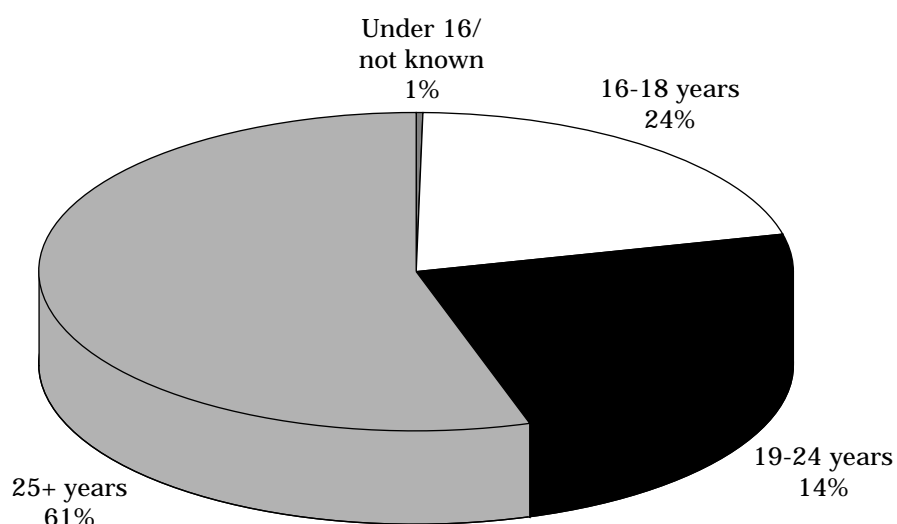
FIGURES

1	Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)
2	Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)
3	Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)
4	Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)
5	Estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996)
6	Estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

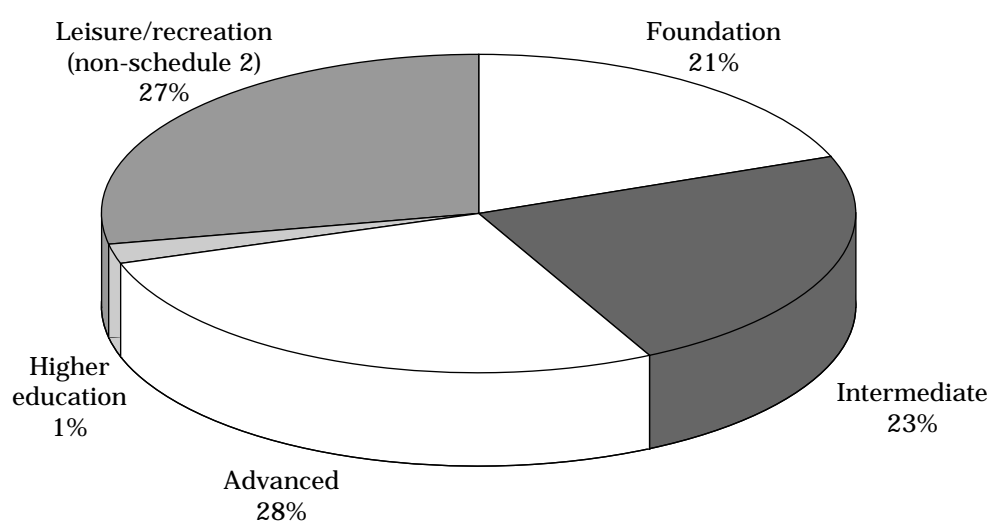
East Berkshire College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 12,283

