

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Eccles College

January 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 04/97

ECCLES COLLEGE

NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected September-October 1996

Summary

Eccles College is a large sixth form college in Salford. It has an experienced and hard-working governing body. The college responds well to the community it serves. Since 1991 it has greatly increased its range of daytime courses. Evening classes are now well established. Students receive good support and guidance from their teachers and personal tutors. There is a well-structured tutorial programme, though the quality of tutorials is variable. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are encouraged to play a full part in the life of the college. Staff are well qualified. There are good standards of teaching and learning throughout the college. Students work hard and enthusiastically. Examination results in most subjects are good. The college's quality management system is comprehensive, straightforward and has the wholehearted support of staff. In May 1993, a fire destroyed a quarter of the college's buildings. Smoke damaged the rest. A well-managed programme of rebuilding and refurbishment has brought the majority of accommodation to a good standard. It is kept very clean, and is carefully maintained. Most subjects have dedicated rooms with lively displays of students' work and other materials. Equipment in most areas is of a high standard. The college should: further develop its flexibility of provision; establish further strategies for increasing its income; ensure that staff on vocational courses are aware of what employers need and expect; improve retention rates in some subjects; ensure consistent use of quality assurance procedures; and improve the standard of some accommodation.

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		1
Quality assurance		2
Resources:	staffing	1
	equipment/learning resources	1
	accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	2	English, communications and modern languages	2
Mathematics and computing	3	Psychology, sociology, law and economics	2
Business	2	Geography, history, politics and classical studies	2
Art and design	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 Eccles College was inspected during September and October 1996. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected in early September, followed by specialist programmes two weeks later. The inspection of aspects of cross-college provision took place in mid-October. Twelve inspectors spent a total of 53 days in the college. They observed 120 classes and eight tutorial sessions. The inspectors scrutinised over 400 pieces of students' work. They examined a wide range of college documents, including the mission statement, the strategic plan and annual operating statement, the self-assessment report, quality reports and programme area manuals. They held meetings with the college's governors, its management team, teaching staff, and present and former students. They also met parents, head teachers of partner schools, representatives of local universities, employees of the careers service, and a representative from the Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Eccles College is a sixth form college in the city of Salford. It was established in 1972 and was formed from the merger of two mixed grammar schools.

3 The college is set in extensive grounds in Ellesmere Park, a residential area of Salford. A substantial part of the grounds has been made into an attractive and interesting nature conservancy park. In May 1993, a fire destroyed a quarter of the college's accommodation. The rest suffered damage from smoke. The college immediately started a rebuilding programme, which is still continuing. All of the college's permanent buildings are now single-storey and offer easy access for students in wheelchairs.

4 Salford ranks in the Department of the Environment's Index of Local Conditions, 1994, as the twenty-eighth most deprived local authority in England and as the third most deprived in the North West. Salford's unemployment rate stands at 8.7 per cent. Approximately 41 per cent of the unemployed have been out of work for over a year. This is one of the highest rates in the region and compares with 34.8 per cent for Greater Manchester. In 1994, only 56 per cent of Salford's school-leavers went on to further education or training. In 1995, this figure dropped to 51 per cent, compared with 59 per cent for the North West as a whole and a national average of 73 per cent. Twenty per cent of the 1995 school-leavers went straight into unemployment. In the same year, only 27.9 per cent of 16-year-old school-leavers achieved five or more passes at grades A* to C in the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), against a national average of 43.5 per cent.

5 The college's mission is to be 'a key provider of high-quality education for students in the city of Salford and the surrounding areas, who are aged 16 and over'. Its lengthy mission statement lists in some detail what the

college promises to provide in response to the needs, aspirations and abilities of its students. There is a strong emphasis on promoting equality of opportunity.

6 The college is dedicated to maintaining its focus on full-time education for the 16 to 19 age group, which forms the core of its activity. At the same time, it is rapidly expanding its provision for adult students, mainly through the programme of evening classes that started in 1994. Most daytime students come from 21 local 11 to 16 high schools, including five Roman Catholic schools. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,005 full-time students on roll and 284 students attending part time in the evening. Three per cent of the students are from minority ethnic groups, a proportion which matches that of the proportion of Salford as a whole. The college competes for students with two sixth form colleges and a large further education college which lie within a three-mile radius. 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. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 The college's range of daytime courses has grown steadily in recent years, reflecting its commitment to increasing vocational provision. Students are now offered:

- general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) in 28 subjects, including 13 which are also available as GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects
- GCSEs in 14 subjects
- general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses at intermediate and advanced levels in art and design, business, health and social care, leisure and tourism, and science
- an advanced GNVQ course in information technology
- national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in four areas
- a programme leading to basic numeracy, literacy and information technology qualifications for students with moderate learning difficulties
- 46 short courses lasting between 10 and 30 weeks, all bearing national or local accreditation
- short courses that prepare students for entry into teaching, nursing and the services.

8 Each year the vice-principal with responsibility for the curriculum reviews the college's portfolio of courses to ensure that it is in keeping with the needs of students and reflects demand. The review has led to a substantial reduction in GCSE courses over the past three years. GNVQ programmes have replaced them.

9 The college is increasingly responsive to the needs of older students in its surrounding communities. Adults are welcome to join any of the courses that run during the day. Programmes funded by the European Community to help unemployed people to prepare themselves to return to work are available in two local community centres. The college started to offer evening classes in 1994-95. Most of the evening courses last for 10 weeks. A few, such as the course for legal executives, last for the whole year. Business and management programmes are a recent development and have proved popular. A new programme of evening classes will be available in the spring term when college staff confidently expect a further 450 enrolments. There is a one-year foundation access course in science for mature students who may not have the qualifications for entry to degree programmes. If such students complete this course successfully, they automatically gain entry to the first year of a degree course at the University of Salford.

10 Timetables for daytime classes are regularly reviewed. Every effort is made to ensure that most students can combine subjects as they wish. For example, recent changes to the GCE A level options grid have made it easier for students to combine sociology and psychology, and almost 50 per cent are now doing so. There are opportunities to take GCE AS subjects alongside, or instead of, GCE A levels. Students following GNVQ courses have the chance to study a GCE A level subject at the same time. Flexible modular courses are available at GCE A level in a small number of subjects, but modularisation is a long way from being complete. The college does not as yet offer students a wide choice of how, where and when they study. There are no arrangements for students wishing to study in their own homes or places of work.

