

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**Gloucestershire
College of Arts
and Technology**

August 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

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

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

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.*

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 119/95

GLOUCESTERSHIRE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

SOUTH WEST REGION

Inspected February - April 1995

Summary

Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology is the largest provider of post-16 education in Gloucestershire. The college offers an extensive range of provision to a wide group of clients. Particular strengths include a high level of responsiveness to community and employer needs, and a firm commitment to providing a high-quality service. The principalship provides sound management and there is an effective working partnership with the governors. Student recruitment, guidance and support systems are generally well planned and well implemented and there are good facilities to support students working on their own. The standards of teaching are generally high across the college. Students achieve examination results which are above average for sector colleges in vocational areas and at GCE A level. Staff are enthusiastic, well qualified and experienced. There is a well-managed staff-development programme. There is some good equipment in specialist areas. To improve provision further the college should: develop its management information systems; introduce effective monitoring of students' destinations; review the complexity of the college's quality framework; improve the present inadequate level of counselling support; address the unsatisfactory retention and attendance rates on some courses; improve the arrangements for accreditation of students' prior learning; and replace specialist equipment in some curriculum areas.

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		1
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		2
Quality assurance		2
Resources:	staffing	1
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science and mathematics	2	Health and social care/ hair and beauty	3
Construction	2	Art and design	2
Engineering/electronics and computing	2	Humanities	2
Business	2	Adult learning	1
		Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
Leisure and tourism	2		
Catering	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1 Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology was inspected between February and April 1995, enrolment and induction procedures having been inspected during August and September 1994. The team of full-time and part-time inspectors spent a total of 137 days in the college.

2 During the spring term of 1995, a team of 22 inspectors observed courses in science and mathematics, construction, engineering, electronics and computing, business, leisure and tourism, catering, health and social care, hair and beauty, art and design, humanities, adult learning, and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors visited 369 classes, met with college managers, teaching staff and students, and inspected a wide range of course documentation and students' work.

3 In April, a team of eight inspectors spent a week in the college inspecting cross-college provision. Inspectors had access to a wide range of college documentation. Meetings took place with governors, college managers and staff, full-time and part-time students, parents, employers, community representatives, the careers service, representatives from local schools, the University of the West of England and the Gloucestershire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

4 The present Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology was formed in 1990, following a reorganisation of further and higher education work by the local authority, and the transfer of the majority of higher education work to the new Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education.

5 The college is the largest of five further education sector colleges in Gloucestershire. It primarily serves north Gloucestershire, including the urban areas of Cheltenham and Gloucester, although specialist courses recruit from a much wider geographical area, including overseas. There are four other further education sector colleges in Gloucestershire: Stroud College, Cirencester College, Royal Forest of Dean College and Hartpury College. Within the college's catchment area there are 21 secondary schools, 13 of which have sixth forms. Approximately 72 per cent of school leavers in Gloucestershire proceed to further full-time study after the age of 16.

6 The combined population of Cheltenham and Gloucester is approximately 280,000. Most of the county's largest employers are concentrated in the college's catchment area. These include several multi-national aerospace manufacturers and the national headquarters of companies involved in telecommunications, banking and insurance, energy, and food processing. Gloucestershire reflects the national trend of a continuing shift in employment from the manufacturing sector to the service sector.

7 At the time of the inspection, the college had enrolled 33,068 students, of whom just over 11 per cent were full time. Approximately 74 per cent were aged 18 and over. Percentage enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. Approximately 55 per cent of students were enrolled on programmes leading to nationally-recognised academic or vocational qualifications. The remaining 45 per cent were following recreation or leisure courses. The college employs 704 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 391 are teachers and 313 are support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

8 The college management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals responsible for academic matters and resources, respectively, three heads of faculty and three directors of cross-college functions. The heads of faculty are each responsible for a major area of the college's teaching programme: adult and continuing education, business management and service industries, and design and technology. Each faculty comprises four or five specialist schools. Cross-college directors are responsible for finance; personnel; and marketing, training and enterprise.

9 The college owns or leases seven separate sites in Gloucester and Cheltenham, although the majority of provision is based at two campuses: the Brunswick campus in Gloucester and the Park campus in Cheltenham. These campuses are 10 miles apart and, to facilitate access for students, some of the college's provision is duplicated at the two main campuses. It includes General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses and some vocational courses in business, health and social care, and hairdressing. In Gloucester, the Brunswick campus accommodates work in art and design, media and motor vehicle engineering; the Eastgate annexe accommodates TEC funded programmes; and Longlevens caters for work in trade union studies and some construction crafts, is a centre for information technology and provides training for the unemployed. In Cheltenham, engineering, construction technician and furniture courses, leisure and tourism, catering and performing arts are all based at the Park campus; the Rowans annexe houses the foreign language school; Fairview annexe accommodates some business studies work; and Christchurch annexe caters for adult education. In addition, some adult education provision is delivered across all college sites, in a further 75 sites within Cheltenham and Gloucester, and at a variety of other locations across the north Cotswolds.

10 The college's main objectives are set out in the strategic plan 1994-97. They are concerned with providing high-quality, accessible education and training for school leavers and adults, responding to the needs of the local community and continuing to work to improve the effectiveness of student learning. Within the strategic plan, emphasis is

placed on the need to ensure the effective deployment of resources, to ensure access to further training and development for all staff, and to continue to develop systems to support improvements in quality.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

11 The college provides an extensive range of academic and vocational programmes from pre-foundation courses to higher education courses. The college ran 2,224 full-time and part-time courses in 1993-94, and at the time of the inspection 2,065 courses were on offer. There are General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) in manufacturing, hospitality and catering, leisure and tourism, art and design, science, health and social care, business, built environment and information technology. Fourteen Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma courses are offered in specialist areas, for example in display and furniture design and production. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) include information technology, business, construction, engineering, care, hairdressing, catering and bakery. There are specific programmes to encourage adults to enter higher education in science, sports studies, computing, social sciences and humanities. Twenty-two GCE A level subjects are currently on offer for full-time and 12 for part-time day or evening study. Eighteen GCSE subjects are available for full-time and part-time day and evening study. Full-time and part-time higher education courses include professional qualifications, and higher national certificates and diplomas in building studies, publishing, leisure studies, management, business studies, and engineering.

12 Training in over 15 foreign languages is taking place for businesses and the general public. There are substantial programmes in adult basic education and in English for speakers of other languages. English language courses for overseas students are a growing area of provision and there were 229 overseas students in the college in September 1994 from 34 different countries. Open and flexible learning are well organised and promoted in the college. They are available in a number of areas including GCE A level, GCSE and business, management and health studies. New developments include vocational courses in performing arts, the training of journalists, and a course to encourage adults to return to education.

13 There is a wide range of full-time courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the college has good links with special schools and external agencies. Ninety-five of these students were enrolled at the time of the inspection. The provision includes courses for students with speech, language, emotional and behavioural difficulties. However, there is only one GNVQ foundation programme on offer and there are few other foundation level programmes in vocational areas which enable students with learning difficulties to progress within the college.