Figure 2

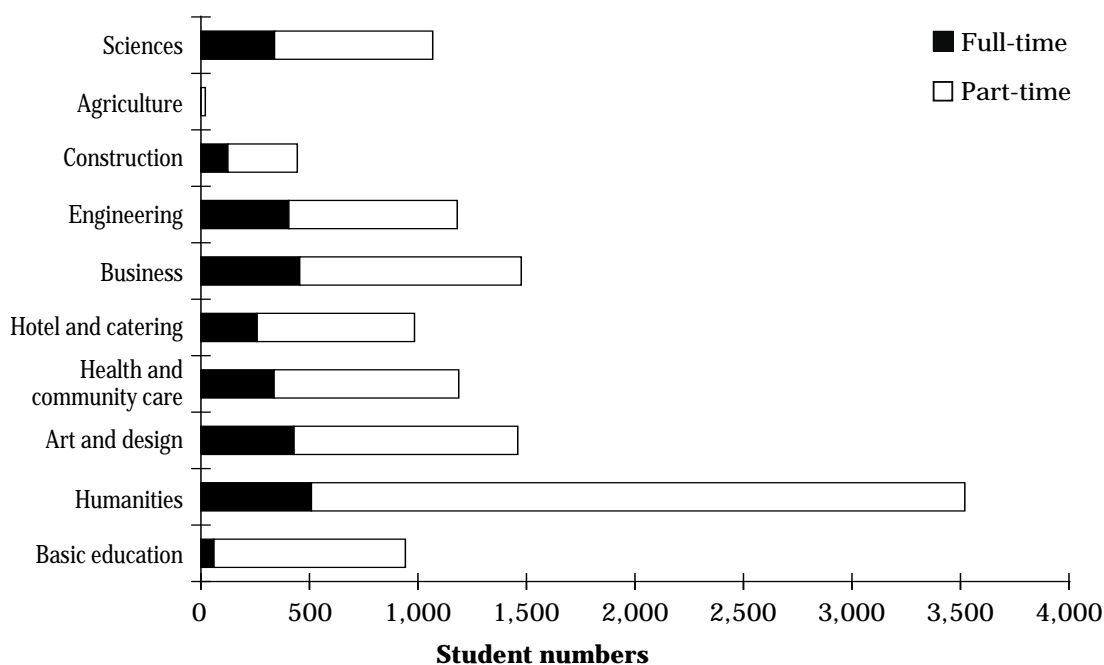
East Berkshire College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 12,283

Figure 3

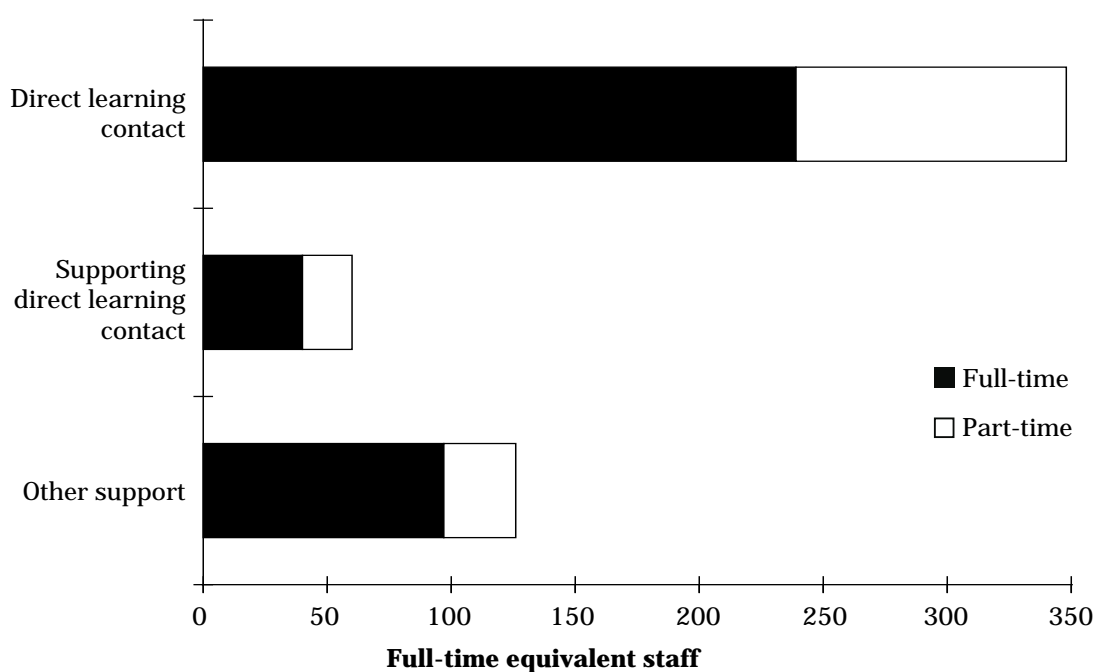
East Berkshire College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 12,283