11 The college puts a lot of thought and effort into carrying out research into new markets and into publicising its courses. A member of staff has responsibility for co-ordinating marketing across the college. There is a detailed marketing plan. It is supplemented by an operating statement which sets out the activities for the year. Publicity material is well written and attractively presented. Energetic promotional work has contributed substantially to the growth in student numbers. This year, the college has exceeded its recruitment targets in most areas. Over the past three years, the numbers of full-time students attending the college have increased by 29 per cent and the numbers of part-time students by 96 per cent. Marketing is no longer focused only on those groups of students which have traditionally sought a sixth form education. Staff are working hard to raise the aspirations of groups which have not usually entered the college.

12 Manchester TEC has recently provided funding to help the college to develop part-time GNVQ provision and the teaching of key skills. Senior managers of the college are keen to increase the amount of work they do with Manchester TEC. The college recognises the importance of having links with industry, and has appointed an industrial liaison co-ordinator.

There are strong relationships with local employers who give practical help to the college in a number of ways. They provide work experience for students. Some teachers of vocational subjects, though not all, seek their advice on the content of courses. Representatives from industry give lunchtime lectures as part of the students' careers programme. An international company that makes beauty products has sponsored an NVQ programme in beauty care.

13 The college continues to have a good relationship with the local authority and with its education service. Links with 21 local 11 to 16 high schools are now well established. Staff make regular visits to schools to talk to pupils and they attend careers conventions and open days. Students often accompany staff on visits to their former schools to help in publicising the college. Taster days and twilight sessions allow prospective students to sample life at the college before making an application. Curricular links with schools are strengthening. The college is working closely with three schools on the development of GNVQ units. A link with two other schools is focusing on keeping in education students who would normally leave at the age of 16. Links with colleges in France, Italy and Sweden have developed with a view to making collaborative bids for European funding.

14 Relationships with local universities are good. Staff from these universities visit the college to provide students with information on higher education. Members of the college's staff, for their part, provide information that helps the universities to develop taster days and training days which enable prospective students to gain experience of higher education so that they can make improved choices when they apply for university courses. There are some productive curricular links. The college has collaborated with Salford Local Education Authority and a local school to secure, for two years, the services of a teacher from Japan. The Japanese government sponsors the teacher. There are only five such projects in the country. The college is now able to offer courses in Japanese to both daytime and evening students.

15 The college has a long-standing equal opportunities policy. The equal opportunities co-ordinator has been successful in raising awareness of issues amongst staff and students. For example, staff teaching on theatre studies courses became concerned that they were failing to recruit male students. With existing students, they staged performances in a number of local schools, including some from which the college did not normally recruit. This led to an increase of 40 per cent in student numbers, including a greater proportion of males. There is a particularly strong partnership with Oakwood School for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. The college has taken pains to develop courses that are suitable for Oakwood School's students and enable them to phase their progression to mainstream college activities.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

16 The college has a large board of corporation, with 19 members. Most of them are experienced governors who have served on the board since it was set up in 1993. The four new appointments since that time have been made on the advice of the search committee. Members of the committee try to ensure that breadth of membership is maintained. The governors have backgrounds in education, local government, industry, marketing and personnel, accountancy and the law. There is a student governor, two staff governors and a representative from Manchester TEC. The clerk is a retired head teacher who is paid for his services. His duties are clearly laid down in a comprehensive job description. The college benefits from having governors from such a wide variety of backgrounds. New governors are given a thorough introduction to the college and its staff. They meet the principal before appointment. Their duties are carefully explained and they are given the opportunity to step down if these duties are felt to be too onerous. There are training sessions to which all are invited, at least one of which has involved a consultant.

17 All governors take an active and informed interest in the college's affairs, and are conscientious in carrying out their duties. They are proud of the college and vigorously support the principal and her staff. The board meets three times a year, and there is normally almost full attendance. There are three major subcommittees: a finance and general purposes committee, a remuneration committee and an audit committee. A search committee and an appeals committee meet as required. Governors have the opportunity for a thorough discussion of the college's strategic plan at appropriate times of the year. They receive regular reports from the principal on progress against the plan. Other members of staff present reports as appropriate on new developments or particular curriculum areas. Governors are generous with their time, and are more than willing to use their skills and experience to promote and develop the college. They have recently agreed to link with members of staff who have cross-college responsibilities so that fuller use can be made of their expertise. One of them already works closely with the health and safety committee. A new governor, who is a senior manager in a local university, has agreed to chair the college's recently-established quality executive committee.

18 The college's senior management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals, and four directors. For the management of the curriculum and for quality assurance the college is divided into four programme areas: mathematics and science; business, social sciences and information technology; English, modern languages and physical education; and humanities and art. A programme manager heads each of the four areas. The role of the programme manager has existed for just over a year in its present form. This layer of management is not yet fully effective in improving the quality of the curriculum and bringing about co-ordinated

curricular change. There are also managers responsible for learning resources, and for industry and community links. A student services team is responsible for careers and pastoral support and guidance. Fourteen subject co-ordinators have the task of seeing that day-to-day subject requirements are met. Their number is reducing.

19 Senior management provide strong leadership. They have successfully communicated to all staff a clear and realistic vision of the way in which they see the college developing. Growth and change are being carefully introduced and managed, at a pace that staff find acceptable. Governors and staff take part in an annual review of the college's mission. Staff speak knowledgeably of the reasons underlying the changes that have come about in the college. They appreciate the opportunities for discussion and consultation, both formal and informal, that have been given.

20 The management of the college is characterised by openness and the encouragement of discussion and participation in decision making at all levels. Significant effort has gone into creating an effective system of communications. There is a tightly timetabled structure of committee meetings, supplemented by task groups or quality circles that are disbanded once they have served their purpose. Minutes of corporation and senior management team meetings are displayed in staff rooms. Any member of staff may attend either of these meetings as an observer, though few take up this opportunity. Briefings for all staff are held weekly. These ensure that staff are aware of decisions and know why they have been taken.

21 Staff at all levels are involved in strategic planning. Each subject area has its own plan which ties in with programme area and college-wide plans. Staff understanding of annual planning is developing. However, planning at subject and programme area levels is not rigorous. Plans are unnecessarily long. They generally fail to identify which objectives are priorities. They have few benchmarks or specific targets against which progress can accurately be measured.

