

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Hereford Sixth Form College

May 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circular 93/28. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also use a five-point grading scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*
- grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*
- grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*
- grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*
- grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

By June 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-95

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 65/96

HEREFORD SIXTH FORM COLLEGE
WEST MIDLANDS REGION
Inspected April 1995-February 1996

Summary

Hereford Sixth Form College mainly offers an extensive range of GCE A level subjects. GCE A level pass rates have been above the national average for the last four years. Students are offered a wide range of cultural and recreational activities and their achievements in sport are impressive. The college provides a diversity of work-experience placements with employers. Links with feeder schools are close and effective. Relationships with the local TEC are positive. The governors are committed to the college and are strongly supportive of its mission. They monitor examination results and students' progression. The college places particular importance on pastoral support and on additional support for learning, where required. Student services are well run. Comprehensive careers education and guidance are available and valued by the students. Staff are well qualified. Staff-development priorities are closely related to the college's strategic plan. Senior managers have recognised a need for staff to be more widely involved in curriculum planning and development. The college should: ensure that the corporation receives reports on all its major policies; formulate a policy on the achievement of quality and continue to develop the work of the quality assurance group; make fuller use of its management information system; develop an effective marketing policy; evaluate the effectiveness of its GCSE repeat programme; give students more opportunity to develop information technology skills; and improve library resources.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision	Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision	2
Governance and management	2
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	3
accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Sciences	2	English and modern foreign languages	2
Mathematics and computing	2	Psychology	2
Business studies	2	Other humanities	2
Art and design	2		

INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection of Hereford Sixth Form College took place in four stages between April 1995 and in February 1996. Curriculum areas were inspected in April and October 1995. Enrolment and induction were inspected in September 1995. Aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in February 1996. Twelve inspectors spent a total of 53 days in the college. They visited 97 classes, examined samples of students' work and held discussions with members of the board of governors, senior managers, staff and students. Meetings were also held with a representative of the Hereford and Worcester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), with representatives of the community, parents, and teachers from local schools. The inspectors had access to a wide range of documentation provided by the college.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Hereford Sixth Form College opened in 1973 as part of the reorganisation of secondary education in and around the City of Hereford. It shares a campus near the centre of the city with the Herefordshire College of Technology, and the Herefordshire College of Art and Design.

3 During the 1970s and 1980s the college provided subjects leading to the General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) examinations. Some students studied for certain GCE A level subjects as part of their course at the college of technology and the college of art. Accommodation in the sixth form college was almost entirely limited to classrooms and laboratories. The college of technology provided some services and resources for the whole campus, including a main library, an assembly hall, and catering. In the last five years the sixth form college has embarked on a building and redevelopment programme to extend both the quantity and type of its accommodation.

4 The college's particular location, the nature of its accommodation, and its particular curriculum were all significant factors in the formulation of its mission. The mission of the college is strongly supported by the governors and is specific: it is to provide high-quality academic education up to GCE A level standard for full-time 16 to 19 year-old students.

5 The governors took account of the diversity of educational provision available on the campus as a whole and the expectations of the community in preparing the college's mission. They have sought to maintain the distinctive ethos of a sixth form college with a population of full-time 16 to 19 year-old students. The college provides a broad range of GCE A level courses in keeping with its mission. The first course in the college to be validated by the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) will begin in 1996.

6 All of the college's courses are in the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) programme areas of science, business, art and design and the performing arts, and humanities. Courses leading to examinations

are enhanced by the inclusion of compulsory and optional activities in a programme referred to as core and recreation. These studies include a widening range of sporting, musical and drama activities.

7 The college serves the City of Hereford (population of 49,000) and since incorporation has promoted its courses more widely in the large, but very sparsely populated rural area of the old County of Herefordshire and beyond. Students from the border areas of Shropshire, Powys, Gwent, Gloucestershire and the Malverns are being recruited to the college. Many of these students have long journeys to and from college using subsidised public transport or, since 1994, a bus service that the three colleges on the campus have themselves jointly provided.

8 In the county area served by the college there are four comprehensive schools that have sixth forms. The Herefordshire College of Technology also offers a range of GCE A level courses. The only other provider of sixth form education in the city is the independent Cathedral School.

9 On 1 November 1995 there were 963 students at the college, 499 female and 464 male. They were all full time and all except two were aged 16 to 19. Of the total, 918 are following GCE A level and GCE advanced supplementary (AS) courses and 45 are taking General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses. Since incorporation the college has met its enrolment targets and has exceeded its 1995-96 target. The numbers of students by level of study and curriculum area are shown in figures 1 and 2, respectively.

10 There are 67 full-time equivalent members of teaching and support staff including the principal. A further 7 full-time equivalent part-time staff complete the college's staffing. Of the total establishment of 74 full-time equivalent staff, 53.5 full-time equivalents are direct teaching staff and 20.5 are technical and support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents is shown in figure 3.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

11 The college's particular circumstance, as one of three colleges operating on a single campus, has been a key factor in the planning of its provision. It also acknowledges the diversity of courses available to young people and adults in nearby colleges. Consideration is being given to the introduction of advanced level vocational courses. Since incorporation there have been few formal links with the two adjoining colleges.

12 An extensive range of GCE A level subjects is offered. Students can choose from 37 subjects. They cover the humanities, science, business and creative arts. Four modern languages are available, and there is a choice of course syllabus in biology, English, history and mathematics. Timetabling arrangements are flexible and allow the majority of students to follow their chosen combination of subjects. Twelve subjects are available at GCE AS. The college offers a range of courses leading to GCSE qualifications. These include basic subjects, English, mathematics, and

sciences, but also more unusual subjects such as Japanese and psychology. GCSE courses can be taken alongside GCE A level subjects. In addition, a small group of students take a full-time GCSE programme. It is not effective for some students and alternative provision may need to be considered.

13 The college's programme of GCE A level subjects is well established and has remained fairly stable over the past few years. Changes have been made in response to the demands of students and new subjects have been introduced. These include environmental science in 1994, and music technology in 1995. At present there are no clear criteria for the introduction or termination of particular subjects and there is little evidence of consistent strategies for market research. Some GCE A levels in science and in three other subjects are modular in structure but there is no plan for the extension of other modular subjects across the curriculum.