14 Strong links have been formed with major local companies. Employers spoke positively about the college's ability to deliver specialist courses and saw the college as a major provider of business services. A

college restaurant, subsidised by Whitbread, was the venue for a presentation to Whitbread Severn Inns at which college students provided the food and entertainment. Training and development work is provided by the college's training and development consultancy, the enterprise unit and individual faculties. Major areas of work include business, management, foreign languages, information technology, printing and engineering. Four members of staff are identified as account managers, each working with 10 of the college's major business customers. As a result, communication with larger businesses is generally effective. The college is recruiting additional staff to improve communications with small and medium-size employers. In some curriculum areas, for example in catering, art and design and engineering, employers are closely linked with the development of the curriculum. A specialist course in metal finishing has been designed by the college in co-operation with an employer. In some curriculum areas, employers are involved in advisory panels while in others, including business, health and social care, and leisure, informal links are regarded as more effective.

15 Marketing activities are co-ordinated by a central unit which is linked to the marketing committees and to representatives within each faculty. The central unit promotes the college generally, advises on and monitors the quality of publicity materials and assists programme areas in marketing their courses. A college marketing plan is mainly focused on the delivery of promotional activities. There is no overall strategic marketing plan for directing and co-ordinating activity across the college.

16 The college has incorporated local labour market information from a number of sources into its planning processes. New course proposals are required to demonstrate appropriate market research and industrial links. The central marketing unit has collected comprehensive data on local schools and training organisations and has a database of employers. Some businesses have been surveyed for their opinions on the quality of provision.

17 There is an effective programme of school liaison activities overseen by a college co-ordinator. Out of 42 schools in the wider catchment area, 27 are participating in the college's liaison programme. The principal and vice-principal visit secondary head teachers regularly. Representatives from the local schools spoken to at the time of inspection were appreciative and supportive of the college's work and praised the objectivity and sensitivity of the guidance given. They particularly welcomed the opportunity for students to start GNVQ programmes in January and the college's flexibility over late applicants. Feedback to the rest of the college from schools liaison activities is enhanced by the schools liaison co-ordinator's membership of the academic board and the governing body. The college also works with two 11-18 schools in the provision of GNVQ programmes in business studies, and health and social care, and has worked with schools to update careers and subject teachers on vocational developments such as GNVQs.

18 Gloscat Training is a college-based training organisation which delivers TEC-funded youth and adult training programmes. It is the largest managing agency in Gloucestershire. Approximately 700 employers provide work placements for trainees. The college has a good working relationship with Gloucestershire TEC and a number of direct links have been established. The college is a member of the TEC's education and business partnership compact arrangements. Successful graduation from this programme guarantees a job interview with participating employers and a place on an appropriate course at the college. These arrangements have helped to increase the number of pupils continuing in education after the age of 16. Members of the compact include a local special school.

19 The college has had partnership status with the University of the West of England at Bristol since December 1993. With the exception of a higher national diploma in leisure studies franchised from the Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies, all franchise arrangements are with University of the West of England. These include courses in engineering and in teacher training. There is a close and productive working relationship between staff from the university and the college's schools. The college, the university, and the Cheltenham-based Universities and Colleges Admissions Service are involved in a research project to investigate the match between the skills required for higher education and the content of advanced GNVQ courses. The college also offers a considerable number of higher education courses funded directly by the Further Education Funding Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

20 The college has a substantial contract with Gloucestershire County Council to provide adult education. In 1994-95, the college aims to recruit approximately 15,000 adult education students, which accounts for approximately 56 per cent of the provision in Gloucestershire. The local authority co-ordinates a group to advise on the development of adult and community education within Gloucestershire and all five of the Gloucestershire colleges are represented. The college is involved in a wide variety of adult education and training ranging from leisure courses to basic skills provision. There are approximately 300 courses.

21 The college encourages people from groups who have not normally entered further education to enrol on its courses. A community liaison officer manages a team of 15 part-time community workers. Many specialist courses for the community, such as English for the Chinese community, have been developed in response to demand. Expertise developed in a co-operative project with the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit has enhanced the language support provision. The college is also involved in setting up an Asian women's education and training group. There is close collaboration with the local consortium of voluntary and statutory organisations and the community's knowledge of the college and its work is growing. Applications to the college from minority ethnic groups

in the community increased from 6.9 per cent of applications in 1993 to 7.4 per cent in 1994.

22 The college, in partnership with Filton College in Bristol, is the Trade Union Congress's regional centre for trade union studies in the south west. It delivers programmes in four counties and has resource centres in Gloucester and Swindon. The college also provides courses for local schools using a team of volunteer trade union officials and runs adult literacy and numeracy courses in the Cheltenham area which bring together employed and unemployed people. A six-month project funded jointly by the Trade Union Congress, the TEC and the college is examining the participation of black people in trade unions. Representatives from the Trade Union Congress and one of the major trade unions spoke highly of the college's work and commented on its responsiveness to requests for training and the support it gives to students.

23 The rapid growth in the number of 16-19 year old students in recent years has outstripped the college's facilities for leisure and cultural activities. There is a sports centre at the Cheltenham site offering indoor sports on demand, although the college does not field teams for competitive sports. On some courses, students are encouraged to participate in sports and additional study on a Wednesday afternoon. However, many students are timetabled for main course activities at this time.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

24 The corporation board has 20 members: 13 business members, three co-opted members, the principal, two staff governors and a student. There are six subcommittees and all governors are represented on at least one of these. Effective use is made of the business and management expertise of governors. Governors receive regular reports from the senior management team and a monthly newsletter to governors includes current financial information. Some of the college's senior managers are present at governing body meetings and there are regular briefing sessions on aspects of the college. There is much informal contact between the governors and members of the senior management team. Requests for information and advice flow both ways. Governors are able to offer comment on academic as well as business matters.

25 There is an effective partnership between the corporation board and the principal. The board has introduced a system to appraise the principal's performance and has reviewed its own effectiveness, using a questionnaire circulated by the chairman. The results of this were summarised and discussed by the board.

26 The principalship provides sound management and the senior management team is a productive and cohesive group with a clear understanding of its role. The college has fostered a team approach which is evident across the organisation. There are effective systems for internal communication and decision making within the college. The principalship

and the senior management team meets weekly. The college management group, which meets twice a term, brings together the senior management team and the heads of school and cross-college managers. In turn, faculties, schools and course teams have their own series of regular meetings although, in a minority of cases, meetings were not taking place as expected.

27 The strategic planning process has been an effective means of communicating with staff about the plans and achievements of the college. The plan describes the college's mission and vision and is supported by an annual operating plan. At the time of the inspection, a number of staff had not seen the final plan, but they were, in the main, aware of the college's plans and contributed to school plans. There are many initiatives and developments which have been launched in support of the implementation of the plan, for example, the development of an integrated library and a flexible-learning centre at the Park campus.

28 The college academic board advises the principal on academic matters. The principal has a positive view about the role of the board and ensures that appropriate matters are dealt with, often transferring items from other college agendas. The academic planning committee and the equal opportunities committee are two of the subcommittees that report to the board. The corporation receives the academic board's papers and values the opportunity it gives them to keep in touch with academic matters.