22 The college has a well-developed computerised management information system. A registry, with appropriately-qualified staff, has recently been set up to improve the quality and flow of information. Staff receive regular and reliable reports on a range of subjects. They are increasingly using the information they receive to inform planning and assist monitoring. A particular feature of the college's information system is its electronic attendance-recording system. All teaching staff use portable machines, resembling laptop computers, to record attendances in each class. The machines immediately transmit the information to a central database. The system enables accurate records to be kept, shows whether staff are taking registers regularly, and enables tutors to follow up students' absences quickly.

23 The college fulfils its obligations under sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*. There is a weekly act of worship and students have the opportunity to take part in religious education. A chaplain regularly visits the college.

24 The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Its average level of funding has decreased from £21.76 per unit in 1993-94 to £19.74 per unit in 1996-97. The median for all sixth form colleges in 1996-97 is £19.36 per unit. The college receives 96 per cent of its income from Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) recurrent funding. Although the college has large cash reserves, its income for 1996-97 will be insufficient to cover its outgoings. The senior management team and the board of governors have introduced, and are seeing through, plans for saving money. They have few long-term strategies for securing income from sources other than the FEFC. Few of the college's staff other than the directors have experience of handling large budgets, though programme managers are now undergoing training. Programme managers delegate budgets for staff training, books, consumables and minor items of equipment to subject co-ordinators. These budgets are sometimes substantial. They are not subject to detailed spending plans and, in some cases, the basis for allocation needs reconsidering.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

25 Students have the opportunity to visit the college well before they enrol. There are open evenings throughout the year, which they may attend with their parents or guardians, and at the end of the summer term there is a conference for new students. During the conference they are able to sample four subjects or courses of their choice. A clear and comprehensive policy underlies the college's arrangements for admitting new students. Under the policy, prospective students receive impartial advice before being allowed to enrol on a full-time course. They have two interviews with college staff. The first of these normally takes place on school premises during recruitment. The second is during enrolment. It takes place in the college after the publication of GCSE examination results. A schedule of appointments, clear documentation, and briefing meetings for staff help to ensure that the arrangements for enrolment run smoothly. Senior staff scrutinise programmes of study carefully to ensure that students' choices of subjects or courses match their career aspirations.

26 A well-structured induction programme ensures that all new students become familiar with the college and the way in which it works. The programme spreads over several weeks. Attractively-presented booklets, tailored to the needs of different age groups, help students to understand the purpose of the induction period. Students also receive a detailed handbook which describes the wide range of services that the college offers them. They find it clearly written and easy to use. Individual subjects and courses also have their own induction programmes. In 75 per cent of the sessions observed, teachers involved students in imaginative activities

which allowed them to meet others in the group and to start developing skills and knowledge directly related to their courses. In the weaker sessions, too much time was spent on administrative tasks or on giving information which students could read for themselves. Systems are in place which enable students to transfer from one subject or course to another. At the time of the inspection, 72 students had taken up this opportunity.

27 The college works closely with local high schools to make sure it can provide appropriate support for students with known learning difficulties and/or disabilities when they begin their college courses. The college also has systems for identifying other students who will need extra support to help them learn. During induction, all daytime students take the Basic Skills Agency screening test in numeracy and literacy. This year's results indicate that at least 17 students may be in need of support and that over 100 students performed below acceptable standards in at least one section of the tests. At the time of the inspection, six weeks after the beginning of term, the college had not finalised its arrangements to provide additional support for these students. There are certain times of the day when students can receive help from specialists in English and mathematics without making prior appointments. This service is comparatively new and it is too early to judge its effectiveness. Few subject areas use diagnostic tests to identify the capabilities of their students.

28 Students value highly the pastoral support they receive from college staff. Eight senior tutors, one of whom is the programme manager for student services, have responsibility for the guidance and welfare of daytime students. Each works closely with a team of five or six personal tutors and has responsibility for about 130 students. Full-time students are assigned to personal tutorial groups. They consist of a mix of first-year and second-year students from a range of courses. Personal tutors meet their groups daily for registration and weekly for a tutorial period of 40 minutes. They monitor students' attendance carefully and most of them follow up unexplained absences promptly. Mature students have a tutorial group of their own, attendance at which is voluntary. The programme of tutorial activities is well structured and relevant. A comprehensive pack of resources is used by personal tutors to ensure consistent coverage of topics, but the quality of tutorials is variable. Most tutorial sessions visited by inspectors were poorly managed and their purpose was not communicated effectively to students. Students are able to arrange confidential interviews with health visitors who come into college weekly. Other support services for students are provided on demand by external agencies.

29 Students' progress is thoroughly monitored through regular reviews with personal tutors and senior tutors. Full and reliable records help staff to build up a detailed knowledge of the students for whom they are responsible. For example, the quality of references written by personal and senior tutors for students applying to higher education is high.

Students are encouraged to assess their own performance, to identify targets for improvement and to develop their own action plans. Students maintain and update their records of achievement with the help of their tutors. This ensures that all of a student's relevant experience is included in the summative document. Eighty-seven per cent of students who left the college in 1996 had records of achievement accredited by the City of Salford Local Accreditation Board. This is a panel made up of local employers, representatives from the local education authority and Manchester TEC, and users of the records, who include the principal of the college.

30 Careers education and guidance is a particular strength of the college. Activities within the tutorial programme, a series of lunchtime meetings led by speakers from a variety of professions and organisations, and specially arranged group visits to universities help students to plan their careers. There is a well-used and extensive careers library in the learning resources centre. Local careers officers visit the college twice a week to work with groups of students or to interview individuals who may want impartial advice. This year, at the college's request, careers officers will deliver a programme of activities specifically for students who want to enter employment as soon as they leave college.

31 Channels of communication between senior managers and the student body are effective. Elected representatives from each tutor group meet the director of students weekly. The students' executive, a smaller group affiliated to the National Union of Students, meets the principal once a month. A series of social events and fund-raising activities throughout the year help to develop a strong community spirit within the college.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

32 One hundred and twenty teaching sessions were inspected. Of these, 73 per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. This is above the national average of 63 per cent quoted in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. Weaknesses outweighed strengths in 5 per cent of lessons. College records indicated that the average attendance at the classes observed during the inspection was 90 per cent. 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
GCE AS/A level		15	27	10	3	0	55
GCSE		6	10	4	3	0	23
GNVQ		4	10	6	0	0	20
Other vocational and NVQ		2	2	1	0	0	5
Other		5	7	5	0	0	17
Total		32	56	26	6	0	120

33 Throughout the college relationships between teachers and students were characterised by mutual respect. Good discipline was maintained at all times. Teachers were clearly committed to their work. They offered a great deal of support to their students both in and out of class, and gave freely of their time. Students, for their part, clearly enjoyed their studies. They listened attentively to their teachers and tackled written and practical assignments conscientiously. Many of them were able to work independently and used the time when they were not in class wisely.

