

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Easton College

September 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to 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 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 121/97

EASTON COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected September 1996-June 1997

Summary

Easton College is a major provider of land-based courses in Norfolk. It has productive relationships with the rural community and a good record of attracting industrial support and funding for new developments. Successful initiatives have attracted students from groups of people who have not usually entered further education. The corporation is highly committed to the success of the college and provides clear strategic direction. Effective financial management systems have been established. Teachers make effective and frequent use of examples drawn from industry. Students are well motivated and some achieve good results. The staff-development programme is comprehensive. Some specialist facilities are well equipped. The college should: develop its marketing strategy; improve the management of courses; improve tutorial practice; record and monitor more effectively students' progress; improve the quality of teaching and examination results; implement an effective quality assurance system; address the inadequacies of the library; and improve access to accommodation for people with restricted mobility.

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	3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	3
Quality assurance	4
Resources: staffing	3
equipment/learning resources	3
accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Grade
Agriculture, animal care and equine studies	3	Business studies 2
Horticulture and floristry	3	
Countryside	3	

INTRODUCTION

1 Easton College was inspected between September 1996 and June 1997. Inspectors spent 43 days in the college, observed 75 classes, and examined students' work and documentation relating to the college and its courses. Discussions took place with governors, college managers, teachers, support staff, past and present students, and parents. Inspectors held meetings with representatives from industry, schools, the careers service, Norfolk and Waveney Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), and members of the local community who have an interest in the college.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Easton College is a major provider of agriculture and horticulture courses in Norfolk. The college was formed in 1974 from the merger of Norfolk College of Horticulture, Norfolk College of Agriculture and the agricultural extra mural department administered by the local education authority (LEA). The main site of the college is at Easton Hall, close to the Norfolk showground where the equestrian centre was built in conjunction with the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association. Residential accommodation is provided in 101 single study bedrooms. The college farms 418 hectares commercially and deals in arable crops, dairy and beef cattle, sheep and indoor and outdoor pigs. A poultry demonstration unit has been established with support from industrial sponsors. The horticultural unit at Burlingham is seven miles east of Norwich. The college also runs courses at centres in Diss, North Walsham and Snettisham.

3 Students are recruited throughout Norfolk, and nationally for some specialist courses. At the time of the inspection, 2,300 students were enrolled at the college. Of these, 313 were on full-time courses and 1,987 on part-time courses. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

4 In East Anglia, there are two other further education agricultural colleges: Otley College of Agriculture and Horticulture in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture. Writtle College in Essex is a higher education agricultural institution. There are five other further education colleges in Norfolk: Norwich City College of Further and Higher Education; Norfolk College of Arts and Technology; Great Yarmouth College of Further Education; East Norfolk Sixth Form College; and Paston Sixth Form College. Across the county there are 52 secondary schools, half of which have sixth forms. The proportion of 16 year olds staying on in education in Norfolk was 69 per cent in 1996. The major providers of higher education in the area are the University of East Anglia, the Norwich School of Art and Design and Anglia Polytechnic University. Easton College is an associate college of Anglia Polytechnic University.

5 The total population of Norfolk was about 745,000 at the time of the 1991 census. The population is projected to grow to around 818,000 by 2006. The unemployment rate in Norfolk is below the national average but is still higher than for the neighbouring counties of Suffolk and Cambridge. Employment is centred around agriculture, food processing and, more recently, tourism. A significant feature of Norfolk is that 74 per cent of businesses employ fewer than six people. Agriculture accounts for approximately 6 per cent of the total employment in the county. The county has the largest proportion of poultry meat production in the country and is the second largest producer of pig meat. Employment in finance and other service sectors is limited, although there is a substantial amount of tourism in the coastal area and in Broadland.

6 The college's mission is 'to provide accessible, personal, high-quality, cost-effective education and training opportunities in partnership with the local industry and community'.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 The college has responded effectively to changes in the rural economy by extending its range of provision to cover all the main land-based industries. There is a good range of courses in agriculture and horticulture. However, the courses in countryside do not relate well to each other. In floristry, some courses have not run because of low enrolments. Additional courses in animal care and equine studies are being introduced as demand increases. Full-time student numbers for courses in animal care are 25 per cent above target this year. There are many courses with low numbers. Insufficient attention has been given to combining groups to improve efficiency and to maintain the range of courses where enrolments are low.

8 Most full-time students have many opportunities to broaden their range of experience. Students visit local enterprises and take part in study tours in the United Kingdom and abroad. Agriculture students are able to gain qualifications, for example in the application of chemicals, which supplement their main qualification and improve their employment prospects. Students are effectively involved in the organisation and staffing of college promotional events and are well supported in organising a range of sporting and social events. The experiences and skills gained by students outside their programme of studies are not always monitored and recorded.

9 The college has used partnership arrangements productively to respond to the needs of the community and to attract students who would not usually enter further education. Working with the Norfolk Broads Authority and the TEC, opportunities have been provided for adult students to re-train. Students are recruited from a wide catchment area; there are effective arrangements to make it easier for students who live outside of the locality to follow some courses. For example, the college provides

programmes in pig management and animal care that enable students to study at home. Transport from Norwich is provided for students. Courses have been held in the evenings and weekends to fit the work patterns of floristry students. The college contributes effectively to the wider rural community and has links with almost 50 special interest groups. It makes resources freely available to many community groups. The Norfolk Federation of Young Farmers Clubs is provided with office accommodation and club members have access to the college's specialist facilities for training and competitions. Members of staff give their own time to support community groups by attending committees and acting as officials at events.

10 In most curriculum areas, there are good links with the industries served. The college has responded constructively to the needs of industry for training and updating, in particular for those working in agriculture and horticulture. The work with the poultry industry has been recognised by a national training award. The industry has funded the development of a poultry training centre and the college works with individual companies from many parts of the country to produce training plans. The college also works closely with many other employer-based training groups. The training services department provides a wide range of work-related courses to meet the needs of industry. The college has been successful in obtaining funds from the European Social Fund through submissions developed in consultation with industry. In the last 18 months, funds totalling £750,000 have been approved for nine projects. There is a good working relationship with the TEC, resulting in improved opportunities for education and training. The TEC is complimentary about the college's responsiveness and flexibility in negotiations.