29 Financial reports and the procedures for the allocation of revenue are well documented and understood. The current budget allocation to schools is based on the achievement of student numbers and a staff-to-student ratio calculation by school. Financial delegation to heads of faculties is currently limited to budgets for consumables and part-time staffing and adjustments are made to the consumable budget against student withdrawals. The full staffing budget will be devolved to faculty heads in the near future. Training has already been provided to help budget holders understand the financial reporting arrangements.

30 The management information unit forms part of the college registry. It is well managed and provides a wide range of reports on demand. Regular reports are produced on staff, student enrolments, early leavers and finance. Information is accurate, user-friendly and is generally trusted. The college does not believe that one system is likely to meet the diverse management information needs of the college. Currently there are two main databases, but in practice a number of other systems are in place, under review or undergoing development. Although reports are used widely at senior management level, there are very few reports produced in a systematic way which support the delivery of the curriculum at course and programme level. Although there are a number of local databases in operation, the college has some way to go before it uses management information to its full potential. Without further investment to provide access for all users it is unlikely that this will be achieved.

31 At present only enrolment and full-cost course income generation targets are set. Enrolment targets are based on estimates by heads of school which are then fed through at faculty level into the strategic planning process. In 1993-94 the college set and achieved a growth target of 8 per cent. Although there are structures in place to collect data on retention and examination success rates, targets are not formally set.

32 The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is £19.43 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £18.17. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Around 60 per cent of the college income is derived from the Further Education Funding Council.

33 The college's destinations database is incomplete. Requests to academic staff to assist in collecting destinations information has resulted in an uneven return, with some areas, for example GCE A level courses, providing thorough and accurate information but with many others generating poor returns. The college is in the process of devising a better system to improve the breadth and accuracy of its data. Information which is collected is fed back to the feeder schools and governors and is included in local publications. Destinations provided by the college based on the 1994 Universities and Colleges Admissions Service statistics indicated that the number of students who progressed to higher education was 465 (43 per cent of second-year students).

34 All key policies are in place. The governing body monitors the college's work and has approved procedures for monitoring the college's financial health. There is a comprehensive health and safety policy which has been circulated to all full-time staff. Local health and safety policies which relate to specific areas are gradually being produced. Monitoring and review procedures are comprehensive and include inspection of sites by the health and safety manager, union representatives and site managers. However, arrangements to inform students of health and safety procedures are not formally established.

35 Responsibility for the management of equal opportunities has been delegated to one of the faculty heads who chairs a committee of college staff. An annual report on equal opportunities is produced for the academic board and governors, and suggestions for further action requested. Awareness of equal opportunities systematically percolates college activities by means of quality assurance procedures and the course review process.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

36 There is a comprehensive admissions policy, approved by the academic board. This outlines the advice and guidance that all applicants should expect to receive prior to entry. Overall, guidance systems are effective. Guidance given to students prior to enrolment is thoughtfully planned to meet the needs of a wide range of clients. Policies and

procedures for admission and enrolment are thorough, detailed and well implemented. Procedures for interviewing prospective students vary across the college but in general they follow the quality standards laid down. A separate unit provides guidance for adult students. Staff from this unit are also responsible for dispersing access and hardship funds to students, although the time taken in administering funds detracts from the guidance work and limits the number of students to whom guidance can be offered.

37 In 1991-92 and 1992-93 the college investigated and made proposals on implementing a scheme for the accreditation of students' prior learning. As a result, a decision was taken not to create a central unit but to work through heads of schools. Procedures are in place in the business schools, but in most schools they have yet to be developed.

38 All full-time students are assessed during induction to identify those who require learning support, although the quality of diagnostic materials used by individual course tutors varies. Students who are thus identified are invited to attend a flexible-learning centre to arrange appropriate support. While the quality of support offered is high, the college estimates that only 20 per cent of these students are taking advantage of the service. Further demand would require a significant increase in the resources provided. Language support is provided for students who do not have English as their first language, and students have found this a valuable service.

39 The college induction programme has two separate components. There is a week-long, college-wide range of events open to all students, followed by individual course induction programmes. The college's evaluations of the college-wide induction programme indicate a mixed response from students, particularly in relation to workload. Individual course evaluations showed that students were generally more positive about their course induction. As yet, these separate evaluations have not been combined effectively to give a complete picture of induction across the college.

40 All full-time students have a personal tutor and course leaders are responsible for monitoring the work of their personal tutor team. Both course leaders and personal tutors have undergone training for their roles. Students are generally positive about the effectiveness of their tutorial support. There are several examples of well-structured tutorial programmes but there is no central guidance on tutorial structure and content. The approaches used to maintain contact with parents vary across the college. However, parents' evenings, which are held at an early stage of the course and subsequently to inform parents about higher education applications, are considered very effective.

41 The student learning agreement sets a target of full attendance. However, several courses in the college were identified during the inspections of curriculum areas as having low attendance levels. There is

a termly check of the registers by registry staff and there are amendment forms which staff submit to the registry to update information on student withdrawals. Course leaders spend much time following up student absences and many have developed their own systems. This has resulted in a wide range of practice and expectation. In general, full-time students' attendance is effectively monitored at course level. There is no central collection of data on attendance or any use of attendance data to influence course design or student recruitment.

42 The college has two part-time counsellors who are employed during term time. The head of student services also contributes to the student counselling service. The counsellors are based at the two main sites, but at times there is no cover and this has created problems in emergencies. Counselling services at the annexes are limited. The counsellors have links with external agencies but these are in need of further strengthening. Teaching and support staff are invited to gain counselling skills and the numbers are growing. Some personal tutors are not familiar with the role of the counselling service. At present, the counselling provision at the college is inadequate.

43 The college has a clear careers policy supported by a detailed statement on how it is to be implemented. There is a part-time careers officer and each school has a named person who acts as the school co-ordinator. The profile of careers advice and guidance in the college has risen sharply over the past two years. Careers advisers are available at set times during the week in the careers libraries to provide advice to students. They also have links to specific college schools and give presentations to student groups on careers. Students were generally supportive about the events they had attended. A good range of computer-based information on careers and entry to higher education is available in the careers libraries.

44 There is much variation in the way in which records of achievement are prepared. This is resulting in some students leaving the college with a detailed record of their achievements while others do not. There is variable practice over monitoring references produced by tutors for students wishing to progress to higher education or employment.

45 An informative student services handbook is supplied to all students. This provides a detailed description of the services available and how they can be used. There is limited reference to the college charter although students are advised that copies are available from their tutor. Overall, students' knowledge of the charter is low. Students are required to sign a learning agreement which sets out the intentions of the college and what is expected of the student. This is supported by a detailed statement of students' entitlements and rights.

46 Day nursery provision is available at both main sites. Over 50 per cent of the 52 places are taken up by students' children. There is a sliding scale of charges which ensures that the service is available to students

with financial problems at a reasonable cost. Waiting lists for places for both nurseries for September 1995 suggest that demand is beginning to outstrip supply.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

47 Inspectors observed a total of 369 teaching sessions. Of these 61 per cent were judged to have strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. Nine per cent had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. The following table shows the grades awarded during the inspection.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		8	30	19	1	0	58
GCSE		2	9	6	2	2	21
GNVQ		8	24	13	5	3	53
NVQ		7	17	15	6	0	45
Other*		46	75	55	16	0	192
Total		71	155	108	30	5	369

Note: other includes BTEC and C&G courses, and professional and higher education provision.