34 In mathematics and computing teachers planned their lessons thoroughly. They were clear about their objectives and had appropriate resources and documentation to hand. In the best lessons, students undertook a variety of tasks. They were encouraged to ask and answer questions and to discuss the principles underlying their work, drawing where appropriate on knowledge and skills covered earlier in the course. In some weaker lessons, teachers failed to check students' understanding of the topic they were working on and did not take into account differing levels of ability. In a few computing lessons, poor classroom management led to some students having to wait for relatively long periods before receiving help. There was a well-structured programme of assessments, but assessments in mathematics were not cross-referenced to the learning objectives of individual units of work. Teachers marked work carefully but, because they did not all use the same grading system, students became confused.

35 In science lessons, including physical education, teachers used a variety of teaching methods. They were skilled in helping students to work independently and clearly valued the contributions that students made to lessons. Teachers managed laboratory sessions well. They used practical work to illustrate scientific principles and aid students' understanding of theory. For example, in a GCE A level physics class, students worked on a number of well-designed experiments. They obtained appropriate results and were able to interpret them. A skilled and enthusiastic technician provided extra support during the session. GNVQ students also undertook interesting and appropriate practical tasks that developed their key skills as well as their scientific knowledge. For example, students in an intermediate class made a video on safety in the laboratory that drew on their communication and planning skills. In theory sessions teachers used handouts and transparencies to aid learning. The quality of some of these was poor. Projectors and screens were inconveniently placed.

36 Teachers of business studies were enthusiastic about their subjects. They showed a thorough understanding of course requirements and had drawn up appropriate and comprehensive schemes of work and well-structured lesson plans. They prepared good-quality, helpful documentation for their students. GNVQ assignments were well written. They were designed to develop core skills as well as the students' knowledge and understanding of business processes. Teachers made sure that students understood how they were to be assessed. They provided

detailed comments on students' written work and returned it promptly. In most classes, teachers used work in pairs or groups and question and answer techniques effectively. Students usually responded well to such activities and showed that they understood what they were doing. However, in some larger classes students did not work well together. They came to lessons ill prepared and did not take a full part in discussions and other activities.

37 In art, media and theatre studies teachers used a range of teaching methods. In many classes they introduced activities that challenged students and sustained their interest. For example, in a theatre studies group, students were asked to write a summary of *The Tempest* in the form of a play. Students produced the play later in the term. All students found the activity demanding and stimulating. One commented that it had caused him to change his decision to leave the course. The most successful lessons were characterised by friendly relationships between staff and students which encouraged students to discuss the work freely. In a few poorer sessions, the teacher lectured at length, did not check that students understood what was being said, and did not encourage them to ask questions. GNVQ classes in art and design lacked a vocational focus, and students in their second year had not reached the expected level of development for the stage they had reached in the programme. Students did not gain experience of working in a wide enough range of specialist areas and of using information technology skills which were relevant to the workplace.

38 In the humanities, most teaching was of a good standard. All courses had comprehensive and well-structured schemes of work which enabled staff to work co-operatively. Teachers planned their lessons with care and made their aims and objectives clear to students, although some wasted time on over-lengthy explanations. They used a variety of methods to engage students' interest in learning. These included the use of lectures, of work in groups and pairs, and of exercises in which the whole class could take part. In many classes students learned well. For example, in psychology, students' written work contained appropriate and accurate references to psychological research and revealed well-developed skills of analysis and evaluation. Handouts for students were wordprocessed and were attractive and easy to read. Classroom activities did not always challenge the more able students. Tutors' comments on marked work were sometimes too few and did not always indicate how the work might be improved. The overcrowding and poor insulation against noise in some classrooms had a detrimental effect on learning.

39 In English, communications and modern languages there were comprehensive schemes of work that included consideration of teaching methods and key skill development. Teaching was purposeful. All preparation tasks were set outside of lessons and time in class was used to the full. Teachers managed their classes well and maintained a friendly yet disciplined atmosphere. In English, question and answer techniques

were used at a challenging level with some of the more able groups of GCE A level students. Not all lessons, however, involved the students with sufficient intellectual rigour. GCSE classes were particularly well taught. Moderators' reports praised the variety of teaching methods and activities, and commended students' speaking and listening skills. Modern language lessons were lively, interesting and enjoyable. Teachers successfully insisted on the use in class of the language being learned, even with beginners. The walls of the four dedicated language classrooms were covered with attractively-produced displays of useful phrases and items of vocabulary. Students used these as prompts when speaking. Teachers laid great stress on accuracy in both writing and speech, and corrected students' work sensitively but rigorously. They used a variety of teaching aids, including the language laboratory, with skill and confidence. The handouts used to supplement published texts were generally well produced. A few contained printing errors that confused and misled students.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

40 In 1996, students aged 16 to 18 entered for the GCE AS/A level examinations scored, on average, 4.7 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). In 1994 and 1995 the corresponding average was 4.8 points. These scores consistently place the college among the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, according to data published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Of the 319 students who began two or more GCE A levels in 1994, 68 per cent obtained pass grades in two or more subjects in 1996, an increase of 3 per cent on the previous year.

41 The college subscribes to a system which enables institutions to calculate the extent of students' achievements on GCE A level courses by comparing their actual GCE A level results with those predicted on the basis of GCSE grades on entry to the college. Data for 1996 were not available at the time of the inspection. Data for the previous two years show that:

- students taking examinations in art, psychology and physical education performed significantly above expectations
- in physics, mathematics, computing, English, French, German, Spanish, Latin, classical studies, economics, history, geography and music, results were broadly in line with expectations
- in biology, chemistry, business studies, sociology, communication studies, general studies and theatre studies, results were below those predicted.

42 In 1996, there were 774 two-year GCE A level entries in 28 subjects from students aged 16 to 18. The average pass rate was 86 per cent. At the time of the inspection, the most recent comparative data published by the DfEE related to results achieved in 1995. Compared with the 1995 national averages for sixth form colleges, students at the college gained:

-
- pass rates at, or above, national averages in 17 subjects, including 100 per cent pass rates in physical education, pure mathematics and mechanics, Latin (one entry) and Spanish (two entries), and pass rates of over 90 per cent in biology, computing, business studies, art and design, theatre studies, English literature, French, German, psychology and general studies
 - pass rates at least 10 per cent below national averages in chemistry, physics, further mathematics (three entries), music (four entries), classical studies and sociology.