11 The college is well informed about the labour needs of the industries served. In the last year, in close collaboration with the TEC, the college has carried out a detailed assessment of the needs of the local agriculture industry and identified gaps in provision. The outcomes provide valuable information for future planning in the agriculture sector. In other areas of the college's work, insufficient attention has been given to market information when planning courses, reviewing their content and investigating low recruitment to courses. The college has not yet developed an effective overall marketing strategy. Industry liaison groups have recently been reorganised and are at varying stages of development. In most areas, there has been insufficient time for them to influence significantly course planning and curriculum review.

12 The college promotes itself through a wide range of interesting projects and is represented at many specialist events in the region. There is considerable involvement in the Royal Norfolk Show. A common format for advertising material is used to promote effectively the diversity of the colleges' work. Most publicity material is attractively presented and informative. Leaflets for subject areas have a common style and provide

detail of course content, entry requirements and progression opportunities. There is, however, insufficient information on how courses are related. Arrangements to evaluate promotional activities are underdeveloped.

13 Effective arrangements to liaise with local schools have been introduced recently. Recruitment activity in schools and in conjunction with the careers service is well managed. A member of staff is allocated to every secondary school in the county to maintain regular contact. The college runs regular information and advice open days and evenings and over 400 school pupils attended a 'farm week' this year. There is an annual information day for careers officers and teachers and one of the activities offers them the opportunity to undertake some of the practical work which students have to do. A schools liaison officer, funded by a local charity, provides support to local schools to meet the requirements of the national curriculum. Almost 1,500 pupils visited the college last year. A resource centre for visiting school pupils, funded partly by local and national groups, is nearing completion.

14 The college has recognised that there is scope to expand partnerships with further education and higher education institutions and is pursuing a number of initiatives to co-operate on teaching courses jointly. Four of the successful European Social Fund proposals are joint bids with other colleges. Great Yarmouth College and Easton College are proposing to offer jointly full-time animal care courses to make it easier for students to study locally. The college is developing higher education courses in co-operation with a number of universities to improve progression opportunities for students; one course has been approved to start in 1998.

15 Compliance with the college's equal opportunities policy is not effectively monitored. The college is careful to ensure that promotional material does not reinforce stereotyping by linking particular courses only to men or women. Insufficient attention has been given to researching the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who may be interested in careers in the land-based industries. Links with special schools are not well developed; the co-ordination of contacts with these schools is not effective. The college is committed to developing this area of work and is contributing to two learning programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities run by external agencies. There are realistic plans to develop this type of provision at Easton.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

16 There are 18 members of the corporation: 11 independent business members, one TEC nominated business member, two co-opted members, the principal, two staff members and a student member. Governors have a wide range of experience and backgrounds relating to land-based industries and key areas of business such as accountancy. They are well qualified, influential in the local community, and highly committed to the success of the college. Three members are women. There is no representative from higher education. There is a code of conduct and a

register of members' interests. The corporation evaluates its own performance and sets aside training days to develop skills of governance and discuss strategic planning. Attendance at meetings is high.

17 The corporation has a clear vision for the college and provides the strategic framework for its development. It has responded quickly to new challenges such as the recent changes in funding arrangements. Members emphasise the importance of the college maintaining effective partnerships with industry and enabling students to progress to employment. Industry liaison groups, chaired by corporation members, are helping to create stronger links between corporation members and curriculum areas. The college has a successful record of attracting industrial support and funding for new developments. The principal and corporation are highly effective in the management of public relations. Corporation members have been effective in helping the college to raise substantial funds from industry to match a successful bid for £600,000 to the lottery fund to support the building of a new sports, leisure and education facility.

18 The corporation carries out its work effectively. There are clear terms of reference for the corporation and its six committees: personnel; finance and general purposes; estates; search; audit; and remuneration. Records of corporation and committee meetings are diligently maintained. Governors work well as a team, and with senior managers. They identify when actions are required and review the outcomes. There is a high level of mutual trust between corporation members and college senior management. Governors receive regular detailed reports from the principal.

19 There is a well-developed approach to strategic planning at senior levels. The college has achieved steady growth since incorporation to meet funding agreements. The strategic plan is well formulated. It is based on appropriate consultation with staff and reviewed by the senior management team and academic board. Clearly-defined strategic objectives have been translated into operating statements. The achievement of these statements is systematically monitored by the principal and subject to detailed termly reporting to the corporation. Strategic objectives have not been translated into measurable targets for work in curriculum areas. Curriculum area plans are not well developed and insufficient attention is paid to monitoring the achievement of their objectives. There are no targets for students' retention and achievement. Reports from curriculum areas to the academic board and corporation show little evidence of comparative analysis of students' performance in examinations from year to year.

20 There are clear job descriptions for senior staff, programme managers and team leaders. The organisational structure of the college is appropriate; roles are clear and understood by staff. The senior management team comprises the principal, two deputy principals responsible for finance and academic areas, respectively, and a director of

academic resources. The senior management team meets weekly to consider strategic management issues, planning and the formulation of policy. The deputy principals meet regularly with programme area managers responsible for academic matters and managers of business and support functions. The revised college management structure enables managers of curriculum areas to exercise a considerable measure of direct control without the need to refer constantly to senior management. Programme managers are supported by team leaders who have responsibility for groups of courses and, in some cases, management of facilities such as the equestrian centre. Programme managers and team leaders also act as course tutors. The role of course tutor has recently been reviewed, is clearly defined, and gives appropriate emphasis to the importance of course management.

21 Administrative and support staff have frequent contact with their line manager, and with their own team, to review progress and formalise procedures. Governors act as directors of the college farm and the college's commercial company.

22 There is a variety of methods of communications between staff, and between managers and staff. A monthly meeting of all staff is addressed by the principal. A weekly bulletin helps to keep staff informed of college developments. Staff meet within programme areas at least once a term and more often in informal groups to exchange information and to share problems. Good practice in course organisation and development is not systematically identified or shared within or across curriculum areas. Support staff find the monthly staff meeting helpful. Staff feel that communications have been improved in the last 12 months and are now effective.