48 Schemes of work were generally comprehensive and well organised. Teachers in all of the areas inspected were knowledgeable about their subject. In most cases, positive and purposeful relationships had been established between teachers and students which encouraged and supported learning. Lessons were well structured and work was appropriate to the level of the course and the abilities of the students. Assignments were mostly of a good standard and generally well marked. In a small number of sessions teachers spoke at too great a length and there was insufficient questioning to check that learning was taking place. In some subjects there was little interchange of good practice between staff based on separate sites.

49 In science and mathematics the teaching and promotion of learning were generally of a high standard. Teachers used well-structured lesson plans and the work was supported by some good handouts. In most sessions, teachers frequently questioned students to assess their progress and this also helped to extend students' understanding. Practical work was well organised and there was good use of models to aid explanation during demonstrations. In a few sessions there was insufficient opportunity for students to ask their own questions or to contribute to discussion. Work experience for full-time BTEC students had proved beneficial. They were producing some good reports on their experience.

50 Teaching and the promotion of learning on construction technician courses were well organised and of good quality. Course and assessment exercises were of a high standard. Teachers marked them thoroughly and

provided detailed comments. The pace of activities in the workshop sessions was realistic and students were interested and involved in their work. In craft skills, practical exercises were well planned and staff made economical use of materials and space. However, some craft theory classes were of a poor standard. There was inadequate lesson planning, inappropriate methods of working and limited use of visual aids where these would have helped students' learning. In GNVQ courses, core skills were well integrated with work for assignments. The quality of NVQ provision was variable; some students experienced too few opportunities for working on their own.

51 Practical classes in engineering were well organised. Students worked hard, had opportunities to work by themselves, and understood the process through which they were being assessed. Practical and written assignments were marked carefully and teachers and course leaders kept thorough records of students' progress. Most teachers involved students through directed questions or tasks and regularly checked their understanding. In a minority of sessions the teaching was weak and there was a lack of rigour in assessment.

52 In electronics and computing, practical exercises and demonstrations were introduced effectively into theory sessions, and the work was supported by appropriate equipment and well-prepared handouts. Practical sessions were realistic and relevant to the workplace, bringing together, where possible, the elements of each part of the course. Teaching was generally well structured. Lessons were well organised, learning objectives were clear and there were relevant student guides and course notes. Most teachers used questions constructively to develop students' understanding. Some relied too heavily on dictating notes or failed to make effective use of information technology in their teaching.

53 Business studies students experienced a good range of activities including formal lectures and small groupwork. Most of the sessions were well planned with some imaginative assignment topics and briefs. The work set was appropriately demanding. Teachers took steps to ensure consistency in standards of marking and feedback. Students had good access to learning resources including information technology. On some courses, core skills were given insufficient attention and in a few sessions, there was extensive copying of notes from the overhead projector when class time could have been spent more profitably.

54 In leisure and tourism, the work was generally of a high standard. Lessons had clear learning objectives and content was well structured. There was effective use of role play, discussions and practical exercises with clients. Assignments were often well presented, although in some cases the instructions given by teachers were unclear. Written feedback to students on their work was detailed and helpful. Core skills in numeracy and communication were effectively integrated with other aspects of the main programme. Students on intermediate and advanced GNVQ

programmes undertook work experience. There was no work experience for foundation students.

55 There were many examples of good teaching in theory and practical sessions in catering. In the bakery shop, restaurant and cafe bar, staff had created a working environment that replicated industrial practice. As a consequence of teachers' strong links with industry, students were regularly involved in organising external events and in national competitions. The assignments set were varied and challenging. Recording of students' progress and achievements was thorough. In a few classes, students did not have enough opportunity to put forward their own ideas or to work on their own, where this would have been appropriate. Teachers should give more attention to considerations of food costs and food safety.

56 In the better sessions in health and social care teachers encouraged a high level of student involvement, made good use of students' experience and ensured that sessions extended students' knowledge and skills. There was good practice in teaching the application of number and in managing sensitive issues in social care. In some instances, teaching was slow, students lost concentration and too much time was spent in copying notes. The use of videos to support learning was not always properly planned. Teachers rarely checked that learning had been achieved.

57 In hairdressing and beauty therapy, there were comprehensive, well-organised schemes of work supported by appropriate assignments that took into account students' differing abilities. Teaching was generally well planned. Good handouts were provided for hairdressing students, although there was limited use of workbooks to support independent learning. In some practical sessions in hairdressing the work was insufficiently demanding. The low number of clients in the public hairdressing salons meant that the opportunities for assessing students' practical skills were limited. In most sessions, there was insufficient integration of science, design, information technology and business studies.

58 Work in art and design and the performing arts was generally well organised and there was effective integration of practical and theoretical work, particularly in media technology/printing, graphic communication, performing arts and foundation studies. On vocational courses, teaching was clearly directed towards the needs of employers. In some of the weaker practical sessions there was a lack of attention to basic design and drawing, and students were allowed to move into finished designs without first exploring ideas or experimenting with approaches to the subject matter. In some cases, the students lacked appropriate knowledge of basic design, typography and colour.

59 In humanities lessons, students benefited from teachers' knowledge and expertise and often had the opportunity to discuss ideas with teachers and between themselves. In a few lessons students spent too much time

taking dictation. Programmes of work were well planned but schemes of work were not generally available to students. Assignments were set regularly and returned promptly, and teachers' written comments were usually detailed and helpful. Students' files were well organised and contained work of an appropriate standard. In languages, the strong emphasis on oral work was supported by good resources. Teachers provided too few comments on students' written language work.

60 The work with adults was varied and appropriately challenging, and there was a good level of learning support. Methods of working included one-to-one support, group discussions, visits and role play. Schemes of work were well developed and teachers were prepared to adapt their teaching to meet individual needs. Students received detailed and constructive comments on their assignments. In a few classes, there were too few opportunities for students to contribute their own ideas.

61 Students with learning difficulties were helped to develop individual and group skills. Most teachers used language well, supporting it with signs and symbols where appropriate. Good use was made of photographs, videos and worksheets. Where students had access to computers they were acquiring appropriate levels of skill. In a few lessons the work did not extend students sufficiently and teachers did not always treat the students as adults. All students benefited from a well-managed work experience programme.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

62 In 1994, there were 1,113 entries for GCE A level examinations. The overall pass rate at grades A-E was 73 per cent. This is above the provisional national average of 68 per cent for sector colleges other than sixth form colleges. Students aged 16-18 scored on average 4.5 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. In 1994, full-time students aged 16-18 achieved pass rates above 80 per cent in psychology (82 per cent), business studies (86 per cent), mathematics subjects (84 per cent), communication studies (93 per cent), English literature (91 per cent), geography (90 per cent), physics (95 per cent), fine art (90 per cent), history of art (100 per cent) and human biology (87 per cent). Subjects in which more than 50 per cent of students achieved the higher grades A-C included English literature, French, communication studies, psychology, geography, physics, human biology and fine art. In home economics, theatre studies and Spanish, pass rates were below 50 per cent; however, there were very few entries in these subjects. Results for part-time students are generally worse than for full-time students. Of the GCE A level subjects taken by part-time students in 1994, the highest pass rate was in English literature (79 per cent). Some subjects taken by part-time students achieved pass rates of less than 50 per cent; for example, history (42 per cent) and sociology (44 per cent).