43 The number of GCE A level students achieving grades A to C in 1996 ranged from very good in some subjects to poor in others:

- in physical education, computing and music, the proportions of students achieving grades A to C were more than 25 per cent higher than the corresponding national averages for 18 year olds in sixth form colleges
- in just over half the subjects, the proportions were lower than the national averages
- in chemistry, pure and applied mathematics and business studies, the proportions were at least 15 per cent, and in sociology at least 30 per cent, below national averages.

44 The number of students taking GCE AS examinations is low. Seventeen students began two-year courses in either Christian theology, electronics, computing or French in 1994. All but two completed their courses and 10 achieved grades A to E in 1996. Most entries to other GCE AS examinations were from students who began GCE A level courses in physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics and decided later to aim for GCE AS qualifications instead. In 1996, 12 of the 18 students who made this decision obtained pass grades in the relevant subjects.

45 Most GCSE courses are taken by students wanting to improve on the grades they achieved at school. English and mathematics recruit the largest numbers of students. Over the last three years:

- few students have achieved their primary learning goal of four or five subjects at grades A* to C, and a significant number of students failed to achieve a grade higher than D
- the percentages of students achieving grades A* to C in French and English have steadily increased whilst those in art and design and biology have declined
- results in mathematics, physics, graphics, law and physical education have fluctuated but were below the national averages for sixth form colleges in one year only
- results in psychology have been consistently below the national average.

46 In 1996, there were 502 entries for GCSE examinations in 17 subjects. Comparisons with the national averages for 16 to 18 year olds in sixth form colleges show that:

- the proportions of students achieving grade C or above were above national averages in just over half the subjects
- there were good results in a few subjects including French, where all students achieved grade C or above, and English (77 students), keyboarding and sociology where the proportion of students achieving grade C or above were at least 20 per cent higher than the national average for each subject
- there were poor results in art and design, biology and information systems where the proportions achieving grade C or above were at least 20 per cent below national averages.

47 College data for courses leading to GNVQs show that:

- the percentage of students achieving full awards at advanced level in business dropped from 91 per cent in 1995 to 63 per cent in 1996
- all students who completed the advanced health and social care course in 1996 received the full award
- in each of the last three years, the percentages of students achieving full awards at intermediate level in art and design were within 5 per cent of national averages
- the percentage of students achieving full awards at intermediate level in business fell from 89 per cent in 1995 to 53 per cent in 1996.

48 Retention rates for courses which ended in June 1996 were poor. Only 80 per cent of students who began two or more GCE A level subjects in 1994 completed their courses and only seven subjects retained at least 85 per cent of their students. Retention rates were below 85 per cent in 13 GCSE subjects and 90 per cent or better in only four subjects. Rates for advanced GNVQ courses ranged from 63 per cent in health and social care to 86 per cent in business. For intermediate GNVQ courses they were at least 89 per cent. Comparison of college enrolments in November 1995 with enrolments in May 1996 shows that the college retained 90 per cent of its students, an increase of 3 per cent over the previous year.

49 Most students who complete GCE A level courses and achieve qualifications proceed to higher education courses. At the time of the inspection, the college was collecting information about the destinations of students who completed their studies in June 1996. College data for 1995 show that, of the 261 students who entered two or more GCE AS/A level examinations, 73 per cent proceeded to higher education, 8 per cent continued in further education and 9 per cent found work. A further 8 per cent deferred entry to higher education for a year. The remaining 2 per cent were grouped under the heading 'other'. About a third of the

70 students who completed one-year courses in 1995 progressed to higher level courses in further education and just over a third found employment.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

50 The college's mission statement commits it to providing high-quality education for its students. All managers and staff have put sustained effort into producing a comprehensive and straightforward quality management system. They have developed appropriate documentation and have set standards, targets and measures for a wide range of services, functions and activities. All staff are aware of their own particular roles and responsibilities in assuring quality. There are clear reporting lines. Subject leaders, programme managers, staff with cross-college responsibilities and senior managers all produce annual quality reports on their particular areas of activity. The reports analyse performance against targets from the previous year and set fresh targets for the coming year. The quality assurance system has not been established long enough to ensure a consistent level of critical evaluation, consistent use of procedures and consistent quality of reporting.

51 Course review and evaluation is well established. Subject leaders draw together information on attendance, retention and students' achievements. They also make use of data which indicate the value added by the college to students' achievements. They issue questionnaires to their students in order to discover how satisfied they are with their programmes of study. All of this information is used as a basis for drawing up plans and setting targets that should enable performance to be improved. Although staff have a manual of guidance on how to maintain quality files, not all of them follow it. Line managers do not yet consistently monitor the files in a way to ensure that the correct process is followed.

52 Plans for staff training and development are linked to the college's strategic and operational objectives. All staff are entitled to training and are represented through a staff-development committee. There are detailed records of all of the training and development activities that they undertake. Processes, procedures and responsibilities are clear and well documented. The college achieved the Investor in People award in July 1996. The college has a training budget of 1.4 per cent of the payroll for 1996-97. Twenty-four per cent of the training budget is allocated to programme managers to support the identified needs of their curriculum areas. The remainder is managed centrally by one of the vice-principals, enabling bids and training plans to be met across the college. The college has been successful in obtaining extra funding for training through contracts with external agencies. For example, a contract with Manchester TEC has brought in money to train staff in the teaching of core skills. In 1995-96, 80 per cent of all staff attended one or more external courses and 100 per cent were involved in some form of training run by the college itself. Organisational and management changes are clearly supported by training and development. Established staff who take on new roles in the

college have a mentor who provides advice and support. All new staff take part in an induction programme as well as being assigned to a mentor. One of the mentor's duties is to observe and comment on their teaching. Staff value the induction scheme highly. Few staff so far have undertaken training aimed at increasing their knowledge of the world of work, although 10 two-week industrial placements have been arranged for this year.

53 There is a well-developed staff-appraisal scheme which is being systematically implemented. It operates on a two-year cycle. Fifty per cent of staff have so far been appraised and there are clear plans to involve the rest of the staff before the end of the 1996-97 academic year. All staff spoken to during the inspection were whole-hearted in their support for the scheme. The process of appraisal involves the gathering of evidence, interviews, classroom or task observation as appropriate, and regular reviews. The documents used to support the process are clear and comprehensive. The main aim of the appraisal system is to improve the quality of education and to promote good working practices. However, the appraisal process does not, as yet, formally relate to the individual responsibilities for actions identified within various quality reports.