23 A comprehensive staff handbook contains statements of college policies, including those for health and safety, equal opportunities, and the recruitment and employment of staff. Responsibilities for monitoring health and safety matters and for ensuring that reporting procedures are followed are clearly identified. There is no cross-college policy on the monitoring and reporting of students' attendance.

24 The academic board was reformed in 1996 to ensure that members have a range of interests and skills to enable the board to undertake a more effective review of college policies and to give appropriate advice to senior management. The academic board provides a useful forum for discussing college issues and for staff to express views through their representatives. There are two working groups which report to the board; the quality assurance subcommittee and the staff-development working group. The academic board has not been effective in reviewing and supporting the development of cross-college policies in important areas, such as quality assurance and the arrangements for tutorial support.

25 Courses are not effectively managed. On some courses, team meetings do not take place regularly and there is no common format for course team

records. Teaching staff meet informally to discuss the operation of courses. These meetings are not formally recorded. At monthly programme area meetings, staff review course operation and agree action to address areas of concern. These arrangements are insufficiently supported by common procedures for assessing and monitoring progress and for reporting to senior managers. Some aspects of course management in floristry, animal care and equine studies are operating effectively. Some management systems, for example the system developed to manage and keep records of students tutorials in animal care, are comprehensive. However, in most areas course teams do not give sufficient attention to course management issues such as: monitoring students' retention, achievements and destinations; tutorial provision; or the management of teaching and assessment.

26 The college's system for allocating funds and for approving spending is tightly controlled. Budgets are held by a small number of functional managers. Careful management has been required to recover from an insecure financial situation and inadequate financial and management accounting at the time of incorporation. Effective financial controls have been developed. Further development of the systems has taken several years and this has delayed delegation of budgets to curriculum areas. A process of capital bids has been introduced for 1997-98. Senior managers recognise the need for a more systematic allocation of resources to courses and programme areas. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 was £18.81 per unit. The median for colleges of agriculture was £23.57 per unit. The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £18.55 per unit. The median for agricultural and horticultural colleges is £22.86 per unit and for all general further education and tertiary colleges it is £17.97 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

27 The college's computer-based management information system does not provide sufficient support to managers. There are no plans to develop the system. The college has devoted some time to developing its systems for compiling the individualised student record. Records of student enrolments, which support the calculation of income from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), are accurately kept. The student record system provides some limited support to curriculum management. Student applications are tracked and the system generates class lists and weekly registers, but student absence is not logged, and students' achievements and destination data are not analysed. Senior managers, and registry and reception staff have access to student information on the college's network at the Easton site. However, programme managers and team leaders do not have ready access to information about students and do not receive regular reports.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

28 Prospective students have access to comprehensive information and advice on the range of college courses. Staff visit schools regularly to participate in careers conventions or to make presentations about college courses to pupils and their parents. Admissions processes are managed efficiently. Enquiries about courses are dealt with systematically and action taken within an acceptable timescale. All prospective full-time students are interviewed by course leaders and interviews usually take place soon after application. These interviews are thorough and follow agreed guidelines which identify and record students' needs. Considerable efforts are made to ensure that students are placed on the most appropriate course. Procedures are in place to enable students to change course. Staff provide sympathetic and careful guidance to students to facilitate such changes. Procedures for the accreditation of students' prior learning and experience are underdeveloped. Enrolment procedures are generally well organised.

29 Induction for new students is well planned. Students visit all parts of the college, including the farm and the equestrian centre, and are introduced to the library and information technology centre. Special attention is given to health and safety issues. The effectiveness of this induction varies widely. For some students it is a lively and stimulating event, but for others it is dull and disappointing. Some course-specific induction is well designed and imaginative and includes introductory projects which provide students with an effective experience of the course. Students are provided with information about the college's charter during induction. Not all students, however, are clear about their rights and responsibilities. A college diary is issued to students but it contains limited useful information.

30 The quality of tutorial support is variable. There is no college-wide tutorial system and no means of ensuring that students receive their individual entitlement. Students are allocated a course tutor and there is a weekly timetabled tutorial session for group activities and individual tutorials. The regularity of individual meetings varies. On some courses, it is half termly, on others termly and, on a few, when the tutor feels it is appropriate. The progress of students is not always systematically recorded. The staff handbook provides tutors with a checklist of tutorial activities. However, the effectiveness with which these activities are managed depends largely on the commitment of individual tutors. Although student attendance is recorded at each teaching session, there is no clear college policy for monitoring absences. There is no consistent approach for informing parents and employers of students' progress.

31 The arrangements to support students who need to develop their basic skills have recently been revised. All full-time students are assessed as part of the college induction programme. A recently-appointed learning support co-ordinator helps individuals and small groups of students to

develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Students value the effective help that is available and a number report improvement in the quality of their work. The learning support unit is well sited near to the library and information technology centre but it is inadequately furnished and equipped. Students with dyslexia receive individual help and other students with specific disabilities receive appropriate support. A system for tracking students' progress and relating this progress to their performance on their course is being developed.

32 The college emphasises the importance of the care it provides for individual students. Relationships between staff and students are informal but businesslike, and staff provide practical help and advice to students as the need arises. Particular care is taken of residential students. Supervision and pastoral support is provided by five wardens. Staff support students in organising a programme of social and sporting activities which are highly valued by students. A professional counsellor is available in the college for one afternoon each week but is able to come to the college at short notice at other times, as required. Residential students mainly use this service and its existence is not widely publicised. Advice is available on transport issues as well as guidance on grants, examination fees and other financial matters. The college has a welfare fund which is made available to students in financial difficulty on a confidential basis.

