

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Varndean College

August 1995

**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.

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 84/95

VARNDEAN COLLEGE

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected July 1994 – March 1995

Summary

Varndean is a responsive college which has grown since incorporation both in student numbers and in the range of courses offered. It now provides a wide variety of courses for adults. The college co-operates effectively with schools, other further education colleges and higher education establishments. The standard of teaching is good. Varndean students enjoy a stimulating and wide-ranging enrichment programme to broaden their educational experience, and good pastoral support. The college is effectively managed, in a manner which combines strong leadership, an open-management style, and good teamwork. It has succeeded in making almost every part of its campus accessible to students with restricted mobility. The college should continue to develop its management structure and its quality assurance system, extend access to information technology facilities and improve social areas for students and staff.

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	3
Resources: staffing	1
equipment/learning resources	3
accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	2	English	2
Mathematics and computing	2	Humanities	3
Management studies	2	Modern languages	2
Visual arts	2	Social sciences	2

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INTRODUCTION

1 Varndean College was inspected between July 1994 and March 1995. Advice and interview sessions were observed in September 1994. The curriculum was inspected in January 1995 and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in March 1995. Two inspector days were devoted to enrolment and induction, 27 days to specialist inspections and 21 to cross-college assessment.

2 Inspectors observed 120 teaching sessions, examined samples of students' work, and held discussions with students, staff and members of the college corporation. They attended a meeting of the students' union executive committee and an act of collective Christian worship. They held discussions with parents, employers, staff from local schools, further education colleges and higher education institutions and a representative of the Sussex Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). They inspected a range of documents including the college's strategic plan, its self-assessment report, policy statements and meeting agendas and minutes.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 Varndean College was a grammar school for boys until 1975, when it was designated a sixth form college under a local reorganisation of secondary education. The majority of its students come from six 11-16 comprehensive schools in Brighton, but an increasing number have been attracted from outside this traditional catchment area. Students now travel to the college from Hove, Lewes, Ringmer, Burgess Hill, Hassocks, and the Cuckfield area of mid-Sussex.

4 The college is on a large site of 22 hectares which it shares with two 11-16 schools, a junior school and an infant school. This site is in the northern suburbs of Brighton close to the major north-south A23 and east-west A27 roads, and to national rail connections. A high proportion of Brighton's workforce is employed in the service sector, including leisure and tourism. Unemployment is above average for the south-east. Brighton is a diverse community, with substantial pockets of poverty. Varndean's students include some young people who are making their way through education with little parental support.

5 Most full-time Varndean students are aged between 16 and 18 and follow courses leading to the General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level), GCE advanced supplementary (AS) or General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). The range of courses has been broadened recently to include a number of General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes at advanced and intermediate levels. All full-time students are required to participate in the 'open college' programme which incorporates a wide range of courses, some of which are accredited. The programme includes recreational, creative and aesthetic, social and political, scientific and environmental, information technology, economic awareness, and community link courses. Learning

support is available to all full-time students. A significant feature of the college's curriculum since 1991 has been the growing number of part-time adult courses in the community education programme. These include both recreational courses and courses leading to qualifications. The college has a strong tradition of sport, drama and music which, with its community links, work experience and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, enrich the life of its students.

6 The number of full-time students has grown from 655 in 1992 to 783 in 1994: an increase of 20 per cent in two years. Over the same period the number of part-time mature students grew from 509 to 711: a rise of 40 per cent. 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. The college has 59.1 full-time equivalent daytime teachers, 29 teachers involved in evening-only courses, and 16.4 full-time equivalent technical and support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. In 1993, Varndean College's unit of funding was £19.81, compared with a median for sixth form colleges of £20.96. In 1994-95 the unit of funding is £18.94 compared with a median of £19.81. The college's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

7 The college declares its mission to be 'to provide a high quality education which makes the best possible use of resources while respecting students and staff as individuals and encouraging their personal development in a supportive environment which is open to a broad community'.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 Most staff are aware of the government's policies for further education, the national targets for education and training, and the requirements of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college's positive response to them is evident in its strategic plan. It met the growth targets set by the corporation for 1993-94, but it may miss this year's targets by a small margin. The corporation board and the staff of the college share a common view of its educational character. Their guiding principles are: equality of opportunity for all; choice from a broad range of courses; independence in the use of a range of learning styles and in developing responsibility for learning; strong pastoral care including access to specialist careers advice and counselling; and progression towards clearly-defined careers and continuing education targets.