54 The college has a well-written student charter. Students, staff and governors were involved in its design, and they review and revise it annually. All of the students spoken to during the inspection knew of the charter and were aware of what to do if they wished to make a complaint. Few students have felt the need to use the complaints procedure. The students consulted expressed the view that tutorial and pastoral arrangements deal with their concerns. An unusual feature of the charter is the invitation it extends to students to examine the many quality reports produced in the college. No student has so far taken up the invitation, but the managers of the college are trying to change this. There are also charters for employers, for parents and guardians, and for evening class students. They have been carefully designed to take into account the specific needs of these groups.

55 Following the appointment of a college GNVQ co-ordinator in September 1995, a whole-college approach to internal verification was devised. External verifiers speak well of the arrangements which have been in place since January 1996. Staff are planning to review the systems and documentation by December 1996 and to refine them as necessary.

56 The college produced a self-assessment report for the first time this September, following closely the format outlined in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report was compiled by one of the vice-principals, who drew on the many quality reports produced in the college as his main source of information. The report goes into considerable detail on cross-college aspects of provision and students' achievements. It has very little to say about teaching and learning, and is not informed by the lesson observations undertaken by college staff. The report identifies strengths, weaknesses and actions. Some key weaknesses are missing

from the report and some strengths are overstated. The college's judgements are, however, broadly in line with those of the inspectors.

RESOURCES

Staffing

57 The college has 73 teachers, of whom 52 work on full-time or fractional contracts. The 21 part-time teachers include 13 evening class tutors, two of whom are agency staff. Over the last four years there has been a 42 per cent turnover in staff. The college did not replace seven of the heads of department and seven of the full-time teachers who left. Twenty-seven new staff have been appointed. This has provided the opportunity to lower the age profile and to bring in staff with industrial experience. All teachers are well qualified for their work. Over 93 per cent of them have a teaching qualification. Those who work on GNVQ courses are making good progress towards achieving training and development lead body qualifications. Twenty-one members of staff have already achieved training and development lead body assessor awards, and eight have the training and development lead body internal verifier award. Six staff are to be assessed in autumn 1996 and 12 more are scheduled for training during the 1996-97 academic year. Three teachers have achieved the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 9282 initial certification in teaching basic skills. This has helped them to improve the support they provide for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

58 Thirty of the full-time staff are female and 22 male. Over 80 per cent of the part-time teachers are female. Two of the senior managers and three of the programme managers are female. There are no staff from minority ethnic groups. Staff are efficiently deployed. The overall ratio of teachers to students is 1:18.5. Twenty-four support staff work in the college. Teachers and students alike speak highly of their commitment, flexibility and technical expertise. The figure of 24 support staff does not include the three foreign language assistants who provide valuable opportunities for staff as well as students to practise their language skills with native speakers. However, not all curriculum areas have sufficient support. There is a particular need for additional staff in the learning resource centre so that it can remain open in the evening.

Equipment/learning resources

59 All curriculum areas are adequately equipped. In modern languages and business studies, equipment is of an exceptional standard. However, due to problems with security and with the movement of large items, students taught in the two external blocks have less access to specialist equipment and learning aids than those working in the main building. The new learning resource centre has seating for 184 students. There are video recorders, eight audio workstations and a small room where students

may use computers at times convenient to themselves. The centre has an appropriate and modern stock of books, and a good supply of newspapers and journals. These are supplemented by stocks held in specialist teaching rooms. Programme managers seek funding for equipment through capital expenditure or curriculum development schemes. Support staff offer advice on selecting equipment and help in ordering and receiving equipment and in budgetary control. The audio-visual technician has a small budget for equipment. He uses it to buy stocks for individual curriculum areas, when appropriate.

60 Students have access to 111 computers, giving a student to computer ratio of around 9:1. Sixty-three of the computers are housed in four dedicated rooms, one of which is always open to students to use whenever they wish. The rest of the machines are spread throughout the curriculum areas. Students may use them when they are not needed to support teaching. At the time of the inspection, 83 of the computers were on the college network. The system is supported by 14 printers, some of which are colour printers, and a scanner. There are 15 computers in the learning resource centre. One of these computers has an Internet link. A further computer is linked to a service that provides information on higher education. There is a good range of office and drawing software on the network. A large selection of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database facilities meets the needs of teachers and students in specialist areas. The librarian has installed systems to guard stock against theft.

61 For the teaching of modern languages there is a satellite link and television and video facilities linked to those in the learning resource centre. Multi-media workstations are being set up which are networked into the college system and eventually onto the Internet. In science, much of the equipment is old but is kept in good repair by the support staff. There has recently been an increase in funding and, particularly for physics, the equipment is being improved. In art and design, some of the specialist equipment was not operational.

Accommodation

62 The college is situated in 21.5 acres of ground in the Ellesmere Park area of Eccles. It is easily accessible, being two minutes away from the M602 motorway and close to railway and bus routes. The college grounds are protected by a strong security fence and contain ample car parking space. There are football, rugby and hockey pitches of a moderate quality. Since the fire in 1993, the college has rebuilt or refurbished much of its accommodation. New rooms include the learning resource centre, language laboratory, computer suites, classrooms and a canteen. The science and mathematics areas are undergoing a refurbishment programme which is due for completion in summer 1997. All of this accommodation is in the main building of the college. It is supplemented by a demountable block, which was erected in 1992. This has eight classrooms, each of which seats 25 students. Further temporary

accommodation is provided in a two-storey block, which has a large hall on the ground floor and 10 classrooms above. All of the permanent accommodation is single storey and allows easy access for wheelchair users. Two maintenance officers keep the buildings scrupulously clean. They are quick to identify the need for minor repairs and to carry them out. Eight new classrooms are planned for September 1997. There are also two schemes awaiting planning permission and lottery funding. The first scheme is an extension to the existing theatre. The second is a collaborative venture with the City of Salford to build a sports and leisure centre on the college site with facilities for people with disabilities.