33 Careers advice and guidance is provided by a Norfolk Careers Service adviser for one day each week. Careers materials and information are located in the library and updated and administered by library staff. Direct support to students on planning their careers is provided by course tutors. There are no procedures for systematically evaluating the effectiveness of this provision or for tutors to co-ordinate the outcomes of careers advice for individual students. Students' destinations are not systematically tracked to inform any careers advice given and details of former pupils' progress are not relayed to schools.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

34 Inspectors observed 75 sessions. In 47 per cent of the sessions the strengths outweighed the weaknesses. This is below the average of 63 per cent for all lessons observed during the 1995-96 inspection programme according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96* and below the average of 57 per cent for agricultural lessons recorded in the same report. Seventeen per cent of sessions had weaknesses which outweighed strengths. This compares with 8 per cent for colleges inspected in the academic year 1995-96, according to figures published in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. The average attendance rate at classes observed was 81 per cent, and the average class size in these sessions was nine. The following table summarises the grades given to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GNVQ	0	5	2	0	0	7
Other vocational	11	13	20	8	1	53
Other	1	5	5	4	0	15
Total	12	23	27	12	1	75

35 The quality of course documentation varied widely. Schemes of work and lesson plans lacked detail and their objectives were seldom shared with students. Most practical lessons were well structured starting with a demonstration followed by opportunities for students to practise their skills. In lessons in classrooms teachers did not always use suitable methods and often failed to set work which challenged the students. In the better theory sessions, teachers effectively used their knowledge of the industry to maintain students' interest. In some classes which combined students from different courses, the lessons were not always planned to take account of the differing needs of students. A significant number of lessons started late or were disrupted by unpunctual students. Many students voluntarily carry out routine duties and take extra lessons. For example, equine students take additional lessons to improve their riding skills and floristry students assist in clearing away flowers after practical sessions. Students participate enthusiastically in the college open days, country shows, and other events.

36 Work experience is an integral part of most courses. On floristry courses it is planned to coincide with the key times in the industry such as Christmas, Easter and Mothering Sunday. Most students valued their placement as it enabled them to consolidate the skills they had developed at college. Students are given good personal support by tutors during their period of work experience but the quality of preparatory guidance for this period varies. Documentation to support work experience was often inadequate. For example, on some courses, there were no written guidelines for employers or students and the schedules for assessments often lacked detail. The college estate, farm units and equestrian centre also provide valuable experience of the working environment for all students.

37 In practical lessons in floristry and horticulture, teachers provided appropriate and challenging work. Horticultural students made extensive use of the college estate to collect specimens of plants for identification and to investigate the growing patterns of trees. Teachers responded well to questions from students and illustrated topics with relevant industrial examples. In floristry, teachers made demonstrations the central focus of most lessons and set students high standards in practical skills. Students' artistic skills were encouraged. For example, students visited a local church and were able to use their own ideas and experience to plan floral

decorations for a festival. Teachers provided supportive feedback and guidance for improvements to students' designs. However, too much time was allowed for some practical tasks. Students were not always given clear guidance to ensure that they made the most effective use of their private study time. In one example of good practice, students each had a private study handbook which included appropriate assignments designed to encourage them to relate theory to practice in their studies. The quality of assignments varied across courses and seldom included the assessment of key skills. Insufficient attention was given to the development of students' information technology skills.

38 On agriculture, animal care and equine courses, teachers made frequent reference to students' practical work when teaching theory. Most practical sessions were effectively managed. Practical teaching in equine studies was of a consistently high standard. Students on the national diploma in equine studies gained valuable stable yard experience supervising first diploma students. However, not all students were productively engaged in suitable learning activities when on animal care duties and during some dog training sessions. Teachers in agriculture used their extensive industrial knowledge to illustrate their lessons but many theory lessons were poorly planned and teachers failed to provide adequate introductions or summaries. Overhead transparencies and handouts were generally of a high standard and supported students' learning. Technical inaccuracies in students' work and poor grammar and spelling were seldom corrected.

39 In countryside studies, teachers drew effectively on students' work experience. Theory lessons were complemented by visits to the conservation area and other sites on the estate. In the better lessons, teachers provided work which involved all students in realistic tasks and gave guidance to individuals. However, a number of practical lessons were poorly organised and students were inactive for significant periods while waiting for instructions. Skilful questioning of students by teachers in a few lessons helped elicit correct responses and encouraged students to express their views. In some lessons, students spent an excessive amount of time copying notes. Most assignments enabled students to consolidate and apply their knowledge to vocationally relevant tasks. Teachers did not always mark students' work consistently and often failed to give students enough feedback on assignments to help them improve their performance. Teachers seldom made use of information technology or encouraged students to use it.

40 In business studies, students were encouraged to work on their own. Teachers enjoyed good working relations with students. The development of students' key skills was effectively integrated with their other studies. Most lessons were well planned and carried out at an appropriate pace. Some teachers made good use of directed questions to involve all students in class discussions and successfully used students' work experience to enable them to understand business concepts. Students were enthusiastic

and worked co-operatively on class assignments. On the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced course, imaginative assignments enabled students to apply their knowledge of industry and commerce. Teachers marked assignments conscientiously, correcting spelling mistakes, and returned them promptly with constructive comments on how students might improve their work. A few lessons were dull because the teacher talked for too long and used the board excessively. Attendance was poor in some classes.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

41 The 1996 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) record that 63 per cent of the college's 30 students aged 16 to 18 in their final year of study on courses leading to advanced vocational qualifications were successful. This places the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. The tables also show that 85 per cent of the college's 65 students in their final year of study on courses leading to intermediate vocational qualifications succeeded. This places the college in the top 10 per cent of sector colleges on this performance measure. However, the majority of students follow courses which are not recorded in national performance tables.

42 Students carry out practical work carefully and have due regard to health and safety considerations. Students improve their employment prospects by gaining additional awards. For example, in 1996 most students studying for the national diploma in agriculture acquired the fork-lift truck operation certificate. Not all students who have studied for additional qualifications take the examination. Equestrian students develop competence in tractor driving but are not entered for the formal test.

43 Most students' assignment work was well researched and of an appropriate standard and made effective use of photographs and diagrams to illustrate points made. A common weakness of assignments was their poor structure and lack of an effective introduction or conclusion. In a few cases, students assignments contained incorrect factual responses which showed little understanding of the topic. Few students wordprocessed their assignments. On most courses, students were insufficiently aware of the application of information technology to their vocational area.