14 Additional courses which augment the student's main programme of study are a strong feature of the college's curriculum. Recreational activities are an integral part of students' programmes and there is an excellent range of options. Forty-two different activities are available with a choice of 14 courses in each timetabled block. Many of these activities are delivered by experts employed specifically for the purpose, for example, in fencing, and in first aid. Students speak positively of this aspect of the college's provision and they value the breadth of opportunities available to them. A general education programme also runs through the first four terms of all students' courses. This includes basic information technology, careers, health, and social issues. The college sees this provision as an important link with the community and there is good representation and contribution from relevant organisations such as local charities and the police. Students and parents clearly welcome some aspects of the programme, in particular the careers element, but there is some disaffection amongst students for the remaining areas.

15 There is an impressive range of other activities within the college. Activities in music and theatre are particularly strong. They have been enhanced by the newly-opened performing arts centre which is used both by the college and by the local community. Almost 200 students are involved in some capacity in performing arts groups, concerts and productions. This year there have been productions of 'Daisy Pulls it Off'; and of 'Barnum'; an inter-schools performance of Haydn's Creation; and a number of concerts.

16 The sports facilities are also available for community use and the sports department has a good range of links with national and regional sporting bodies. Students take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. They give good support to a range of societies linked to charitable or environmental groups. Approximately 100 students each year are involved in the college's community service scheme.

17 There is a positive relationship between the college and the Hereford and Worcester TEC. The college has received support from the TEC to

prepare for the introduction of a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in science and for a project to track the progress of students who leave the college before the completion of their course. The college has strong links with the local Education Business Partnership. The Education Business Partnership supports a number of valuable college initiatives relating to the awareness of staff and students of the world of work.

18 European links are developing well. They are supported by the European officer, who is a member of the modern languages team. There are well-established exchange links to Russia, Spain and France within modern languages. Students of business studies, language and politics will attend a conference at the European Parliament in Strasbourg later in the year. European work experience in France is being planned and the college has a 'Young Europeans' students' group. Students from the college were winners of a national competition to produce a video on 'Career and Study Opportunities in Europe'. A number of departments provide a good range of visits and fieldwork to enhance learning opportunities.

19 The college's marketing strategy is evolving. As yet there is not a clear marketing policy or role for marketing within the organisation as a whole. The college takes care to maintain its good reputation in the locality. Recent initiatives have led to improvements in the information available to the local community. A publicity group has been formed and a member of staff has additional responsibility to co-ordinate information services. The termly newsletter to parents is well received. The college's links with local schools are highly effective. There is a well-established and well-organised cycle of liaison activity with the 10 schools in the local area from which approximately three-quarters of students are recruited.

20 The college has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and an equal opportunities co-ordinator. Initiatives are taking place to raise the awareness of staff and students of equal opportunities issues. Implementation of the policy needs to be strengthened by initiatives across the whole curriculum. The college has a co-ordinator for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

21 The governors have a strong commitment to the mission statement and a clear view of the role of the college which they actively promote. Governors were responsible for writing and reviewing the mission statement. They also aim to ensure that the college's strategic plan reflects their objective to maintain the good standing of the college in the local and regional community. The governing body has 20 members including the principal. The 11 independent members include a nominee of Hereford and Worcester TEC. The other places are taken by three co-opted members, two parents of existing students, two members of the teaching staff and a student. There were vacancies for an independent member and for a co-opted member at the time of the inspection. Nine of the members, including the chairman, were governors of the college before

incorporation. Their experience contributes to the wide range of collective expertise of the full board. Independent members include a bank manager, a chartered engineer, a retired college principal, a solicitor and others who bring considerable senior managerial expertise to the corporation. Two of the independent members and three of the other board members are women.

22 The corporation has established six main subcommittees: finance; staffing; curriculum; premises; audit; and remuneration. The formal establishment of the remuneration committee is not clearly recorded. Members of the corporation attend meetings regularly and support college functions. All of the governors sit on at least one subcommittee where their expertise is valued. The corporation board and its subcommittees receive informative reports and all meetings are recorded, though the minutes vary in quality and style. The corporation has not formally reviewed its own effectiveness since incorporation nor identified the training needs of members. Governors have not registered their interests. Although a strategic planning committee of the governors discussed the college's strategic plan it was not formally approved by the corporation board. Most of the corporate objectives have been achieved by the target dates set.

23 All of the major policies such as health and safety and equal opportunities have been discussed and approved by the corporation. Responsibility for equal opportunities is assigned to the principal tutor and director of student services and delegated to a member of staff who leads the equal opportunities group. Responsibility for health and safety issues is assigned to the premises manager and there is a health and safety committee. The corporation has not received reports on the implementation of these policies. The college meets the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of *The Further and Higher Education Act 1992* by providing worship of a Christian nature.

24 Working relationships between the governors and the principal are productive. The chairman and the principal meet every week. The senior managers are the principal and two deputies. This group meets every two weeks with the finance officer; the premises manager; and the co-ordinator of examinations and administration as the management committee. It has new terms of reference and the minutes of its meetings have improved since the beginning of this academic year. Agendas have a standing item reviewing action points from the previous meeting. The minutes, which are displayed in the staff room, do not assign responsibilities or list actions. Each member of the management committee acts in a servicing role for one of the corporation board's subcommittees and this provides an effective link between governors and senior managers.

25 Governors have a clear perception of the role of the college and have a commitment to protect and enhance its provision. The corporation board's curriculum subcommittee closely monitors the examination results

and statistics relating to the progression of students and provides regular reports to the corporation. Members of staff are occasionally asked to report to this subcommittee to provide information on the achievements and developments in their subject area. The governors hold an annual meeting with parents in which they report to parents on the college's work during the previous year and on plans for the next year.

26 The college management and organisational structures are in a transitional stage. There have been a significant number of staff changes through early retirement and new appointments. Changes have been managed effectively. There is now scope for improving communications at every level and for ensuring that all staff understand the management structure and their own lines of accountability. Recently-appointed staff were, however, well informed about college organisation and benefited from a thorough induction programme. All staff and students are fully aware and appreciative of the principal's open door policy. The principal meets regularly with the senior tutors responsible for pastoral care. Information bulletins are distributed to all staff on a periodic basis and the principal addresses staff on major topics of interest. The college has no forum similar to an academic board and some staff have expressed a keen interest in having better representation in the discussion of issues relating to the planning and development of the curriculum. The senior managers have recognised the need for a formal system to allow the wider involvement of staff in academic debate. They have proposed a consultative committee which would also include representation of cross-college services. The procedures for implementing this committee had not been determined at the time of the inspection.