63 The overall quality of accommodation within the new and refurbished areas of the main block is very high. The accommodation is well planned and provides a pleasant and stimulating learning environment. The building programme has gone ahead with very little disruption to lessons. The single-storey demountable buildings also offer classrooms of a good standard. However, the quality of accommodation within the two-storey temporary block is of a lower standard. Its classrooms are noisy and too small for the number of students using them. This building is envisaged to have a further life of around five years. Increasing student numbers are starting to put pressure on the college's accommodation. At the time of inspection, at the start of the academic year, some classrooms were too small for the groups using them and the canteen was overcrowded at main meal times. The overcrowding of the canteen is in part caused by students having no common room.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

64 Eccles College's strengths are:

- well-established and productive links with local schools, universities and businesses
- an increasing range of courses for daytime students
- rapidly-growing evening class provision
- experienced and supportive governors who take pride in the college
- effective leadership from senior managers
- the management information system
- effective enrolment and induction programmes
- the pastoral and teaching support for students
- well-qualified, dedicated and hard-working staff
- good standards of teaching and learning throughout the college
- good examination results in many subjects
- a comprehensive and straightforward quality management system
- a systematic approach to staff training and development

-
- modern information technology equipment available throughout the college

- an effective building and refurbishment programme.

65 To continue to make progress the college should:

- further develop flexibility of provision
- establish further strategies for securing funding from external sources
- ensure that staff teaching on vocational courses are aware of industry's needs and expectations
- continue to improve retention rates in some subject areas
- ensure consistent use of quality assurance procedures
- improve the standard of some accommodation
- consider providing a common room for students.

FIGURES

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

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

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

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

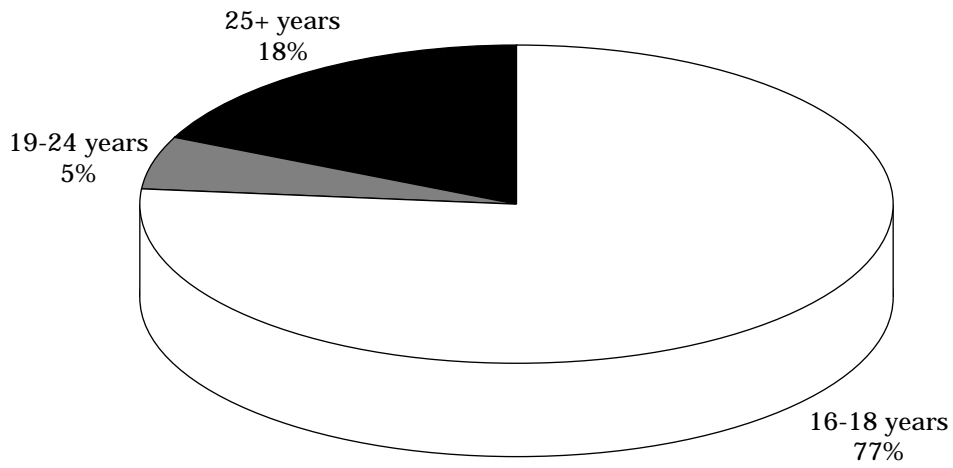
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 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

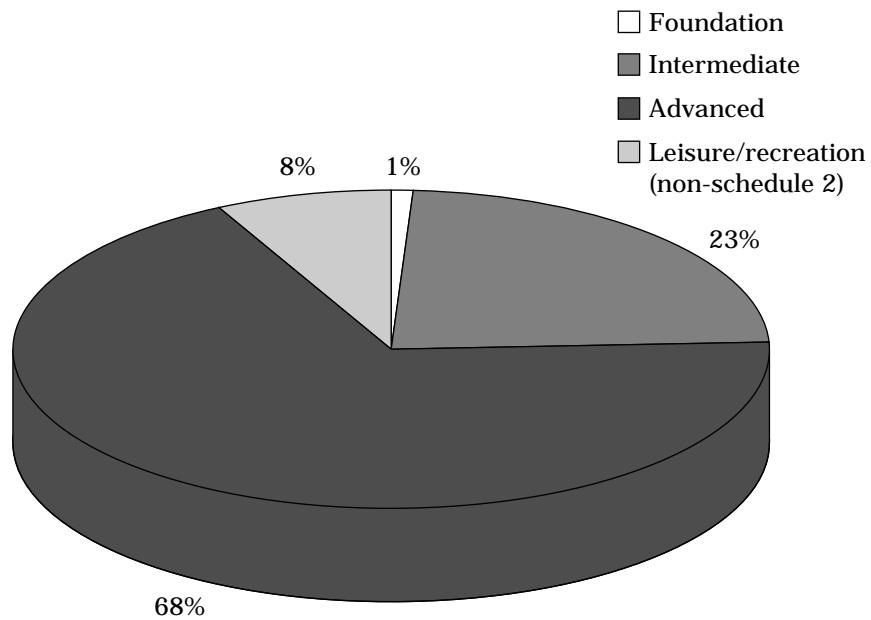
Eccles College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,289

Figure 2

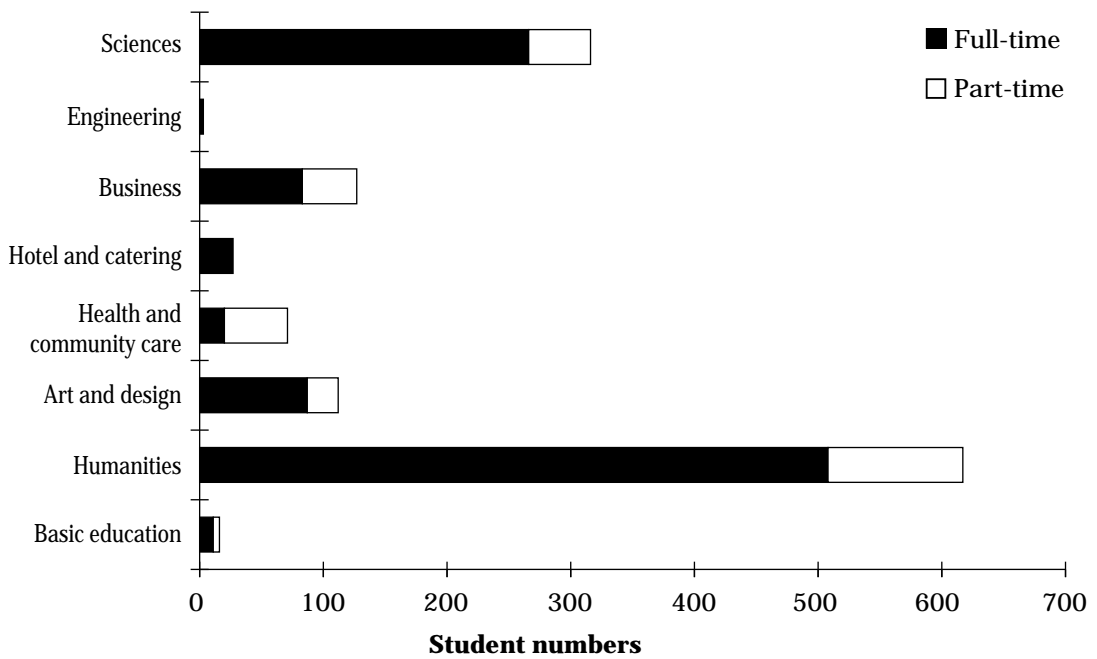
Eccles College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,289