44 Floristry students gain sound experience from displaying their work at festivals and exhibitions. The high standard of practical work in floristry is reflected in the regular success of students in national competitions. The college has achieved the 'centre of excellence' award from the Floristry Training Council for the last four years. Students develop good business skills by costing floral arrangements for special events. In 1996, all the students who completed the national certificate in professional floristry gained their qualification. There is a history of poor achievement on some

part-time, advanced floristry courses. On the national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 3 in floristry in 1995, only 15 per cent of the students were successful and in 1996 none of the 18 students enrolled achieved an award. Notable success in 1996 was the award of the City & Guilds of London Institute (C&G) silver medal to two students on the national certificate in horticulture course. In 1996, 70 per cent of students on the C&G national certificate in horticulture were successful. There is a low level of achievement on the Royal Horticultural Society amenity horticulture certificate.

45 Pass rates for students completing the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma in agriculture in 1995 and 1996 were high at 94 per cent and 100 per cent, respectively. In the same years, the results on the national certificate course were poor. Retention on the BTEC first diploma in agriculture fell from 80 per cent in 1995 to 63 per cent in 1996. In practical sessions in agriculture, students displayed good teamworking skills and were keen to help each other complete practical tasks. There were good pass rates on the British Horse Society riding and road safety and horse knowledge awards. Students benefit from participating in shows such as those organised by the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association. A recent silver medallist won a Winston Churchill Fellowship grant and is continuing her studies in New Zealand. In 1996, 79 per cent of animal care students and 82 per cent of horse studies students who enrolled on the BTEC first diploma courses gained the qualification. No student enrolled in 1995 for the NVQ level 2 in animal care has yet gained the full award.

46 Students achieve good results on some countryside courses. Students showed a particular interest and an understanding of environmental and conservation issues. A good example of this was where students produced a detailed management plan for a site and presented it to the land owner. Students' ability to take their own notes and maintain a record of their work was poor. Practical work was usually carried out carefully and students were mindful of safety aspects. On the BTEC national diploma rural studies course, there was a 100 per cent pass rate in 1995 and 89 per cent in 1996. Students on the first diploma in rural studies were less successful; 73 per cent achieved the award in 1995 and 75 per cent in 1996. Seven of the 10 part-time students on the NVQ level 2 in gamekeeping in 1995-96 achieved the qualification.

47 Students on business courses displayed high standards of research and presentational skills. A group of students reached the finals in the 'schools challenge' competition, a local project set by industry for schools and colleges. In 1996, the four students completing the intermediate GNVQ in business each achieved the award. Of the 12 students enrolled on the advanced GNVQ in business in 1994-96, six were successful. This pass rate is below the national average. Seventy-two per cent of students entered for awards in wordprocessing were successful. Results are poor

on the part-time National Examining Board for Supervisory Management introduction to supervision and management certificate courses.

48 The intended destinations of about half of the students are known to the college. In 1996, approximately 97 per cent of full-time students progressed to further or higher education or employment. The college should monitor the destination of students more rigorously.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

49 The college has not developed a comprehensive policy for quality assurance. Quality assurance procedures are not followed consistently. Quality assurance procedures apply to the operation of courses and do not include cross-college services. There is no overall plan or manual that details all the procedures in operation, which courses they apply to and definitive dates for their completion. Some staff are insufficiently aware of the importance of target setting, performance indicators and accurate statistical data on students' achievements. There is a need to develop a more open and critical self-assessment of college provision. The college operates quality procedures approved to the ISO 9001 standard for training it carries out for the TEC.

50 The quality assurance procedures were developed under the guidance of the quality assurance group, a subcommittee of the academic board. The academic board does not critically analyse reports presented to it by the quality assurance group or request information that would enable it to make evaluative judgements about the quality of courses. The quality assurance cycle has four main elements that contribute to the overall assessment of courses: a survey of the initial views students have of their course; course appraisals which ask students for a more detailed course evaluation during the autumn and spring terms; end of course reviews produced by the course tutor; and student exit review forms. The procedures have not been applied to all courses and some staff are uncertain as to whether all of the procedures apply to all courses.

51 Issues from the initial student surveys and course appraisals are reviewed by the programme manager, the quality assurance group and the deputy principal (academic). The deputy principal (academic) is required to initiate action on issues that cannot be resolved satisfactorily by the course team or the programme manager. Areas for improvement have been recognised. For example, the 1996-97 initial survey of students indicated that students thought that the induction period was too long. The course appraisal process identified the need to improve students' access to careers advice. Although some of the issues raised were dealt with, this has not always been the case. Sometimes the action taken was not recorded.

52 The end of course review is the most valuable of the quality assurance procedures. It brings together the external verifiers' or moderators' reports, comments from the course appraisals committee, and

examination, destination and retention data. The number of course reviews carried out in 1996 was very low. Those that were completed lacked sufficient rigour in the analysis of students' performance. Overall, course reviews were too descriptive.

53 There has been a significant increase in the level of staff development within the past year. The budget for staff development increased from £17,000 in 1995-96 to almost £24,000 in 1996-97. In the past year, all staff have attended a staff-development day and received appraisal training. In addition, about 60 per cent of staff have attended other activities. For example, an increasing number of teachers have been encouraged to register for assessor awards and reception staff have had training for vocational awards in customer care. A comprehensive programme of weekly staff-development activities has been scheduled for each term. Topics have included support for basic skills, dyslexia training, careers training and teaching skills. Some activities were introduced in order to address issues raised during the curriculum area inspections. A staff appraisal system was introduced in December 1996 and became fully operational in January 1997. The scheme has helped to identify training needs. The college is at an advanced stage in preparing its submission for the Investor in People award.

54 The college charter has recently been revised but has yet to be approved by the academic board. The revised version is an improvement on the previous charter. It is well laid out, easy to read, and contains a number of performance standards, for example, in relation to student admissions and complaints. The charter commits the college to monitoring the complaints procedure as part of the quality assurance system. These developments represent a significant improvement as there is no history of the college monitoring its performance against the charter.