63 In 1994, there was a total of 35 entries for GCE advanced supplementary (AS) examinations in three subjects: science in society, human biology, and psychology. Overall, the pass rate was 77 per cent. The best pass rate was for science in society (94 per cent).

64 There were 1,048 full-time entries for GCSE subjects in 1994. Seventy-four full-time students entered for mathematics achieved an overall pass rate, grades A-C, of 36 per cent. In English language, there were 84 entries from full-time students and the pass rate, grades A-C, for 16-18 year old students, was 64 per cent. Seventy-three per cent of English language students over 19 years of age achieved grades A-C. In other subjects, the best results for full-time students were achieved in sociology (55 per cent), human physiology (50 per cent), drama and theatre arts (56 per cent) and science in society (50 per cent). Part-time students generally achieve a high level of success at GCSE. For example, 72 per cent of the 151 entries for GCSE English language and 57 per cent of the 205 entries for mathematics achieved grades A-C. All the students entered for business studies, and art and design gained an A-C grade. Other subjects where part-time students were particularly successful included French (84 per cent), German (77 per cent) and sociology (83 per cent).

65 In 1994, there were some good pass rates on GNVQ intermediate level courses, for example, leisure and tourism (100 per cent) and health and social care (97 per cent). In GNVQ intermediate business, the overall pass rate was 63 per cent. Good results were also achieved in GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism (95 per cent).

66 BTEC first diploma students who completed their studies achieved some good pass rates, for example, art and design (100 per cent) and construction (100 per cent). There were also high pass rates on many BTEC national diploma courses; for example, in display (85 per cent), general art and design (85 per cent), electronics and communications (100 per cent) and beauty therapy (100 per cent). The weakest pass rates were recorded in building studies (37 per cent), media (53 per cent) and design communications (53 per cent). On part-time BTEC national courses, the best pass rate was achieved in business and finance (91 per cent).

67 The results for students who complete their NVQ courses were often good, particularly for students aged over 19. In 1994, NVQ courses in hospitality and catering subjects had an average pass rate of 91 per cent. On other vocational courses where NVQs are not yet available the pass rates were also good; for example, City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) fabrication and welding level 3 (80 per cent) and nursery nursing (85 per cent). On many of the typewriting, shorthand and wordprocessing courses students achieved 100 per cent pass rates. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieved a range of qualifications included C&G wordpower, numberpower, and food hygiene certificates.

68 The figures quoted for the college in the Department for Education's performance tables for vocational courses published in 1994 are

inaccurate. A revised figure of 88 per cent for students aged 16-18 who were successful on vocational courses has been accepted by the Department. This places the college in the top third of sector colleges on this performance measure. The figure does not include the substantial numbers of students over the age of 18 who are studying for vocational awards.

69 Retention rates vary significantly between courses. In some areas, for example, leisure and tourism and electronics, the retention rates on most of the courses are above 90 per cent. Retention rates on full-time GCE A level programmes are also satisfactory. However, in art and design, engineering, hairdressing and beauty therapy, social care, and on part-time GCSE courses and part-time access programmes, retention rates are frequently below 75 per cent. Retention rates in 1994 were below 50 per cent on: the BTEC national diploma in agricultural engineering, a programme run jointly with another college; the GNVQ intermediate business course at the Park campus; and the GNVQ advanced hospitality and catering course.

70 Although there is no comprehensive college analysis of students' destinations, the information held by course tutors indicates that students have considerable success in gaining relevant employment or entry to higher education. In 1994, 152 GCE A level students went on from the college to higher education courses, and a further 24 successfully gained full-time employment. On the access to higher education course, 85 per cent of students successfully achieved their award and gained a place in higher education. On the GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism course, all students who applied for a higher education course received an offer of a place. In vocational areas, students completing nursery nursing, hairdressing and beauty, and printing courses were particularly successful in gaining relevant full-time employment.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

71 The college produced a well-structured self-assessment report. The report highlights the method of review, strengths, weaknesses and planned improvements for each of the issues identified under Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The document provided a helpful context for the inspection and pointed inspectors to a number of other useful sources of information. Some of the strengths and weaknesses observed during the inspection were highlighted in the report. There was no section on teaching and the promotion of learning or students' achievements.

72 The college policy for quality assurance has developed over a number of years. Senior managers are committed to developing a quality system which includes all college activities and which leads to continuous quality improvement. The college has achieved the Investors in People award and the college training and development consultancy has achieved British Standard (BS) 5750 accreditation.

73 The quality assurance policy includes the setting of standards for services internally and for the college's customers. Staff have developed their own specific standards guided by a set of centrally-produced standards which in turn are derived from the college's mission statement. Of the centrally-produced standards, 30 are related to academic work and 16 are for use by support staff. The system has much to commend it and there are many examples of specific standards being set and achieved, particularly in areas such as finance and personnel. The common standards that have been developed for the learning-resource centres, libraries and central information technology provision on both sites have also been effective in raising quality. However, the sheer number of academic standards and their varying interpretation has meant that weaknesses in aspects of teaching and learning have not always been clearly identified and the overall quality assurance structure, which has developed over a period of time, has resulted in a complex organisation which some members of staff do not understand. A quality improvement group has recently been introduced. This group samples and audits certain quality activities and its members are helping course teams and other groups to develop appropriate standards. It has generated a better understanding of quality issues within the faculties.

74 A policy of internal verification to ensure consistency of standards across all courses including NVQ and GNVQ programmes has been approved by the academic board. Major new courses are internally validated and this enables quality assurance aspects of courses to be assessed against college requirements at the design stage. It also provides an effective vehicle for staff development and dissemination of quality concepts. Quality assurance and monitoring reports from external bodies are scrutinised by a senior manager who communicates directly with course teams on any issues which need to be resolved.

75 At programme level, quality control is based upon a well-developed system of course reviews and the production of course files. The system specifies the performance indicators to be used, requires input from students, employers and staff and leads to the production of reports and action plans. With a few exceptions it works effectively. Not all teams consult their students; there is little input from employers at course level; and some action plans fail to address poor performance or to state measurable outcomes. A review of the system and the procedures for course reviews is to be undertaken by quality assurance co-ordinators, supported by the quality assurance officer.

76 In general, quality assurance reports are of a good standard. Course team reports are used to inform the reports generated by heads of schools and heads of faculties. The faculty reports are presented to senior management and the academic planning committee. The amount of statistical information associated with performance varies and not all reports are produced in the same format. Feedback within the system is generally good and is supported by the attendance of senior managers at the faculty board meetings which are held to discuss performance.