27 The college receives 97 per cent of its funding from the FEFC. Overall targets are set and have been exceeded in each of the last two years. Clear procedures have been drawn up to determine and allocate budgets. Initial allocations are adjusted through a two-stage process that responds to recruitment figures. A unit cost analysis has been developed on the management information system but it has not yet been used in course management.

28 The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 4 and 5. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 is £18.30 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.37 and the median for all sector colleges is £18.56.

29 The management information system has been in place for several years. It was developed in the college at relatively low cost. Access to the system is available to the senior staff. Teachers have been supplied with a simplified manual of the software for records of students. This gives examples of reports which can be produced. The technical aspects of the system are good. It can produce information in a variety of ways for a wide range of requirements. This includes information about students, absenteeism, tutor groups, examination results, value-added data, and

destinations. The timetable is also computerised so that staff, student and room timetables can be produced. Returns on records about individual students have been free from errors. The potential of the system to provide performance indicator information is not being fully used. Because the system has been produced in the college and not by a commercial supplier, college managers will need to ensure that it can be maintained and developed to meet future, internal and external requirements for information.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

30 Pastoral support is given a high priority by the college and a good range of support is offered to students. There is a comprehensive support system of tutorial, counselling and careers guidance. Close contact with parents is actively promoted and is valued as a significant factor in ensuring the personal and academic progress of the students. The college is committed to the continuous improvement of the quality of its pastoral care and has recently employed specialist consultants to carry out a thorough review of all pastoral arrangements. The college has considered the findings of the review carefully and has responded to many of the recommendations. A new student services centre is being built to make support services more accessible to students.

31 Pastoral arrangements are overseen by a principal tutor. Five senior tutors are responsible for ensuring students receive appropriate academic and personal support. Specialist staff are employed to provide careers advice, learning support, medical support, and personal counselling and advice services. Staff refer students to specialist support services as necessary. Relationships between staff and students across the college are positive and supportive and staff are sensitive to students' concerns. Opportunities for reflection on moral issues exist within the general education programme and a Christian-orientated discussion group is available on a Wednesday afternoon.

32 Prospective students receive clear and helpful information about the college. The college organises a series of taster days, open evenings, and visits to schools. Parents consider that the college provides open and fair information and advice for prospective students. Useful information on courses and subjects and student support services is given in the attractively-produced college prospectus and in handbooks. Handbooks are not available for all subjects. Procedures for admissions are systematic and effective. Admissions interviews are offered in local schools. The college describes itself as having 'an open admissions policy'. In practice, students have an average of seven GCSE grades A to C at recruitment. The college requires certain levels of attainment in GCSE for students to take GCE A level courses; students should have five GCSEs with grades A to C to study a full-time programme of three GCE A levels. Students with lower levels of qualifications are accepted to study two GCE A levels or GCSE courses. All students with lower than a grade C in GCSE mathematics and

English are expected to retake these examinations. Occasionally students over the age of 19 are enrolled and special permission is sought from the governors in these exceptional cases. A number of students with disabilities are recruited.

33 The college provides effective individual guidance. Students are able to make an informed choice about their programme of study. They benefit from taster sessions for different subject areas during visits to the college and the induction programme helps them decide which courses to take. Most taster sessions are of high quality and provide detailed information about the subject area and the teaching and assessment methods. A few students receive insufficient individual careers guidance during induction. Such guidance is of particular importance for students who achieve unexpected results in their GCSE examinations and are reconsidering their programme of study.

34 Induction is thorough, comprehensive and generally effective. Staff are sensitive to the possible anxieties of new students and are welcoming and reassuring. A good range of useful introductory sessions is organised. These include talks about student services, taster sessions in particular subjects and individual interviews with personal tutors and senior tutors. An external consultancy company provides a variety of activities over four days which are designed to help students get to know each other. The activities of the 'group dynamics' day give students the opportunity to get to know college tutors and other students in an informal setting. Students value this event but a few find some of the activities intimidating or embarrassing. Induction and support arrangements help students to make the transition from school to the college. Senior tutors have responsibility for students from particular 11 to 16 local schools so they have met many students before they start at the college. Senior staff also allocate students to tutor groups where there are at least a few other students from their previous school.

35 All students have a weekly group tutorial. Students also receive individual tutorials about every five weeks. Group tutorials combine personal and social education activities, reviews of students' progress and some administrative tasks. In some tutorials too much time is taken up by administrative matters. Individual tutorials give students a valuable opportunity to review their progress and to discuss any problems. The effectiveness of individual tutorials is limited by tutors having too little time for discussions. The college is reviewing its current tutorial practice and plans changes for next year. There are helpful tutorial handbooks for tutors. Senior tutors provide effective support for tutors and further individual support for students. There is purposeful and regular liaison between group tutors, course tutors, senior tutors and other staff in student services. Tutors record students' absences. If students are absent for three days a follow-up letter is sent to parents. Appropriate action is taken, if required, to encourage students to attend college.

36 Students are informed about additional support available to them to assist their learning through, for example, the prospectus, admissions interviews and induction. There is no systematic screening of all students to identify their needs. Students either refer themselves for support or are referred through their tutor. Thirteen students currently receive additional help from specialist tutors and the quality of this support is good. Several departments provide support in their subjects for students during lunchtime sessions. Parents spoke positively about the support provided for students with disabilities.

37 The college provides a confidential personal counselling service for students. Eight voluntary staff counsellors provide a first level counselling service. In addition, a qualified external counsellor provides professional personal counselling. Appropriate referrals are made to external agencies, for example, psychiatrists or psychologists, if required. The college employs the Herefordshire Youth Advisory Service at lunchtimes for four days a week to provide a range of information and advice services to students, for example, on housing issues and homelessness, benefit entitlements, finance and health. Students value the counselling and advice services provided by the college. Other practical support is provided for students, such as financial help from the college's hardship fund to help pay for educational visits, medical support from the college nurse and subsidised transport to college for students living in several local villages.

38 High-quality and comprehensive careers education and guidance are offered to students. The three specialist careers staff work closely with senior tutors to ensure all students benefit from individual interviews about their future careers. Over 1,000 individual careers interviews are carried out each year. Careers interviews are thorough, informative and supportive. They lead to the drawing up of plans by the students on how they will fulfil their individual objectives. Impressive and detailed records are kept of all interviews. The open access careers library is well used by students. Students have access to a good range of literature and videos on higher education. There is a limited stock of careers publications some of which are out of date. Students and parents speak extremely highly of the careers advice they receive.