55 The college's self-assessment report follows the headings used in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Each section contains both strengths and weaknesses. It was written by the senior management team before the inspection, and updated following the inspections of curriculum areas. The report is largely descriptive and has few quantifiable statements. It does not comment on some important aspects of provision, such as course management. It also lacks thorough evaluation of teaching and the promotion of learning, and students' achievements. As a consequence, there are differences between some of the college's judgements and those of the inspection team.

RESOURCES

Staffing

56 There is a full-time equivalent staff of 38 teachers and 97 other staff which includes instructors, technicians and support staff. Most staff have relevant industrial experience and appropriate technical ability. Some staff lack professional teaching skills. Only 55 per cent of teachers have a

teaching qualification and the same proportion have a training and development lead body award. Part-time teaching staff, many of whom work in local enterprises, contribute valuable up-to-date expertise and knowledge of the industry. Staff have been slow to achieve assessor and verifier awards to support GNVQ and NVQ courses.

57 Teaching staff are not effectively deployed across the college and are not always fully utilised. Although systems exist to cover staff absences, they are not always reliable. This has resulted in some classes not being taught. Often part-time teachers who contribute to vocational programmes do not receive sufficient guidance and are not briefed on the teaching to be done. Teachers in some areas of the curriculum are well supported by technicians and instructors. Support workers on the college farm, and in other commercial enterprises, help to supervise students and contribute to their assessment. Instructors supervise students in areas such as equine studies and carry out practical tasks under the direction of teachers. Technical support staff are not always effectively deployed, for example, on countryside management courses and in computing classes. Teachers sometimes carry out duties which could be covered by technicians. There is an adequate level of administrative staff to support the work of the college.

Equipment/learning resources

58 Specialist equipment is generally of a good standard to support courses. There are shortages of specialist resources in some areas where student numbers have increased. In the equine unit there is a good range of tack and equipment but the number of horses available for students' use is low. The small number of animals and the limited exotic collection in the animal care unit severely restrict the practical experience students can gain. The dog grooming parlour is well equipped. Students have access to a good range of vehicles, including 16 tractors. The varied range of livestock on the farm units provides a valuable learning resource. The broad collection of plants and trees on the college's estate is used to contribute to students' learning. There are planned maintenance schedules for most categories of equipment. There is no clear policy on the upgrading and replacement of machinery and equipment.

59 The library has 7,000 books, of which 1,300 have been purchased over the last two years. Opening times of up to 70 hours a week provide students with good access to the library. However, as the library is not always staffed in the evenings the withdrawal of books is not always recorded. There are no library facilities for horticultural students at Burlingham. Despite recent improvements, there are inadequacies in the library which has led to criticisms by students and staff. There are few study places and quiet study areas for the number of students. Many curriculum areas have an inadequate bookstock to support students and enable them to complete their assignments. Floristry students make use of staff collections. There is a good range of specialist agricultural

periodicals but insufficient equine studies and animal care texts. The range and quality of books in agriculture is generally adequate.

60 There is an adequate range of information technology facilities to meet current demand. There are 43 up-to-date computers. Although they are not networked, students have good access to computers outside timetabled classes. Overall, there is a narrow range of general and specialist software. There is a growing number of specialist compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases and over 180 videos for students' use.

Accommodation

61 The grounds of the college estate and farm sites provide a pleasant and attractive learning environment. The grounds at the Burlingham site are well maintained and include a specialist horticultural centre and bowling green. Some specialist facilities are of a high standard, such as the commercial farm, the poultry unit, and the purpose-built equestrian centre. Most accommodation at Easton is adequate but the sports hall, student social areas, and some pig and farm buildings are in a poor state of repair. The machinery, construction, and science workshops are of variable quality. Hutted accommodation has inadequate heating and ventilation systems. Teaching rooms are generally clean, well maintained and suitably furnished. Most, but not all rooms, have whiteboards, blinds and overhead projector screens. Few rooms have stimulating displays or examples of students' work. Some covered areas enable students to continue outdoor practical work in inclement weather. The college monitors the use of classroom teaching space.

62 There are poor levels of access to most of the Easton site for people with restricted mobility. There is no access to the library, residential accommodation and the information technology area. Access for wheelchair users is better at Burlingham where there is a specially designed garden area for horticultural students. However, there is no access to the main teaching rooms for wheelchair users.

63 Some residential accommodation is in need of upgrading and refurbishment. Exterior lighting around the site could be improved. There is extensive car parking space but traffic flow around the site is not well directed. The student common room is untidy and used as a smoking area, which is offensive to many students. There are no childcare facilities. Sports facilities are limited. The college has a clear set of proposals for the future development of the college sites.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

64 The main strengths of the college are:

- close links with some industries and the rural community
- initiatives to attract students from groups which have not usually entered further education

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- a highly committed corporation which provides clear strategic direction
 - the effective financial management systems
 - the frequent and effective use of relevant industrial examples in teaching
 - some notable achievements by individual students
 - the comprehensive programme of staff development
 - some well-equipped specialist facilities
 - the success in attracting industrial support and funding for new developments.
- 65 If it is to build on these strengths, the college should address:
- the absence of a marketing strategy
 - the unsatisfactory management of courses
 - the lack of management procedures to monitor the effectiveness of course teams
 - inconsistent tutorial support, some of which is weak
 - ineffective recording and monitoring of students' progress
 - teaching quality which is below average for the sector
 - some poor examination results
 - the inadequate quality assurance system
 - the inadequacies of the library
 - the limited access for people with restricted mobility.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at June 1997)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at June 1997)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area
(as at June 1997)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents
(as at June 1997)