77 The college was responsible for founding the Gloucestershire Quality Forum. This is an organisation which has many major companies in its membership and meets to share information and experiences about quality issues. Involvement with this group has provided useful experience of industrial quality systems and has influenced the development of the college's management development programme.

78 There is a common staff review system for both teaching and support staff which is linked to programmes of staff development. Although this provides for a review of all staff every two years, in practice many reviews are undertaken on an annual basis. Staff are positive about the review system and value the opportunity to discuss their role and personal development within the institution. Staff-development activities are matched to the strategic objectives set out by the institution. A programme of staff development has been identified and an extensive programme of internal activities is well publicised in the college's newsletter. There is a close relationship between the three key areas of quality assurance, curriculum development and staff development.

79 A college charter has been developed and published through a process of consultation between governors, staff, students, employers and the local community. The college charter addresses the same areas as the national charter for further education. The entitlement of students, employers and others in the community are set out clearly. The charter has not been widely circulated although it is available to students in reception areas, the libraries and from tutors. It has been published in other languages in response to requests from minority ethnic groups and is available in sign language in video format. The charter is currently under review to see whether there are improvements which can be made.

RESOURCES

Staffing

80 The quality of staff is a particular strength of the college. Staff are enthusiastic, committed and prepared to be flexible in their work. The large number of projects that the college has embarked on over recent years, the course developments which have taken place and staff membership of external bodies reflect the positive attitude to innovation and change within the college. There are good working relationships between different groups of staff.

81 Full-time teachers are well qualified and experienced for the work they carry out. Eighty per cent have a degree or an equivalent professional qualification and 70 per cent have a teaching qualification. It is college policy to support all teaching staff to obtain a teaching qualification. Currently, a further 10 per cent of staff are in the process of qualifying. Sixty per cent of full-time teachers have achieved Training and Development Lead Body assessor or verifier qualifications.

82 The full-time teaching staff is stable. Thirty per cent of staff have been in post for more than 15 years and 50 per cent for more than 10 years. They remain enthusiastic and energetic although, in many cases, their industrial and commercial experience is dated. The college is trying to increase opportunities for industrial experience through secondments, using links with the education business partnerships. However, the number of staff involved so far has been small.

83 Teachers are effectively deployed. Faculties and schools make effective use of part-time teachers who support approximately 25 per cent of the teaching programme. Most part-time staff are well qualified and bring to their work a good range of current experience of industry and commerce.

84 Non-teaching staff are effectively deployed to faculties, schools and cross-college units and work flexibly within and across these boundaries. Administrative and clerical staff are well managed. There are good working practices which enable staff to support each other, to cover for absences and to widen their experience. Technician staff are well qualified and well trained and provide high-quality support. The computer services unit is about to introduce a help desk to deal with user problems but, in general, the growth in provision of computer resources at the Brunswick site has not been matched by a sufficient increase in technical support staff to maintain and enhance the service to users.

85 Four professional staff and 13 support staff provide support for the three main libraries. The staffing of the college's flexible-learning centres is additional to this. Staff provide a high level of service in a friendly, welcoming environment. Students are positive about the quality of the facilities and the level of support they receive, but an increasing amount of advice and guidance is given away from the main counter and this, with the present number of staff, can cause delays in service.

86 The personnel department operates a clear, well-documented recruitment and selection policy and is currently reviewing the implementation of these policies. It is also responsible for the production of an informative staff handbook.

Equipment/learning resources

87 Levels of general and specialist equipment are adequate. There is good specialist equipment in some areas including business studies and languages. There is a well-equipped fitness centre at the Park campus supporting leisure courses. Some workshops, such as those for painting and decorating and hairdressing, have been well equipped for the training and assessment of NVQ students. However, some of the equipment in engineering, catering and science, although adequate to meet present course needs, is ageing rapidly. Technicians are working hard to maintain specialist equipment in a useable state.

88 The college has an assets register which records its stock of equipment and it is developing a strategy for a rolling programme to update and replace equipment. Capital funds are allocated as a result of a bidding process. The selection of bids is linked to the college's strategic objectives. Some areas have received support from industry; for example the Midlands Electricity Board has provided a demonstration kitchen for hospitality and catering. Some initiatives in pooling resources have also improved the effectiveness and use of equipment.

89 The establishment of the central computer services unit has provided an effective focus for the implementation of the college's information technology strategy. The central facilities and those in the schools are good. Although some old obsolete equipment remains in evidence, over half the personal computers are now of a high specification. There has been considerable investment in information technology equipment and high levels of use are recorded.

90 There has been a major investment in flexible-learning resource centres at both main sites. At the Park campus the centre includes audio-visual, information technology and traditional library facilities of a very high standard. The centre on the Brunswick campus has similar facilities, but library provision is separate. In addition to the main library at Brunswick there is also a smaller media studies library located in the media studies annexe. A small learning-resource centre has been created at the Christchurch centre.

91 The overall library provision is good. Some weeding of the bookstock is in progress and additional resources have been provided to improve the generally low level of bookstock. Library resources are heavily used. There were 145,000 visits to the Park learning-resource centre from September to March. Study spaces are well maintained, but there are too few for the number of students and the pressure on them is heavy at certain times.

Accommodation

92 Most of the teaching accommodation is satisfactory. General purpose classrooms are suitably furnished and equipped. The accommodation for hospitality and catering at the Park campus, for hair and beauty at the Brunswick campus, the computer workshops and the Longlevens, Fairview and Rowans annexes is of high quality. However, some teaching accommodation is in need of general redecoration. The specialist accommodation for electrical installation and performing arts, and the sciences laboratories at the Park campus require upgrading. Most office accommodation is good.

93 The new reception areas at the Park, Brunswick and Fairview campuses provide a welcoming environment to all who use the buildings. Reception facilities at most of the other campuses are adequate. At most sites the 'welcome' sign has been translated into many different languages.

There is a small team of maintenance staff, but most building maintenance work is put out to contract. There has been a significant programme of adaptation and refurbishment over the last four years. Satisfactory arrangements are in place for cleaning and site security.

94 The distribution of accommodation is logical and most schools have a cohesive cluster of rooms. Signposting around the buildings is generally good. Specialist and general teaching accommodation is allocated to schools for timetabling, but spare general classroom space is pooled and this works well. Site managers based at the Park and Brunswick campuses maintain central records on room usage for all sites and there are site administrators at the other sites. Allocations are reviewed annually in the light of enrolment trends and planned developments.

95 The extent to which accommodation is used varies. Pressure on general teaching accommodation is greater at the Park campus than at the Brunswick campus. Some specialist accommodation, for example laboratories and workshops, is underused. The college is proposing to introduce an internal charging system for accommodation in order to improve the use which the schools make of it.

96 Refreshment facilities are available to students on all sites. On the main campuses there are refectories which provide an adequate service to staff and students. There are considerable variations in the quality of common room and sports facilities between sites. A new common room has been created at the Park campus with a snack bar and vending services and there is also a sports hall. Brunswick campus students do not have a common room. The Park campus has a large car park for students, whereas at the Brunswick campus parking is restricted to staff, visitors and students with restricted mobility.