39 A comprehensive careers education programme includes advice on how to apply to higher education institutions and preparation for interviews for higher education and employment. The programme includes several visits to higher education institutions and contributions from various outside speakers from higher education and different professions. Work experience is not a compulsory part of the students' programme but approximately 100 students in each year group take up the opportunity of placements, mainly during the holidays. The college has successfully built up a good range of placements with local employers. Great care is taken to secure placements for students which are interesting and relevant to their career aspirations. Students have worked with members of parliament, the Welsh National Opera Company and the Lawn Tennis Association.

40 The college keeps detailed records of the academic achievements of each student and feedback is given to students on their progress on a regular basis. Students are encouraged to develop records of their achievements using the national record of achievement. Some support is given by tutors to help students do this but the college considers it is primarily the student's own responsibility to maintain a record of achievement. Apart from a personal statement, students' records of achievement contain little which relates to their achievements whilst studying at the college.

41 Parents speak positively about the helpfulness of the staff and the range of information they receive about the college, including an informative termly newsletter. An innovative and successful 'expectations evening' was run for new parents this year which included information about courses, assessment processes, homework and dates of examinations. Regular reports are sent to parents on students' progress. There are regular parents' evenings and an annual advice evening for parents on careers opportunities for students.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

42 Of the 97 sessions inspected, 67 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. In 4 per cent of the sessions weaknesses outweighed the strengths. The following table shows the grades awarded as a result of the inspection.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		12	47	23	3	0	85
GCSE		1	5	5	1	0	12
Total		13	52	28	4	0	97

43 The average class size in the sessions inspected was 12 and attendance rates were high. Classes are generally well organised and provide an open and relaxed atmosphere often with the teachers' use of humour encouraging lively participation. Students are well motivated to learn and they generally work enthusiastically. Teachers help them to develop skills required for examination or course work. Teaching is carefully planned. Course documentation is comprehensive. The limited development of information technology as an aid to teaching and learning is a noticeable weakness across the college. There are a few examples of good use of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases.

44 Science courses have clear schemes of work which relate well to the syllabuses set by the examination boards. Tutors have sound subject knowledge. Relationships between tutors and students are good, particularly on GCE A level programmes. In a second-year GCE A level chemistry lesson on aromatic amine, dyes were made and used to dye

cloth with a message that said 'chemistry is fun'. This was then displayed on the laboratory wall.

45 A good range of teaching approaches including practical experimental work is used in the teaching of mathematics and computing. Lessons are well planned and tutors give clear explanations reinforced with handouts. In some classes well-managed group discussions and lively question and answer sessions developed the students' confidence and made their learning more exciting. Occasionally group work was not well planned and then it failed to engage the interest of some students. Tutors regularly set work and good records are kept of students' achievements.

46 Teaching in business studies is of good quality and challenges and extends students' skills, knowledge and understanding. Lessons are well organised and are supported by appropriate schemes of work for the level of course and the examination syllabus. Tutors clearly explain the aims and objectives of courses to students. Occasionally, however, teachers failed to begin lessons by linking the current topic with previous study. A good variety of teaching approaches is used. Tutors use effective questioning approaches, and often humour, which keep students interested and enjoyably involved. In one example of poor practice students had to take notes for most of the lesson. Tutors set assignments at appropriate levels. These were marked promptly and students were given clear and helpful information on their performance. Tutors keep detailed records of students' achievements and regularly inform students of their progress.

47 On art and design courses, teaching is generally good. Students benefit from one-to-one teaching approaches which take into account their different needs and abilities. In some lessons there was insufficient group work. Some teachers missed opportunities to initiate discussion as a means of reinforcing what had been taught. Courses are well structured and are generally supported by schemes of work which are appropriate for the course aims and their level. In some lessons there was too little emphasis on the development of critical and analytical skills and the students were insufficiently challenged. The art and design course handbook gives useful information about courses including arrangements and criteria for assessments. Work is regularly and fairly assessed and the progress of students is carefully recorded. Some tutors made insufficient use of visual reference materials to reinforce learning. No use was made of audio-visual aids. In theatre studies a range of activities is used which involve students in group discussions and practical activities. These are managed effectively to help students generate and clarify their ideas and develop their skills and understanding. Students are helped to make connections between the various topics in the course syllabus. Teachers mark work carefully and give the students useful pointers and advice on areas of their work where they need to make improvements.

48 Teaching in English is well planned and effective. Course aims and objectives are clearly explained to the students. Most teachers skilfully

and enthusiastically guide the students and help them to learn by themselves. Some teachers, nevertheless, talked at the students too much and were reluctant to let them work on their own and develop their own ideas. Generally, however, teachers employ a good range of teaching and learning methods, including work in small groups as well as activities for the whole class. Teachers encourage students to study texts on their own, develop their own critical views and ideas and participate in discussion. In a few instances, teachers did not manage lesson time effectively and some learning activities were left unfinished. More use could be made of homework as a means of enabling students to prepare for forthcoming lessons.

49 In modern languages, teachers use a wide range of effective learning methods including structured practice in oral work, role-play, activities in the language laboratory and a variety of writing exercises. Teachers are fluent in the languages they teach. Lessons are conducted in the language being studied. They are enriched by appropriate reference to the life and culture of the country from which the language comes and are supported by authentic materials including appropriate television programmes. In one particularly effective lesson, the teacher arranged for a group of French students on an exchange scheme to discuss topical issues with the class. Teachers mark work systematically and use a thorough and consistent system of assessment which is closely related to the examination syllabuses. Some tutors were particularly adept at identifying, through assessment, aspects of skills in languages which students need to develop further. Some students are reluctant to practice their oral skills and there is scope for teachers to ensure that all members of the class are drawn into discussions in the language being studied. In some instances, teachers could provide more opportunities for students to work by themselves.

50 In psychology, there is an appropriate balance of practical and theoretical work and teaching effectively challenges the students. Practical activities are varied and they hold the students' interest. In one lesson, the teacher gave a demonstration of memory processes and the students were encouraged to make connections with their own, everyday experience of memory and how they use their powers of recall to prepare for examinations. Practical activities were followed by a clear explanation from the teacher of the key theories of memory. In lessons, proper attention is given to ethical considerations. Teachers assess work regularly and fairly and give their students clear information about their progress. The psychology teachers operate an effective moderation system whereby they monitor one another's marking of students' work.

51 Teaching is generally well structured in humanities subjects such as history, politics and geography. A variety of teaching and learning activities engages and sustains the students' interest. Teachers give clear and well-organised presentations and draw on up-to-date developments in their subject areas. They make effective use of the whiteboard. Students receive handouts of good quality which help to reinforce their learning.