Figure 4

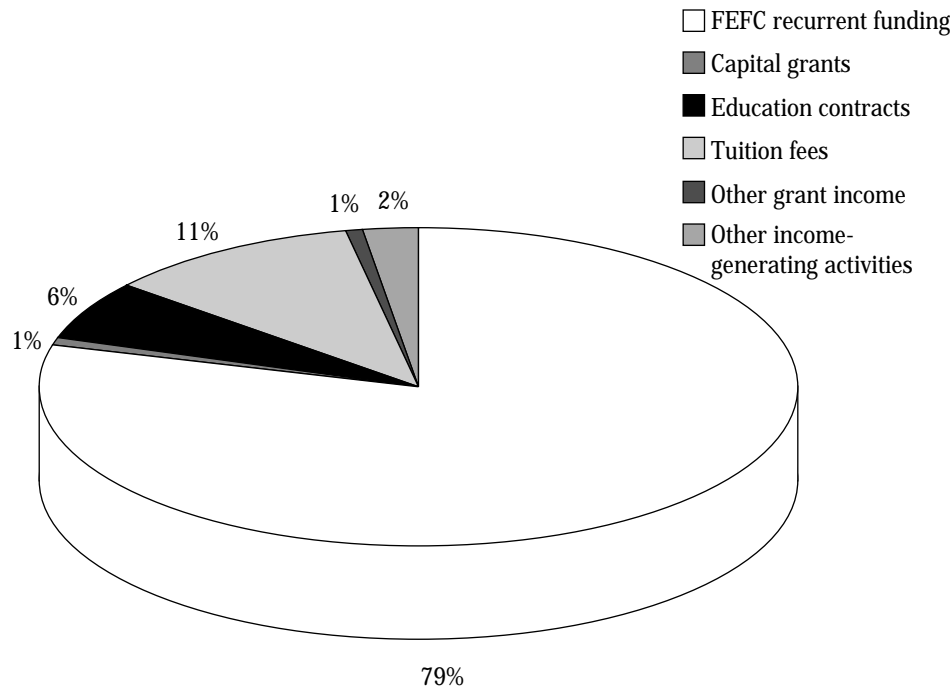
East Berkshire College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 534

Figure 5

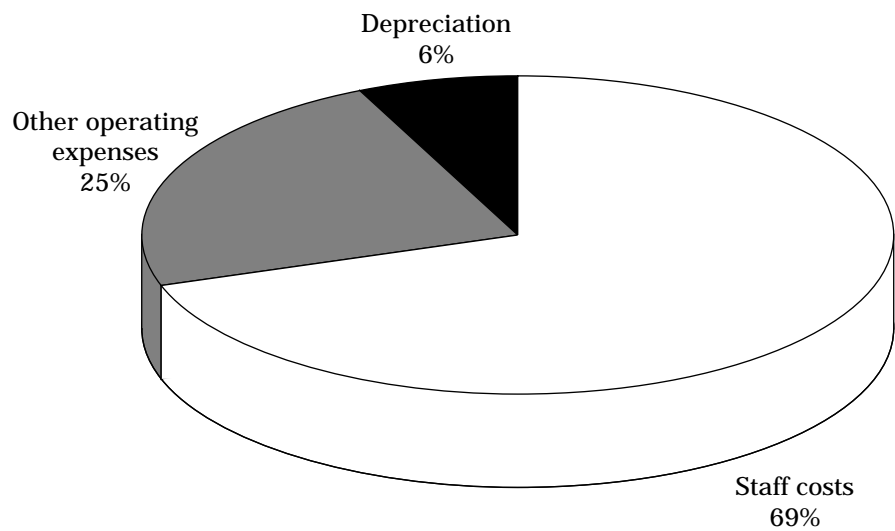
East Berkshire College: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Estimated income: £16,693,000

Figure 6

East Berkshire College: estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Estimated expenditure: £17,199,000

Transfer from revaluation reserve is £752,000.