Figure 3

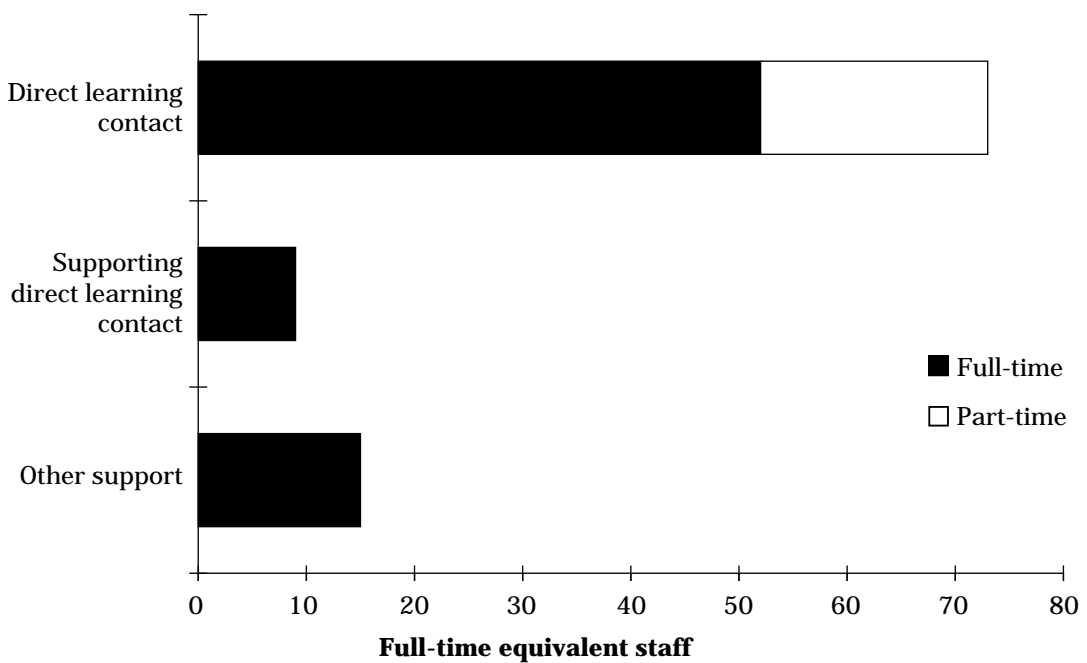
Eccles College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,289

Figure 4

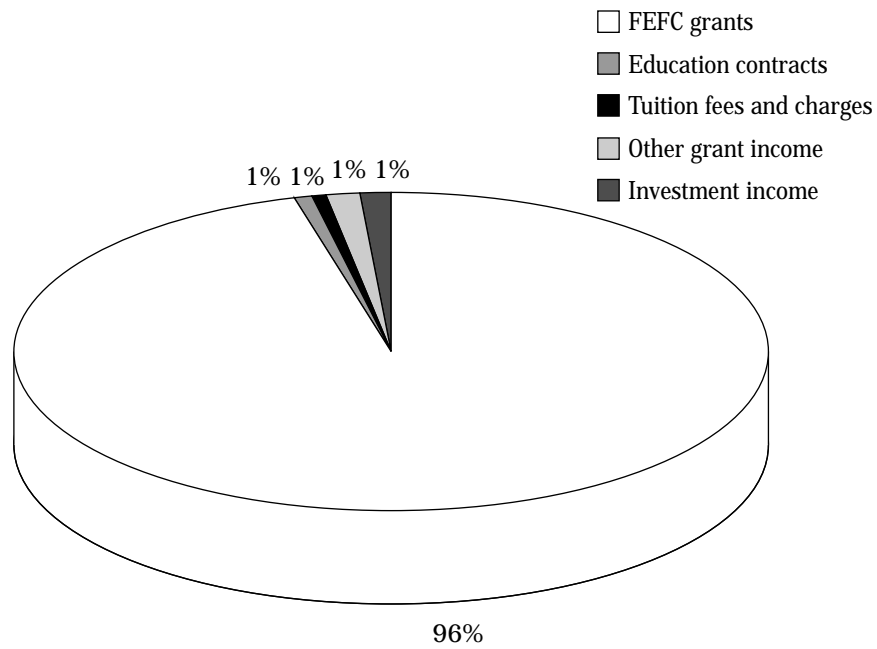
Eccles College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at September 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 97

Figure 5

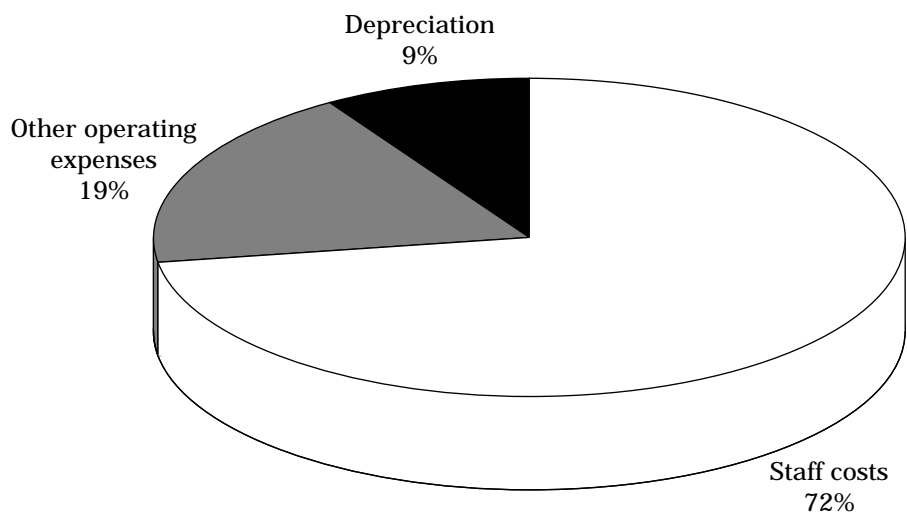
Eccles College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £2,497,000

Figure 6

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



Expenditure: £2,447,000

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