In a few cases, schemes of work are too limited in scope. In a few lessons, group discussions and question and answer sessions could have been better managed by the teachers.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

52 Students are well motivated and enjoy their studies. They speak and write about their work clearly and with enthusiasm. Many students would recommend others to study at this college.

53 Written work is generally of a high standard, and shows evidence of careful thought and preparation; in class, students demonstrate good understanding and apply their knowledge in new situations. In a minority of cases, the progress of classes is hindered by the lateness, or behaviour of some students which goes unchecked by teachers, such as chatting or inattention.

54 Students respond positively to working in groups. In theatre studies, students participated confidently and constructively in discussion and practical work. English students worked well in groups to study texts supported by worksheets and the teacher. Some GCSE French students are reticent during group oral activities and unwilling to risk making mistakes. The practical work of students in art is accomplished. Science students carried out practical work in groups with enthusiasm. There is not always sufficient enforcement of the requirement to use safety clothing for practical biology and chemistry. The performance of students in the practical aspect of the theatre studies examination at GCE A level is relatively weak compared with the written component.

55 All students who have not achieved GCSE grade C or above in English or mathematics on entry to the college are required to resit the subject. The general education course includes a half-term information technology module for all students. There were some students with poorly-developed oral skills in some of the humanities subjects. In biology, the students' communication skills were poor and they sometimes misspelt biological terms. In contrast, integration of mathematical skills with the physics teaching scheme enables students who are not continuing their study of mathematics beyond GCSE to develop the level of numeracy required for GCE A level physics. There is scope for all students to be given more opportunities to develop skills in information technology.

56 During their time at the college, students have opportunities to broaden their range of experience. Some students have won the Guides' young leadership awards and others the Queens Scout award; one student represented the Guide Association of Great Britain at an international event in South Africa and another obtained a place on an Arctic expedition. Students regularly participate as members of regional and national orchestras, and one student won a scholarship to play with the Finnish national wind band. The students' achievements in sports are also impressive, with successes in national events in athletics, canoeing, hockey

and netball, and representation in a number of regional sports teams, including cricket and rugby. The college celebrates academic and sporting successes at an annual prize giving ceremony. Most of the prizes are donated by representatives of the local community.

57 Students aged 16 to 18 who were entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1995 scored on average 5.0 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college among the top third of colleges on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1995 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. This represents a slight decrease in average performance when compared with the average 5.3 points per entry achieved in 1994. Over the last four years, the college has maintained overall GCE A level pass rates which are above the corresponding national average. There were 1,036 subject entries in 35 subjects at GCE A level in 1995 and the overall pass rate was 89.4 per cent. In almost all subjects, the percentages of students achieving grades A to E were at, or above, the corresponding national averages. Physics is the only subject where the pass rate has been below the national average in two successive years. In nine subjects, all students entered for the examination passed: these included business studies (54 students), government and politics (33 students) and physical education (30 students). The results in English were outstanding: 112 out of 113 students passed and 84 students (74 per cent) were awarded grades A to C. Similar success was achieved in mathematics, where 57 out of 58 students passed and 44 students (76 per cent) were awarded grades A to C. Psychology is a popular subject, and 95 per cent of the 111 students entered passed. In several subjects for which smaller numbers of students were entered, there were excellent results with high pass rates and a significant proportion of students who achieved grades A to C; these included theology (92 per cent) and economics (76 per cent). In contrast, there were 14 subjects where the percentages of students achieving grades A to C were below the corresponding national averages; these ranged across the humanities, and also included subjects from the art and design and science curriculum areas. This decrease in the number of higher grade passes was the major contributing factor in the decrease in average points score, when compared with the previous year.

58 There were 86 subject entries for GCE AS examinations in 12 subjects, with an overall pass rate of 82.6 per cent. This represents a substantial improvement compared with 1994, when the pass rate was 66.7 per cent. In seven subjects all students passed. Overall, relatively few students obtained high grade passes, but results were good in decision mathematics.

59 The college has participated in the Advanced Level Information System for the last three years. In terms of the value added to students' achievements by comparing their performance at GCSE with their performance in final examinations, GCE A level results in English, psychology and theology were particularly good in 1995, whilst in art,

communication studies and physics, grades were slightly below those predicted.

60 In 1994-95 there were 284 entries for GCSE examinations in 14 subjects. Forty-eight per cent of students achieved grades A to C. There were three subjects where the proportion of grades A to C was considerably higher than the corresponding national averages: most notable was archaeology with 23 out of 31 students (74 per cent) achieving grades A to C. In English 45 per cent of the 29 entries achieved grades A to C, but in mathematics only 31 per cent of the 91 entries achieved grades A to C. Achievement rates of grades A to C in mathematics have declined over the last three years, and have been below the corresponding national averages for two years. In both subjects the results for the winter 1995 examinations show a significant improvement, with 67 per cent of the 55 entries achieving grades A to C in English, and 54 per cent of the 41 entries achieving grades A to C in mathematics. Only two of the 14 entries in human biology achieved A to C grades. The overall success rate of students taking GCSE was low: out of the 29 students still on the GCSE course in May 1995, only 18 took four GCSE examinations, and only a third of these students obtained two or more grades A to C. The remaining 11 students took three or fewer GCSE examinations.

61 The college has records of the number of students studying GCE A level subjects at any one time, but is unable to give course completion rates for GCE A level. The course completion rate for GCSE in 1995 was 91 per cent.

62 Destination data are collected systematically and analysed. From the 413 students who completed their GCE A level courses in June 1995, 60 per cent went on to higher education, 11 per cent to further education, 6 per cent to art foundation courses, 9 per cent to employment and 10 per cent were taking a year out or seeking employment. The destinations of 4 per cent were not known. Of the 29 students who completed the one-year GCSE foundation course 51 per cent continued with their studies, 28 per cent entered employment, and the destinations of 21 per cent were unknown.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

63 The college's rationale for quality assurance is based on its mission. Individual tutors or groups of tutors in particular subject areas are relied upon to deliver sound teaching and are expected to monitor the progress of students, identify their problems and difficulties and take action when necessary. Much attention is given to reviewing GCE A level results. The college is changing aspects of its quality assurance processes and has recently established a quality assurance group and appointed a quality co-ordinator. The cross-college responsibilities of the group and the co-ordinator are not firmly established and there is no policy to show how quality is defined, identified and maintained across the college.