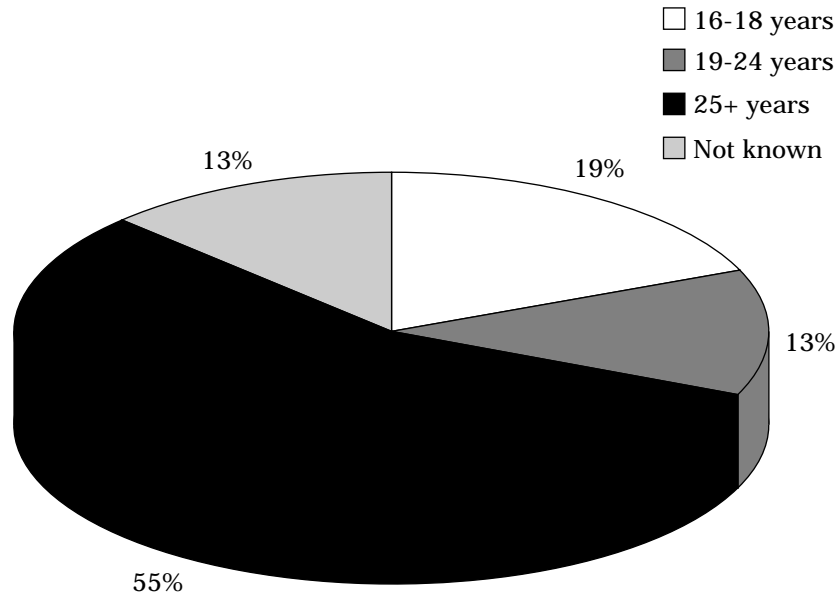
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 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

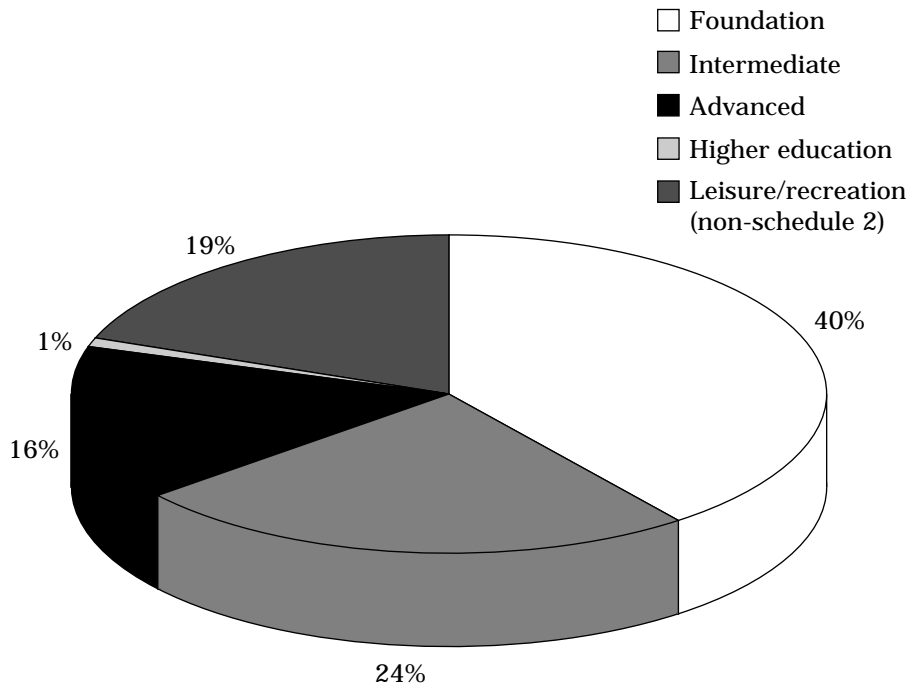
Easton College: percentage student numbers by age (as at June 1997)



Student numbers: 2,300

Figure 2

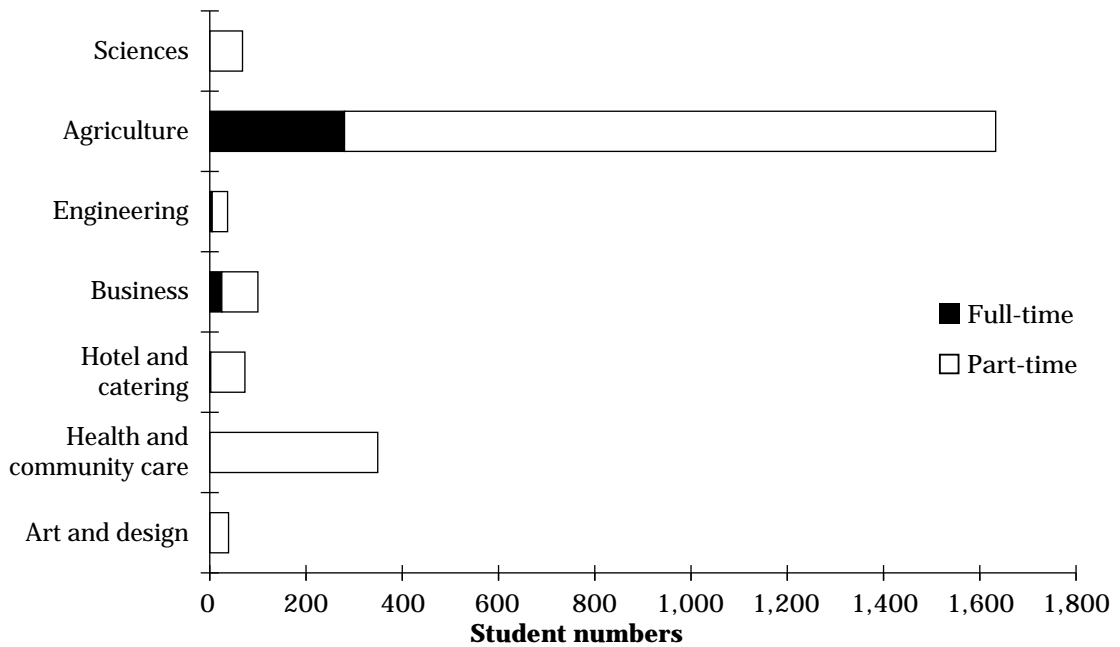
Easton College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at June 1997)