97 Provision for students with restricted mobility is variable. The Christchurch annexe is increasingly popular with students using wheelchairs because of its ease of access. The Park campus has poor access. Plans are in hand to install a lift. This will partly alleviate the problem, giving access to some of the teaching accommodation and to the library, resource centre and computing facilities. The Brunswick campus provides satisfactory wheelchair access. Recent improvements to the Fairview site have included the provision of toilet facilities for students with restricted mobility, but there is no access to the first floor. There are good childcare facilities at the main sites in Gloucester and at Cheltenham.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

98 The college has made significant progress towards achieving its mission. Its strengths are:

- an extensive range of learning programmes for students of all ages and abilities
- the high level of responsiveness to the needs of the community, employers, adults returning to learning and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

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- the sound management provided by the principalship and its effective working partnership with the governors
 - good communication and teamworking across the college
 - detailed and well-implemented systems for student recruitment, guidance and support
 - the commitment to the development of a quality service supported by quality systems
 - generally high standards of teaching
 - a well-managed staff-development programme
 - enthusiastic and committed staff
 - some good accommodation, including the high-quality facilities for flexible learning, particularly at the Park campus.
- 99 If it is to continue to improve the quality of its provision the college should:
- improve the unsatisfactory retention and attendance rates on some courses
 - further develop college management information systems including a more comprehensive database for students' destinations
 - improve the inadequate level of counselling support
 - increase opportunities for students to have their prior learning accredited
 - review the complexity of the college's quality framework
 - replace some ageing specialist equipment
 - improve access for students with restricted mobility.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at April 1995)

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

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

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

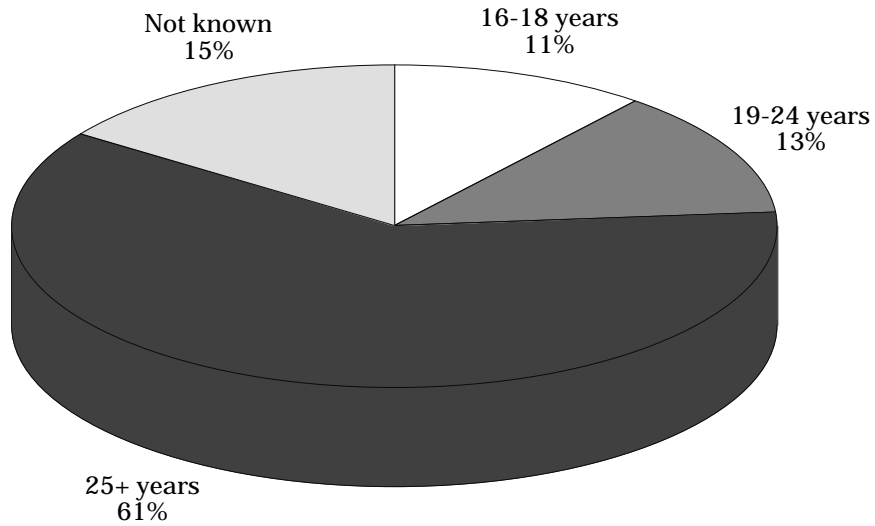
 - 5 Estimated income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology: percentage enrolments by age (as at April 1995)

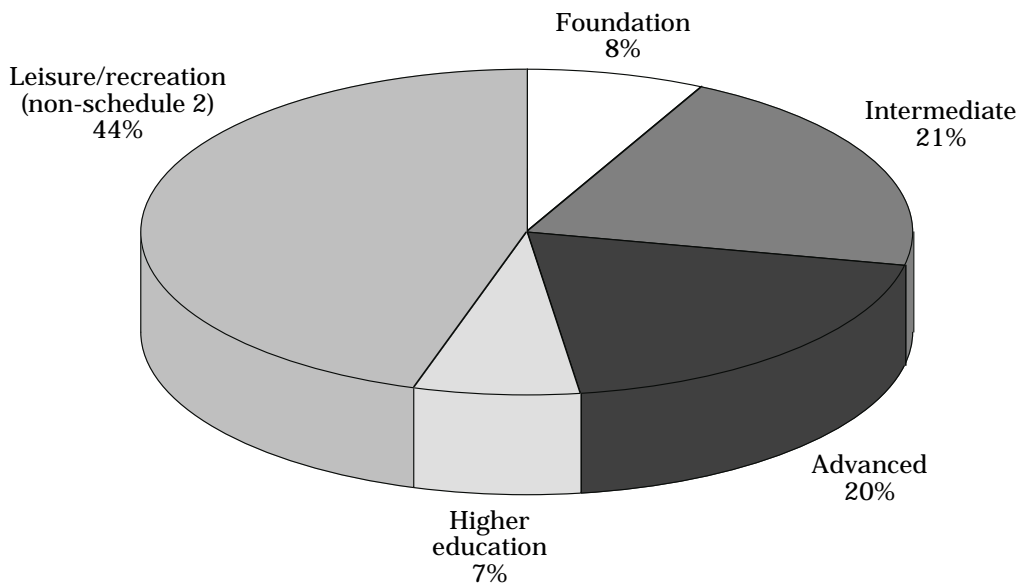


Enrolments: 33,068

Note: this chart excludes 64 enrolments under 16.

Figure 2

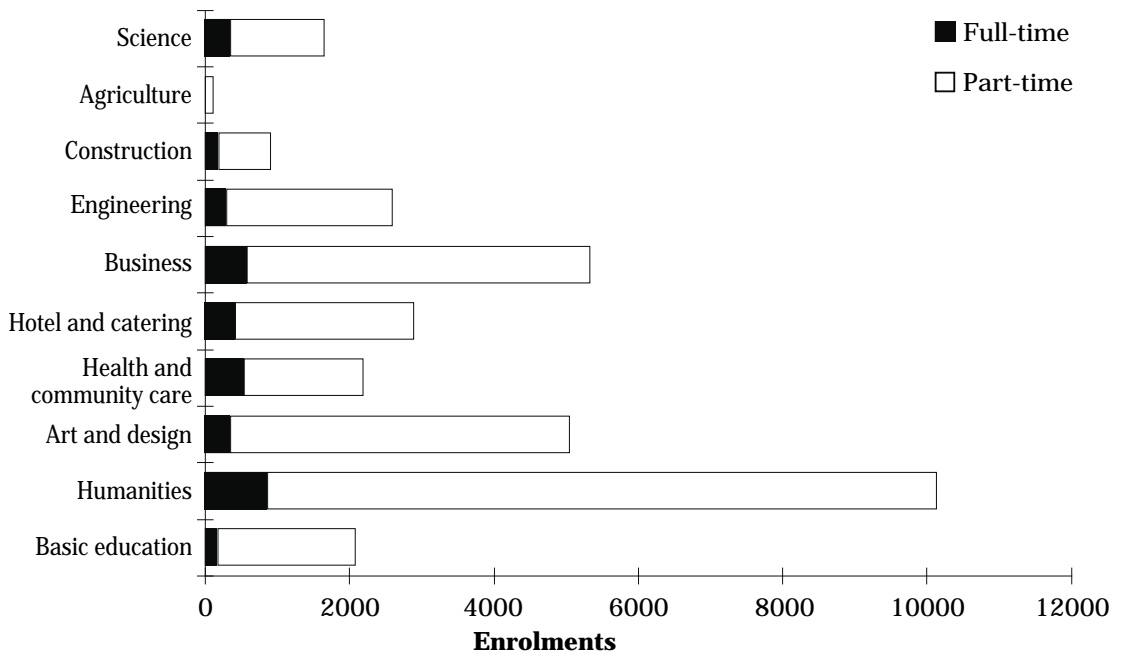
Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at April 1995)