64 The college's quality assurance procedures use a few explicit targets and standards. A specific target has been set for the overall level of students' achievements in each subject. Taken as a whole, the students' examination results are expected to be at least equal to the grades predicted for them on the basis of their performance prior to their GCE A level examinations. Well-designed standards have recently been set for the new student services and learning resources centre covering the needs of users, provision of services and resources. Some standards are also included in the college charter. The strategy for the monitoring of quality includes the production of annual departmental reports. Some of these give concise accounts of major issues and review examination results in depth. There is no commonly agreed content for these reviews and consequently they vary greatly in the kind of information they provide and the depth of analysis they contain. Plans on action to deal with problems identified in the reports are not sufficiently clearly set out.

65 The review of courses during the year is carried out in different ways. Review in subject areas where there are several teachers is usually carried out at course team meetings. For subjects taken by only a small number of teachers, review is carried out more informally. There is no procedure whereby the issues and findings of course reviews can be shared amongst all staff in the college. As a result, teachers of different subjects have few opportunities to learn from each others' experience or share good practice in ways of monitoring quality or collecting and using performance indicators.

66 The college has set up sound systems for analysing examination results. Over three years ago teachers devised their own method of analysing the value added to students' achievements. The GCE A level information service is also used but it is unable to provide the college with the immediate analysis that is available from the college's own system. When examination results are poor the principal calls for a report and discusses the remedial action that is required. The governors' subcommittee on curriculum also reviews results and identifies action to be taken. Despite these systems the overall achievement target has not been met for all subjects.

67 Questionnaires are extensively used to assist tutors to monitor progress and evaluate the quality of teaching.

68 There is widespread use of questionnaires to gather information on students' perceptions. Many of the questions ask students to assess their own efforts in their subjects, and evaluate their achievements and general progress. Some questions ask about students' satisfaction with teaching, the quality of assistance they receive, and their enjoyment of courses. A recent innovation was a cross-college survey which measured students' satisfaction with the library services. A thorough analysis of the results was published in a report which also set new objectives on the basis of the findings. The college has recognised that there is a need to promote good

practice and co-ordinate the use of questionnaires. The quality assurance group is trying to devise some questions which can be made common to all end-of-year questionnaires.

69 The college's self-assessment document gives detailed accounts of the areas that the college considers to be its strengths. There is much less attention given to areas where improvements are needed. Each section of the document ends with a short outline of matters needing attention and these mostly relate to issues identified through inspection. The document gives little indication of the action the college intends to take and in two sections concentrates on constraints which inhibit the remedying of defects and deficiencies. The college should review its self-assessment process to ensure that it leads to constructive proposals for securing improvements.

70 The college charter is distributed to all students and staff. There has been a vigorous debate about the content of the charter which now includes comprehensive details of whom to contact if things go wrong. Before the charter was drawn up, there was careful consultation with staff and students and members of the governing body. A second round of consultations was taking place at the time of the cross-college inspection. The reaction to the charter from students has been largely one of indifference. A common belief amongst students is that the charter is not relevant to them and that problems can be dealt with simply by talking to tutors. A system for monitoring the charter has not yet been implemented though plans are being prepared to do this.

71 There is a policy and annual plan for staff development. Priorities are closely related to the college's strategic plan and the system for staff appraisal. It is the responsibility of the college's committee for staff development to consider requests from members of staff for support and training, in the light of their individual needs, identified at the time of their appraisal.

RESOURCES

Staffing

72 The teaching staff are well qualified. All teachers have degrees and 29 per cent have an additional, higher level qualification. Over 90 per cent of the full-time teachers, and many part-time teachers, have a teaching qualification. Almost a third of the teaching staff are currently external examiners, and a significant number are members of subject associations. Teachers display professional commitment and enthusiasm for their subjects. They have a range of prior experience, mainly in the school sector. Some have worked in industry. A significant minority has obtained experience outside education as a result of work placements arranged through the Education Business Partnership. Since 1993, 11 staff have been placed in the local area and two in Europe.

73 Science is well served by an experienced team of technicians, but there is insufficient technical support for other curriculum areas such as art and design, information technology and modern languages. There is an enthusiastic and appropriately-qualified librarian. She is, however, the only member of the library staff and one librarian is not sufficient for the college's needs.

74 The age profile of the staffing establishment is wide. Forty per cent of full-time teaching staff are female. Whilst 35 per cent of heads of department are female, there is no female senior tutor, and only one member of the senior management team is female. All teaching staff receive a copy of the comprehensive, well-indexed staff handbook. They have easy access to other more detailed information, such as policy documents, in the staff reference file. New full-time teaching staff participate in an induction programme and commented favourably on its usefulness. Part-time teachers do not have this induction programme which would be of value to them. Staff contracted for recreation classes need to be informed on appointment of the location of copies of the staff handbook.

Equipment/learning resources

75 The college does not have a policy for the purchase or replacement of capital equipment. Reference to equipment in the strategic plan is limited to information technology. Decisions are taken centrally on a year-on-year basis according to immediately foreseen priorities. As a consequence, the provision of equipment is variable.

76 Subject areas are generally adequately equipped with specialist and general purpose equipment. Features of particular note include the language laboratory with up-to-date video and satellite equipment, the excellent provision in the new performing arts centre, and the wide range of equipment in the science areas. Students are also well supported by good stocks of teaching materials, a variety of textbooks and other learning aids.

77 The current library and private study area are not large enough. The college recognised this following incorporation and the new student services and learning resources centre, due to open at Easter 1996, will include an appropriate library and private study area. Opening hours of the library, including those for holiday periods, are reasonable. The library does not have sufficient books and equipment. Some students have access to the library of the adjacent Herefordshire College of Technology although this user agreement ends at Easter 1996. The library/learning resources budget (exclusive of textbooks) for 1994-95 was £5,000; that for 1995-96 at £7,000 represents 0.3 per cent of the college's recurrent funding.

78 The college has recently agreed a policy on information technology. There are around 75 computers available throughout the college for students to use; this represents a full-time equivalent student to computer

ratio of 12.5:1. Access to machines is limited and there are only four machines available to students at any time. Some machines are incompatible with industry-standard software. Staff development and training in information technology are mainly limited to aspects of wordprocessing. The college has recognised these issues and is beginning to address them with a significant extension of information technology facilities firmly planned for the new student services centre.

Accommodation

79 The college's main accommodation comprises four blocks of buildings which stand on a compact freehold site. They were built between 1974 and 1995. The buildings are appropriate to the college's needs. A small proportion of the accommodation is in temporary buildings. The college also owns a site of rough meadow about a mile away. This is intended for sports but is difficult to use because it is subject to flooding.