9 The college offers a wide choice of programmes. There are 36 GCE A level, 26 AS, and 22 GCSE courses. Alternative syllabuses are available in English, history and mathematics at GCE A level. This year 717 full-time students aged between 16 and 18 are enrolled on these courses, of whom 103 are taking one-year GCSE programmes. The college has offered vocational courses since 1990. GNVQ advanced and intermediate programmes are available in business studies and in health and social

care, and an advanced programme only in leisure and tourism. Sixty-six full-time students aged between 16 and 18 were registered for these awards in 1994-95. Next year, the college plans to launch GNVQ intermediate programmes in science, information technology, and art and design, and an advanced course in media studies.

10 The college requires all its 16-18 full-time students to take part in the open college programme, which consists of core modules in personal, social and health education, and study skills, together with a wide range of extension units. These include creative, artistic, recreational and sporting activities, additional academic studies, and community projects involving work with children and elderly people. Students also have the opportunity to participate in Vocational Interest and Experience Week which has 15 options including work experience, cycling in France, conservation in North Wales and art workshops. The courses are accredited through the Sussex Open College Network. Some units lead to national certificates such as the bronze medallion life-saving certificate and the Community Sports Leadership Award.

11 The college provides other sporting and artistic activities which are not accredited. Sports include cricket, football, netball, hockey, tennis, squash, basketball, athletics and cross-country running. The college stages frequent dramatic productions and concerts. Creative writing includes prose and poetry for public reading and publication. There are art exhibitions and dance performances.

12 In accordance with sections 44 and 45 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the college offers a weekly act of collective Christian worship and provides religious education classes at times convenient for the majority of full-time students. The Christian student group holds daily prayer meetings and a weekly meeting for study and fellowship. A meditation and discovery group investigates other approaches to spiritual development.

13 The college encourages participation by adult students in its daytime courses and in the open college programme. The number of adults taking up this opportunity has been modest; this year there are 22 adult day students. Six hundred adults study at Varndean in the evening and at weekends. Programmes available to them include a European studies access course in preparation for entry to higher education; courses at different levels in European languages including French, German, Spanish and Italian; GCSE and GCE A level courses including law, mathematics, dance, and the history of art; several courses designed for particular groups such as the political refugees resident in the district; and a number of courses in practical skills such as wordprocessing. There is no provision for distance or open learning, or courses aimed specifically at the unemployed.

14 The college has a comprehensive policy for equal opportunities which is actively implemented and monitored. Much is done to raise awareness

of equal opportunities issues among staff and students. Examples of good practice in individual departments are disseminated throughout the college. In collaboration with a local school, the college works well with students with learning difficulties and includes them in one of its residential courses. There are plans for further development in this area. The whole curriculum is accessible to students using wheelchairs or with other mobility restrictions.

15 The college receives good support from the local education authority (LEA), the careers service, parents and local schools. It has excellent relations with the 11-16 schools from which most of its students are drawn. Advertising and promotion of the college's curriculum to school leavers is scrupulously conducted in accordance with an agreed code of practice. Schools are informed of the progress and achievements of their former pupils. The college encourages parents to attend open days and reports to them regularly on the progress of their children. Parents reported some discouragement of applications to the college by schools with their own sixth forms. There is no parent-teacher association or other formal body which could enable parents to express their appreciation of the college's work in a tangible way: a matter of regret to some parents.

16 The college has good connections with other further education institutions and with local universities, particularly through accreditation networks for the open college programme and access to higher education courses. The college is active in the Sussex sixth form college consortium which makes joint bids for projects funded by the Sussex TEC and collaborates in training teachers. It has been seeking to compete in the local training market. With the help of TEC funding it has conducted market research into the training needs of local employers and has made plans to meet the requirements that were identified.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

17 The governing body has a potential membership of 17. At present there are eight independent members, two staff, two parents, one student and a co-opted member. The principal is also a member of the board. At the time of the inspection there were vacancies for a representative of the TEC and one co-opted member. The college has done its best to fill the TEC vacancy without success.

18 The corporation board meets twice each term. Its six committees deal with finance, premises, personnel, curriculum, audit and remuneration. Rates of attendance at meetings are good.

19 Independent members of the board have professional experience in computing, finance, human resource management, personnel and premises. Corporation members are well briefed by the principal and receive well-prepared papers in good time for meetings. They are aware of their role and responsibilities and are familiar with the instrument and articles of government. Members understand the difference between their

strategic functions and the operational duties of the principal and his senior management team, to whom they give strong support. Corporation members take a keen interest in the life and work of the college, beyond that required by their formal duties. They attend presentations, social events and some staff-development sessions. A number of governors are parents of past or present students of the college, or have been recruited through Varndean College's involvement in community education. All members of the corporation take a particular interest in a designated curriculum area.