Enrolments: 33,068

Figure 3

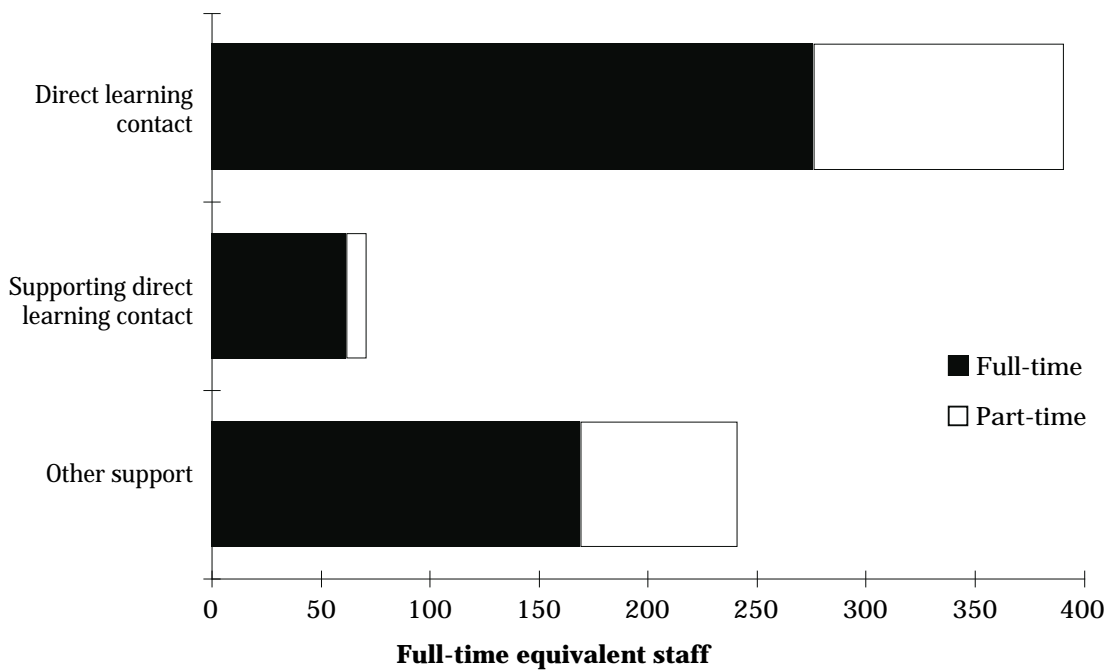
Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at April 1995)



Enrolments: 33,068

Figure 4

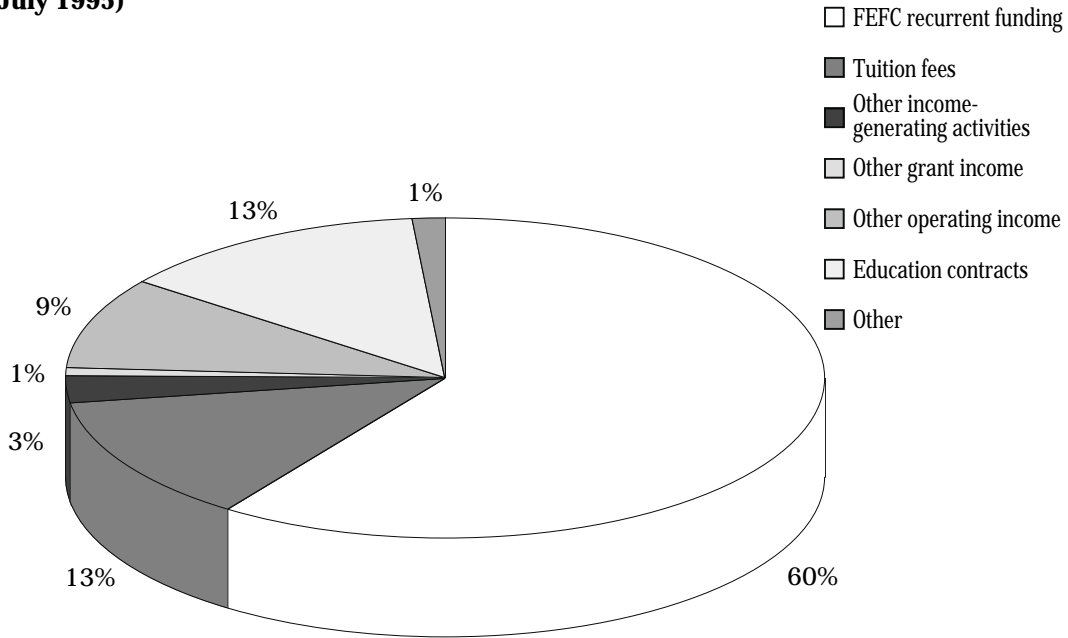
Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 704

Figure 5

Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1995)

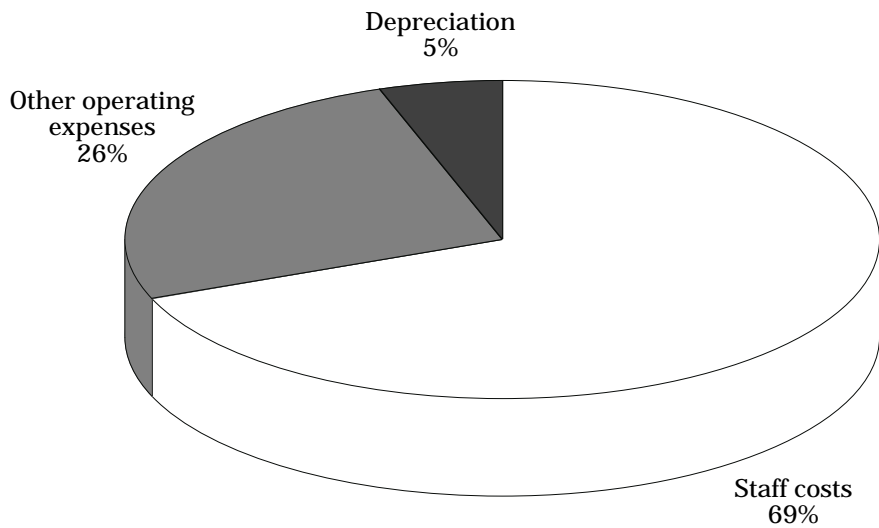


Estimated income: £18,829,000

Note: this chart excludes £85,000 capital grants.

Figure 6

Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology: estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Estimated expenditure: £19,574,000

Note: this chart excludes £5,000 interest payable.

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