80 The necessity to modify and improve its accommodation in response to changing requirements of courses and the needs of students is recognised in the college's accommodation strategy. The construction of a new performing arts centre which opened in May 1995, and the imminent completion of a new student services and learning resources centre are beneficial major achievements. Other major facilities include a sports hall.

81 The buildings are generally in excellent condition and have been well maintained to a scheduled programme determined by a professional survey prior to incorporation. Parts of the sports hall are in poor condition. The college is well decorated. There is access for students with restricted mobility to most parts of the college but not the language laboratory. The recently-extended student common room and food bar have proved popular. Students may also use the refectory at the college of technology. Access to the entrance of the main reception area can be difficult when students congregate outside it during breaks.

82 The size and layout of accommodation are generally appropriate for the programmes of study. The learning environment is improved by good and varied displays in most rooms and corridors. The new performing arts centre provides excellent accommodation. There are some less positive features in parts of the college; some rooms are overcrowded and cluttered. Teaching in both the language laboratory and the art and design suite can be disrupted because students have to pass through them to reach other classrooms. Biology needs extra accommodation as only one of the two laboratories is suitable for practical work with large classes. Staff rooms are adequate.

83 Most of the accommodation for teaching is allocated on the basis of programme areas. The college has undertaken regular space utilisation surveys which confirm that teaching room usage during the working week is generally high. External consultants have been used to good effect to

advise on the control of energy costs. The shortage of space for car parking on the campus is an acute problem. Signposting to the car park from the main entrance is non-existent.

84 Students have access to off-site facilities such as the local swimming pool and sports facilities when necessary.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

85 The college has the following strengths:

- the commitment and support of governors
- the detailed analysis of examination results and the value added to students' achievements
- the range of subjects at GCE AS/A level and GCSE
- the complementary relationship between main studies and enrichment activities
- highly-effective links with feeder schools
- the attention given to the views of students and of parents
- the high priority given to pastoral care
- effective recruitment, induction and guidance
- good counselling and careers advice
- good standards of teaching
- examination results that are better than national averages
- developing European links
- well-qualified staff
- the match of staff development to strategic planning
- a good learning environment and well-maintained accommodation.

86 If it is to maintain and improve the quality of its provision the college should:

- improve the individual tutorial arrangements
- ensure that students have better opportunities to use information technology as an integral part of their curriculum
- ensure the corporation receives reports on the monitoring of college policy
- evaluate the effectiveness of the GCSE resit programme
- define its quality assurance systems more positively
- give further consideration to the processes of self-assessment
- strengthen marketing procedures
- fulfil the potential of the management information system

-
- improve the library resources
 - develop planning procedures for the purchase and replacement of equipment.

FIGURES

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- 1 Student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)

 - 2 Full-time student numbers by curriculum area (as at November 1995)

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

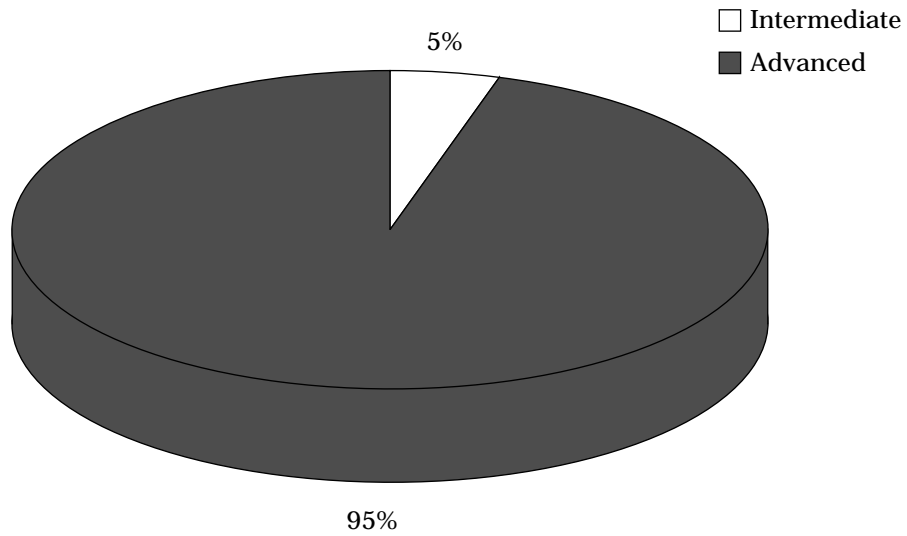
 - 4 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 5 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

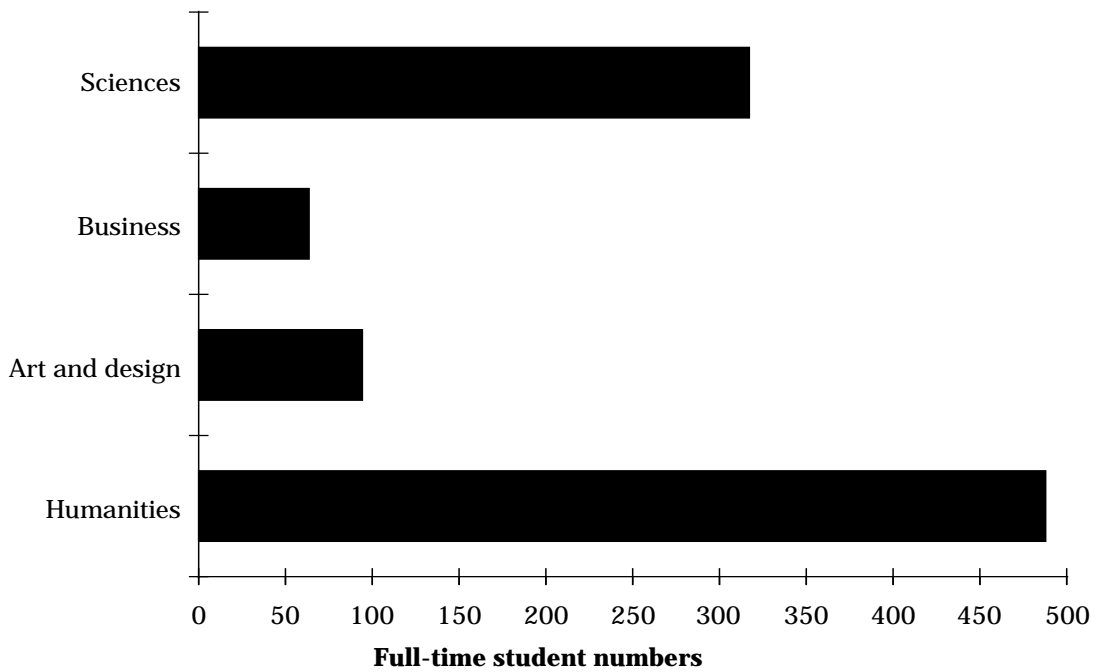
Hereford Sixth Form College: student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 963