20 Governors have been closely involved in the development and monitoring of the strategic plan. The formulation of the strategic plan benefited greatly from two staff-development days when teachers and governors together considered the future role and shape of the college. Members of the senior management team work together closely and their decisions are clear and open. Teachers praised the collaborative management style, the accessibility of managers, and their receptiveness to staff suggestions and ideas. Staff understand current administrative and curriculum structures, and have been fully involved in debate about the new management structure to be introduced in September 1995. The principal has played a vital part in generating a strong team spirit among staff and a real sense of community within and beyond the college.

21 All central management roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and staff understand the lines of accountability. There are formal descriptions for all jobs. The college is well organised and its structures are consistently documented. At department and course level, however, practice varies and new initiatives are not always well co-ordinated across departments. The college has addressed this problem in its new structure by creating larger groupings and making responsibility for quality assurance more explicit.

22 Procedures for financial allocation to departments are clear. Governors and departmental heads receive regular reports on income, expenditure and cashflow. Financial procedures have been commented upon favourably by external auditors. Resource allocation takes account of the strategic plan. Bids from heads of department for resources follow consultation with teachers. The college is aware of the financial issues it faces. It is working with its auditors on a cost-centre analysis which will give a clearer view of the range of costs of its work and point the way towards action to reduce unwarranted variations.

23 The college uses a computer management information system which produces financial and student data which are reliable and easy to understand. The system has some weaknesses which are inherent in the software but the college is aware of them and they cause no significant practical difficulty. The college uses some performance indicators and has the information with which to develop more.

24 There are well-documented policies for health and safety and equal opportunities. They are publicised in the staff handbook with the names of those responsible for their implementation. A staff group monitors health and safety. Most health and safety deficiencies in the buildings, identified by the Hunter Survey, have been rectified.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

25 The college draws most of its full-time students from six 11-16 schools in the area. It nominates a senior tutor as the main point of contact between each school and the college. In organising progression from these schools, the college works collaboratively with Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College under a formal code of conduct. The principles outlined in the code are also shared with Brighton College of Technology and with the four 11-18 schools in Hove. The code of conduct is designed to guarantee the quality and impartiality of advice and information given to potential students. It deals with issues of publicity, admissions and information exchange in detail. It is a responsible measure to ensure that applicants to every local college are given accurate and unbiased information on which to base their choice.

26 Senior tutors oversee a connection with 11-16 schools which starts with 14 year olds in some cases, when the college has its first opportunity to contribute to parents' evenings. Each July, 15 year old pupils are invited to attend the college for a day with a particular theme; in 1994 it was 'life and study in the 1960s'. In October and November staff and former students visit the schools of 16 year old pupils to tell them of the opportunities available at Varndean College and to reiterate invitations to open evenings. Access to 11-18 schools is more difficult. The college has relied on word of mouth and local advertising. However, the LEA careers service provides a guide to parents which outlines the full range of 16-plus provision in the county; it has been sent to the homes of all pupils in East Sussex schools who are in their final year of compulsory schooling. All full-time applicants to the college are invited to an interview to discuss their choice of course. The subsequent letter offering a place draws attention to a new students' day in June, to evenings for parents of new students and to the final stage interviews held immediately after the publication of GCSE examination results.

27 Mature students applying to join daytime courses receive, with their application form, information which is particularly relevant to them; for example, about subsidised creche facilities. The recruitment and induction procedure is otherwise the same as for 16-19 year old students. Applicants interested in access to higher education are able to attend a special open evening in January. They are then interviewed by the course co-ordinator and a representative from the University of Sussex. The college is successful not only in providing good support to young people at a time of important decisions, but also in helping and encouraging adults who may lack confidence in their ability to re-enter education.

28 The induction of new students to the college begins in June each year with a new students' day. They are shown around the college, they meet their personal tutors and take part in five taster sessions to refine their choice of course and increase their knowledge of services such as learning support. It is an opportunity for personal tutors to hold individual interviews with their students. If issues arise then senior tutors are also involved.