Student numbers: 2,300

Figure 3

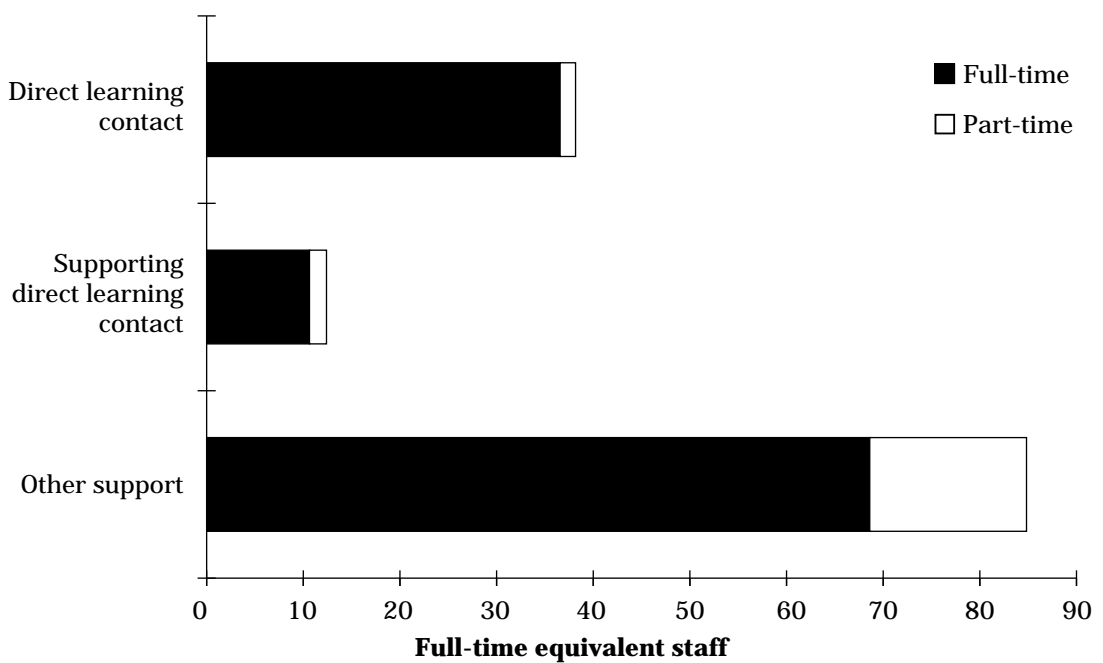
Easton College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at June 1997)



Student numbers: 2,300

Figure 4

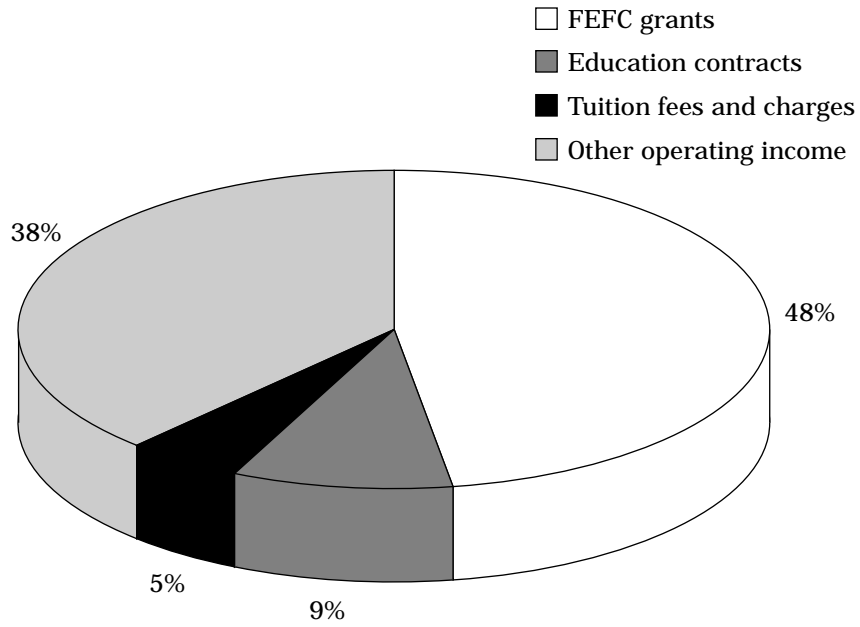
Easton College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at June 1997)



Full-time equivalent staff: 135

Figure 5

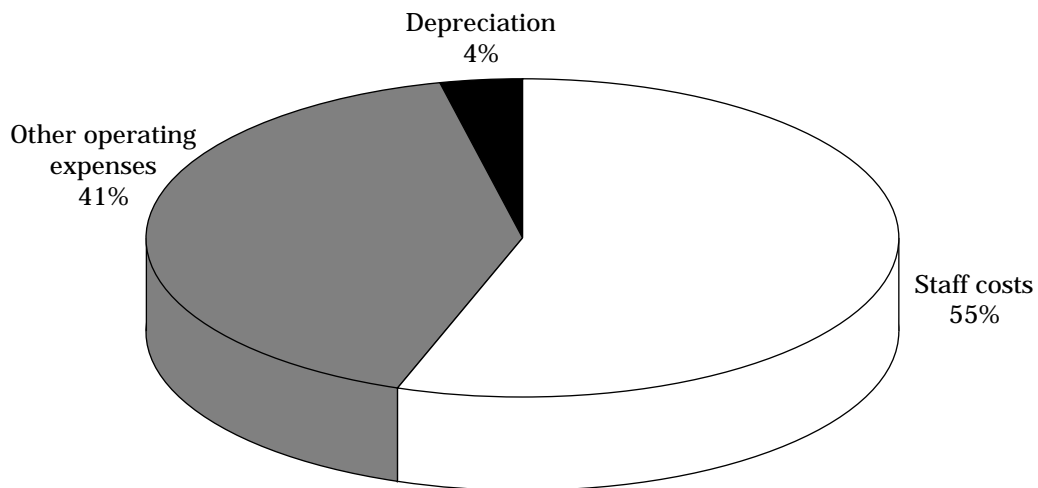
Easton College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £3,384,000

Figure 6

Easton College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £3,658,000*
*includes restructuring costs

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