Figure 2

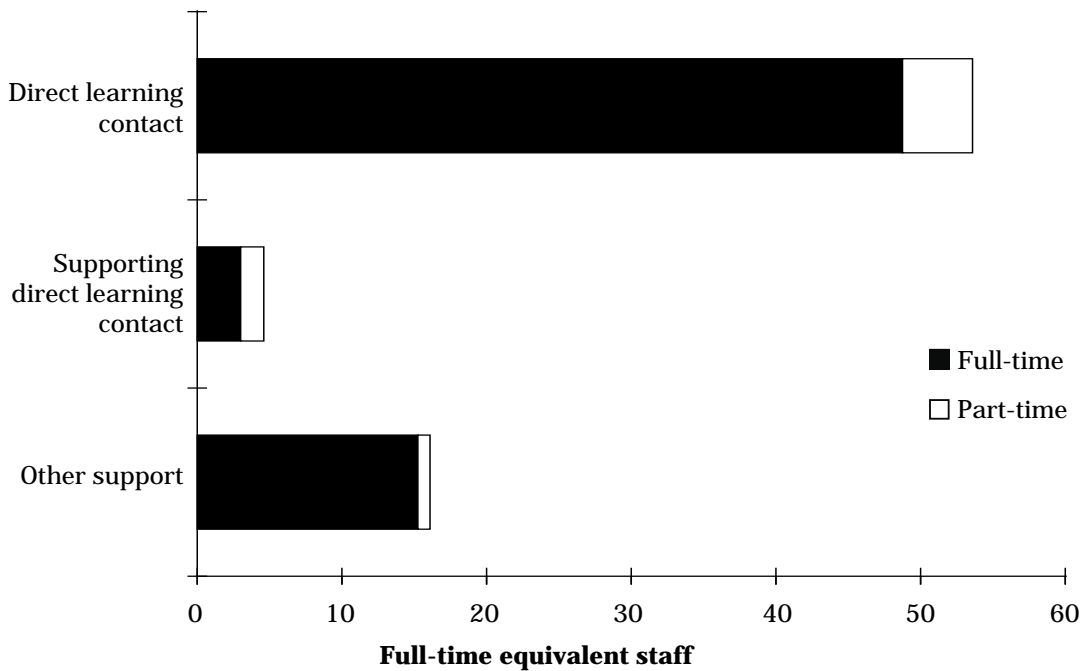
Hereford Sixth Form College: full-time student numbers by curriculum area (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 963

Figure 3

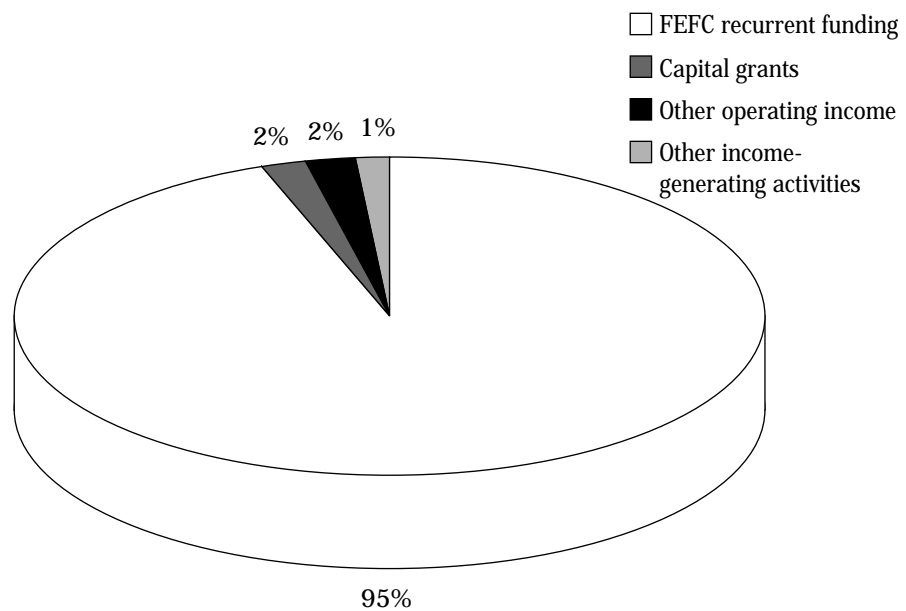
Hereford Sixth Form College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 74

Figure 4

Hereford Sixth Form College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)

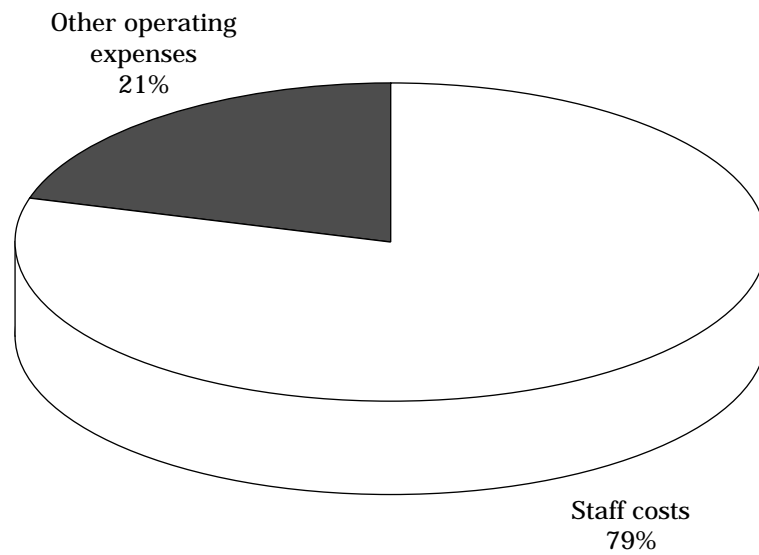


Income: £2,336,000

Note: this chart excludes £5,000 education contracts and £1,000 tuition fees.

Figure 5

Hereford Sixth Form College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £2,284,000

Note: this chart excludes £6,000 depreciation.

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