29 After the GCSE results have been published each new student becomes the responsibility of a staff panel, usually of three members. The panel includes the personal tutor, whom the student will have met already, and others from a range of curriculum areas. Staff devote time to discussing longer-term goals such as higher education and employment plans, to stretching able students, to trying to guide weaker students towards realistic goals, and to pointing out opportunities to widen interests in music, drama or sport, for example. Senior tutors also meet each student from their tutor groups, double-check the programme selected, and enter details into the computer database so that the college timetable can be finalised. This is a thorough and productive part of the induction process. On the first day of their course, full-time students have a tutorial at which they receive printed timetables, a briefing on student services including the library, careers and counselling, and begin selection of their open college units. Curriculum induction takes place as part of the introduction to each course. Adult learners joining evening classes leading to an examination discuss the course requirements with the tutor. While induction is generally well planned, thorough and effective, some students, for example in business studies, felt that there should have been a stronger focus on preparation for the course itself. It was a common complaint that induction to the library was repeated for each subject taken by students.

30 The number of mature students is growing, and with it the need to establish a formal system to accredit prior learning and experience. The college recognises this as a significant issue in terms of access and is beginning to address it by equipping staff with the skills they need. Three members of staff are undertaking courses leading to acquisition of the appropriate Training and Development Lead Body award.

31 There are flexible procedures for students to transfer to other courses or subjects if necessary. The process is managed in the first instance by personal tutors and specialist staff, overseen by the senior tutor with responsibility for guidance who is able to call on the reliable student database to ensure that control and co-ordination are maintained.

32 Five senior tutors each have a group of personal tutors for whom they are responsible. Adults who attend daytime classes are encouraged to join a tutorial group. The community education manager takes responsibility for adults who attend only in the evening.

33 The college has introduced a pairing system for tutors. This ensures that if one tutor is absent students will not find themselves without a tutor

or with a tutor unfamiliar to them. It also encourages co-operative working between tutors and their students.

34 The college has a careers room open to students for about 90 per cent of the week, including in the evenings. The service provided by the college's own tutors is supplemented by the attendance of LEA careers officers for two days a week. The library has a range of careers-related databases for students' use. Tutors providing guidance to students aspiring to higher education are given a general guide to the applications process, and samples of student references and personal statements.

35 Responsibility for management of the tutorial system rests with the vice-principal for guidance and student services. Tutorials are well planned, well organised, and carefully delivered. There is a 40-minute tutorial each Monday. Tutors seek to develop self-criticism among students and encourage them to review and update their national record of achievement regularly. Students coming to the college without a record of achievement are encouraged to establish one using the college's own documentation. Students from overseas with no records of achievement pose particular problems of continuity in the recording of achievement, and the college is looking into this.

36 Tutors also play an active role in monitoring attendance. Concerns about poor attendance led to a college-wide monitoring exercise in March 1994. Tutors are required to follow up any unauthorised absence with a phone call to the student's home on the second day. Subject teachers inform personal tutors about significant absence by means of a 'cause for concern' note. The personal tutor records the action taken and passes the note to a senior tutor. Inspectors recorded an 84 per cent rate of attendance during the specialist phase of the inspection. Students sometimes arrived late at classes, particularly at the start of the day. The college will pilot an electronic attendance and registration system with its first-year GCE A level students in the summer term and introduce the system fully in September 1995. The college should continue to seek improvement in this area.

37 The college provides a confidential counselling service to its students. One member of staff is available for 10 hours a week. All the staff involved have professional counselling qualifications. Counselling staff have seen more than 80 students so far this year. This is a larger number than was anticipated which suggests that resources may soon be overstretched. Students speak highly of the service they receive.

38 Students learn about their rights and responsibilities through discussion of the college charter at tutorials. Their views of the value of the charter were mixed. Its direct connection with the college's learner agreement, which has not been well received, has had a negative effect. Parents had little or no knowledge of the charter, although some recognised elements of its content from the principal's talks at open evenings. Teachers are developing a new charter presentation for next session.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

39 The quality of teaching is good. Of the 120 sessions inspected, 62 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. The following table summarises the grades given to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		7	44	30	2	0	83
GCSE		1	9	7	1	0	18
GNVQ		1	3	1	1	0	6
Other		1	8	4	0	0	13
Total		10	64	42	4	0	120

40 The majority of sessions were well planned and well organised. They were based on good lesson plans and clear schemes of work that, in the best practice, specified the teaching methods and the resources required. GCSE mathematics was well planned. Three teachers used the same work scheme: all were at the same stage and used the same teaching aids. The detailed scheme of work for English literature is imaginative and challenging. The scheme for the access course had been prepared in co-operation with the University of Sussex. In some subjects, such as visual arts, there are examples of good planning and written course briefs which nevertheless did not represent common practice. They could and should be more widely adopted as models. Other schemes of work, such as that for communications, merely repeated the examination board syllabus. In media studies, the stated aims and objectives were substantially the same as for English; they need to be more closely focused.

41 Almost all teaching sessions were conducted at an appropriate pace. In the better classes the pace was adapted to the difficulty of what was being taught, and to the needs of the students. Students responded well when the expectations of their teachers were high. Teachers in the better classes employed a variety of methods including lecturing to the whole group, teacher-led and student-led discussions, question and answer exchanges, role-play, reading tasks, reviews of examination questions and 'surgery' sessions to help prepare for coursework assignments. The best sessions sought to find ways of involving students actively in the learning process, challenging and extending their knowledge and skills.

42 Teachers made good use of oral work, which took various forms, including tasks carried out in groups of two or three students, whole group discussions, and student presentations. It helped to develop students' self-confidence, and to establish friendly and informal relations between students and staff. In the best practice teachers drew on students' own experiences to illustrate topics under discussion. In modern languages, a high percentage of tutors are native speakers who use the language being

studied consistently to help their students to develop a good ear for the spoken word.

43 A minority of classes were much less effective. They included those where teachers were not coping well with mixed-ability groups. Some staff relied too heavily on dictating notes or on making students copy them from the board or from transparencies. Others addressed their questions only to the whole class, leaving the weaker students silent and uninvolved. The inclusion of class observation in the college's quality assurance procedures would help to reduce poor practice.

44 The college seeks to provide students with learning opportunities that go beyond the demands of the syllabus. This is done primarily through its open college programme, but teachers in some curriculum areas also make a valuable contribution. English teachers assist with drama productions, theatre visits and poetry readings. About 40 students and staff attended a lunch-time session to launch an anthology of poetry written by Varndean College students. An attentive and appreciative audience listened to poems read aloud, mainly by their authors. The work was expressive and technically competent and the standards of reading were high. The texts were printed in a well-produced booklet. In other subjects, staff encouraged students to take a wider view of their course by, for example, taking part in exchange visits and field trips, discussing issues with visiting speakers and attending external lectures and conferences. The college has an active politics society.

45 Students were set regular homework and tests. Most were well marked and promptly returned. In most subjects teachers made constructive written comments which gave guidance on future improvement. In most written work, errors in spelling and grammar were corrected. Staff also used recent mock examinations to good effect in order to improve students' understanding of assessment requirements. During feedback on examination results, the marking scheme devised by the examination board was explained to students, to show them how their results might be improved.

46 There were some instances, for example, in management studies, where a bunching of assignments could have been overcome by better planning of the assessment programme. Work was not always promptly returned. The quality of written commentary was poor on a few texts. Errors in spelling and grammar in some written work were not corrected. The college should ensure that the high standards of most teachers apply across the college.

47 Proper attention is paid to health and safety issues. Good laboratory techniques were observed in science work. The laboratories themselves were well laid out, clean, tidy and well maintained. Protective clothing was available and the importance of health and safety was emphasised.

48 Most teachers used a variety of aids to improve the effectiveness of their teaching. These included television and video equipment, overhead

projectors, handouts and the language laboratory. Overhead projectors and appropriate screens were not, however, available in all rooms, and there were occasions when audio-visual aids could have been used more effectively. Most handouts given to students were well presented but in a few cases teachers should have checked their material more thoroughly for accuracy.

49 In some subjects students were encouraged to work independently. In a German GCE A level class, students were making effective use of the library to research their current topic, the Berlin wall. In a science class, each student was given a task that required them to carry out research to be completed in a week, and directed to source material in the library. The librarian had been involved in planning the exercise and producing packs of appropriate material.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

50 Most students are strongly motivated to succeed, express themselves with confidence, and work hard to acquire skills and understanding. In most subjects high expectations of students by teachers lead to good levels of achievement.

51 The development of core and study skills varies across the college. Not all GCE A level students develop effective study skills or are capable of independent learning. Students have access to well-organised and relevant learning support where needed. Areas of common concern such as essay research, planning and writing are addressed with the aid of well-prepared material. Practical work was carried out competently and was particularly well organised in physics, electronics and textile design.

52 In 1994, the college's GCE A level results were similar to the national average, with 84 per cent of students achieving grades A-E compared with a national figure for all ages in sixth form colleges of 83 per cent. In 1993, 88 per cent of students achieved A-E grades compared with a national average of 80 per cent. In 1994 there were 763 subject entries, a rise of 6 per cent over the previous year. In 1994, the GCE A level subjects that had pass rates well above the national average were art and design, biology, business studies, decision mathematics, economics, English literature, French, German, history of art, mathematics, media studies, philosophy, photography, politics and government, and sociology. There were also good results in theatre studies and dance for which no comparative data are available. Subjects where the results were below average were accounting, chemistry, communication studies, design, English language, combined English language and literature, geography, history, home economics, further mathematics, mathematics with statistics, mathematics and mechanics, physics, religious studies and social biology.

53 In GCE AS courses in 1994, 67 per cent of all students achieved A-E grades, compared with a national average for all ages in sixth form colleges of 70 per cent. In 1994 there were 104 entries, a fall from 138 the previous

year. Only psychology, with a pass rate of 88 per cent, was significantly above the national average. Subjects where the results were below national averages in 1994 included English, history and mathematics.

54 The tables published by the Department for Education in 1994 showed that students aged 16-18 entered for two or more GCE A levels or AS equivalents achieved an average points score of 14.2 (where A=10 and E=2) compared with a national average of 14.5 for all sixth form colleges. This placed the college third among the eight further education colleges in the county and in the top third of all colleges in the further education sector. The college's point score for 1994 was lower than the 16.2 achieved in 1993.

55 In 1994, 55.5 per cent of students following GCSE courses achieved grades A-C compared with a national average of 50 per cent for all ages in sixth form colleges. This is a fall from the previous year when 64 per cent achieved grades A-C. Among the subjects in which students achieved results above the national average were accounting, art and design, biology, dance, electronics, media studies, photography and sociology. Subjects where the results were significantly below the national average were chemistry, English, physical education, physics and Spanish.

56 In 1994, 78 per cent of students completing vocational courses achieved the qualification they sought. Students performed particularly well in GNVQ business, health and social care, foreign language at work and a range of wordprocessing courses.

57 The retention rate in 1994 for vocational courses was 80 per cent, for GCE A level 79 per cent and for GCSE 74 per cent. These figures are an improvement on those for 1993. Further improvement is desirable. In 1994, 32 per cent of one and two-year GCE A level students went on to higher education, 8 per cent deferred entry to university for a year, 29 per cent undertook additional further education, 13 per cent entered employment and 18 per cent were either unemployed or their destination was unknown.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

58 The production of the college charter has involved consultation at all levels with staff and students. There is a high level of awareness of the college charter, though not of the national charter. There is greater familiarity with the student learner agreement which emphasises students' responsibilities, than with the college's responsibilities which are set out more fully in the charter. There has been no monitoring of the effectiveness of the college charter. It is planned to revise the charter at the end of this year and annually thereafter.

59 College-wide quality assurance is still in its infancy, although there is an established scheme of annual reporting on the work of each department. A policy for the management of quality in the college has been approved by the curriculum review group. It contains many elements of good practice

but sets few measurable targets for progress. Student questionnaires on the entry and achievement phases have been completed and the responses analysed. A questionnaire relating to on-programme experience is to be issued but it will not provide students with an opportunity to comment on the quality of teaching. There are no plans to include classroom observation in the new quality assurance arrangements.

60 Staff differ in their awareness of the new quality assurance procedures. All departmental files include a section on quality assurance, but the current edition of the staff handbook does not. Discussion with staff indicated that they understood those parts of the policy which affected them directly but few were conscious of the framework as a whole, even though there had been a staff-development period to introduce it. The draft job description for the heads of section under the new management structure, includes responsibility for quality assurance. Staff are aware of the importance of target setting as an aid to quality improvement and some departments already set targets.

61 College targets for recruitment were set and have been largely met but there is no consistent system for setting and monitoring targets for student recruitment, retention and achievement by subject areas.

62 Reports produced on students' achievements include useful information for feeder schools on the progress of their former pupils. Moderators' reports corroborate evidence that appropriate standards are met. Statistical reports produced by the Advanced Level Information System, supplemented with additional college data, are given to heads of department. A destinations report is published. Examinations are carefully administered. Internal reports include the findings from the first students' induction questionnaire which is part of the new quality assurance system. Relevant parts of the questionnaire findings have been brought to the attention of appropriate staff groups.

63 The college has made a commitment to seek Investors in People status with the support of the local TEC. An initial staff questionnaire has been completed and analysed. A draft programme has been written but not yet agreed by college management.

64 Staff development is well established in the college. This year a new staff development policy has been introduced which links activities more firmly to the objectives in the strategic plan. The staff-development budget is £15,000, or 0.7 per cent of college turnover. Recent staff development activities have been concentrated on preparation for GNVQ programmes and eight staff now hold the relevant qualifications of the Training and Development Lead Body. Three others are still in training. These numbers are appropriate in relation to the size of the GNVQ programme.

65 There is an established staff-appraisal scheme which took the form of voluntary staff review. A new system was launched in 1994 under which all staff will be appraised. The 12 teaching and support staff who have so far completed appraisal training speak highly of the experience,

and college-wide appraisal is now getting under way. The scheme will not include performance-related pay.

66 There is an induction programme for new staff and a staff handbook. All new staff have monthly interviews with their managers. Although the interpretation of induction varies, all recently-appointed staff expressed satisfaction with the experience.

67 The college's self-assessment report reflects its positive approach to inspection. The report is a genuine attempt to make an objective evaluation of performance. It includes comments from individual departments, and the section on teaching and learning is particularly extensive and detailed. Staff were closely involved in preparation of the statement, which has made a useful contribution to the launch of the new quality assurance system.

RESOURCES

Staffing

68 The college has 48 full-time and 18 part-time teachers. Forty-four per cent of full-time and 78 per cent of part-time teachers are women. Teaching staff are well qualified; 92 per cent are graduates, a quarter have a higher degree and 86 per cent hold a teaching qualification. Seventeen per cent of teachers have been appointed in the last two years and a further 23 per cent within the last five years. This has allowed the college to acquire the new expertise needed for its developing work with adults and in GNVQ, which has been a great help in its progress towards diversification. There are sufficient teachers with appropriate qualifications and experience to cover all aspects of the programmes offered.

69 Normal staff contact time is 28 periods in a 35 period week. Two-thirds of teachers have special responsibilities for which they receive remission from teaching. The college student-to-staff ratio is 13.2:1.

70 There are 24 support staff of whom four are full time, four are part time and 16 part time during term time only, to give a total full-time equivalent of 16.4. Two technicians have completed the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) further education teacher's certificate and have some teaching duties. Another two support staff who assist with teaching are currently following the course. Staff in the college are enthusiastic about their jobs and demonstrate an impressive degree of care for their students.

Equipment/learning resources

71 In 1994-95 the college allocated £89,000 to departments for specialist equipment and teaching materials. There is adequate equipment to support the courses taught at the college. Equipment in art and design is good and well maintained. There is a new and well-equipped electronics

laboratory. Much of the physics equipment is old, but changes in the curriculum have led to the reintroduction of some equipment which was being considered for disposal. The college has recently refurbished the language laboratory, but it is adequate only for groups up to fifteen students.

72 The college library has a welcoming atmosphere. It is effectively staffed by a qualified librarian and three part-time assistants. Although staffing of the library has increased recently, there is a large backlog of cataloguing. Study space for students is inadequate and the library was full on a number of occasions during the inspection. The bookstock is relatively small at 10,000 volumes, but it has been substantially updated during the last three years. In some subjects, such as sociology and information technology, there is a good range of books, but in history and science the rate of improvement has been slower. Replacement of the bookstock will need to continue for some time in order to remedy many years of neglect and under investment. The annual library budget is modest, at £12,750.

73 Improvement of library systems is taking place. Bar-coding, date labelling and a computerised lending system have been introduced. The levels of book borrowing are monitored but there is no system to show which students and courses use the library. A new video library has been installed which is having an immediate impact on teaching. A compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database terminal is available in the library. It has seven disk drives which are accessible by all of the networked computers in the college. All new students receive an induction course on how to use the library facilities.

74 The college has a network of 45 computers which are mainly of 486 standard, and a further 21 computers of various types. The student to computer ratio is 12:1. The appointment of an information systems manager has led to improvement in access and a more efficient system. However, the college has no open-access learning centre and students find it difficult at times to find an available machine.

Accommodation

75 The main building of the college was constructed in the early 1930s, and there was further development during the 1950s and 1960s. The main building is handsome and is used as a selling point to prospective students. It has a number of distinctive features, such as the open cloisters and courtyards. Several of the large, high-ceiling classrooms have been refurbished in recent years to provide accommodation more suited to current needs. For example, a former science laboratory has been subdivided to provide a music teaching room and practice rooms. Maintenance programmes have been undertaken, for example, upgrading of the central heating system and replacement of windows in the main building. The general standard of accommodation remains variable. Some

rooms such as the chemistry laboratory and the new electronics laboratory are excellent, and the college has a well-equipped multi-gym. Other accommodation, such as that used by business studies, is barely adequate. The huts used for English and media studies are cramped and noise penetration is a problem. Physical education and dance are accommodated in a traditional school gymnasium. Changing rooms and toilets are of a poor standard. The student canteen, the only social space, is dirty and unkempt. Although the college has erected some good new buildings recently, it should take steps to achieve acceptable minimum standards throughout.

76 The college has worked hard to achieve accessibility for students with restricted mobility. Improvements include the provision of a lift, ramps, accessible toilets and car parking spaces. Almost all of the campus is now accessible by wheelchair users. This is a substantial achievement on a sloping site which is by no means easily adapted to access for those with restricted mobility. There is a day nursery to help mature students with children attend classes.

77 The college monitors its use of rooms. There is a shortage of work and social areas for staff and students. The college refectory is inadequate for the numbers wishing to use it at peak times. However, a comprehensive accommodation strategy is in place which identifies areas that need to be addressed and sets out a programme of work and development.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

78 The strengths of the college are:

- co-operation with schools, other further education colleges and higher education
- the enrichment programme
- the growing provision for adults
- the combination of strong leadership and open management
- good student support
- good standards of teaching
- good teamwork involving all members of staff
- good accessibility for students with restricted mobility.

79 If it is to succeed in achieving its aims, the college should:

- pursue the introduction of the new management structure
- continue the development of its quality assurance system
- extend facilities for information technology
- improve accommodation including social areas for students and staff.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

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

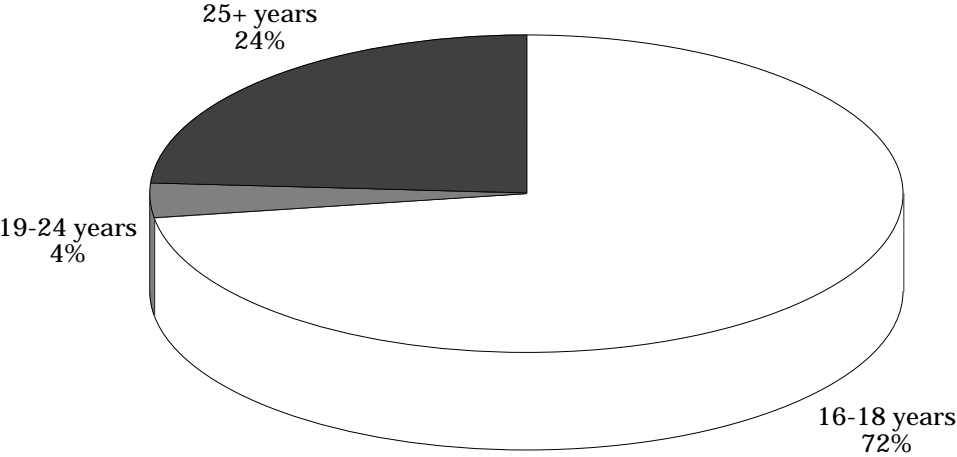
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

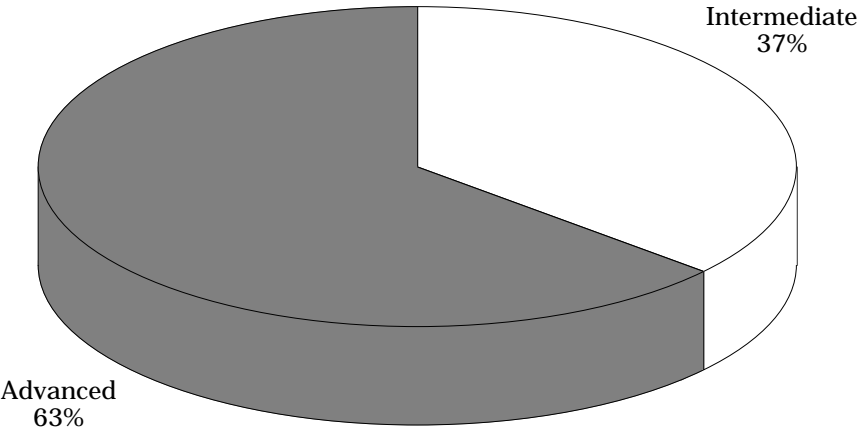
Varndean College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 1,135

Figure 2

Varndean College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 1,135

Figure 3

Varndean College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

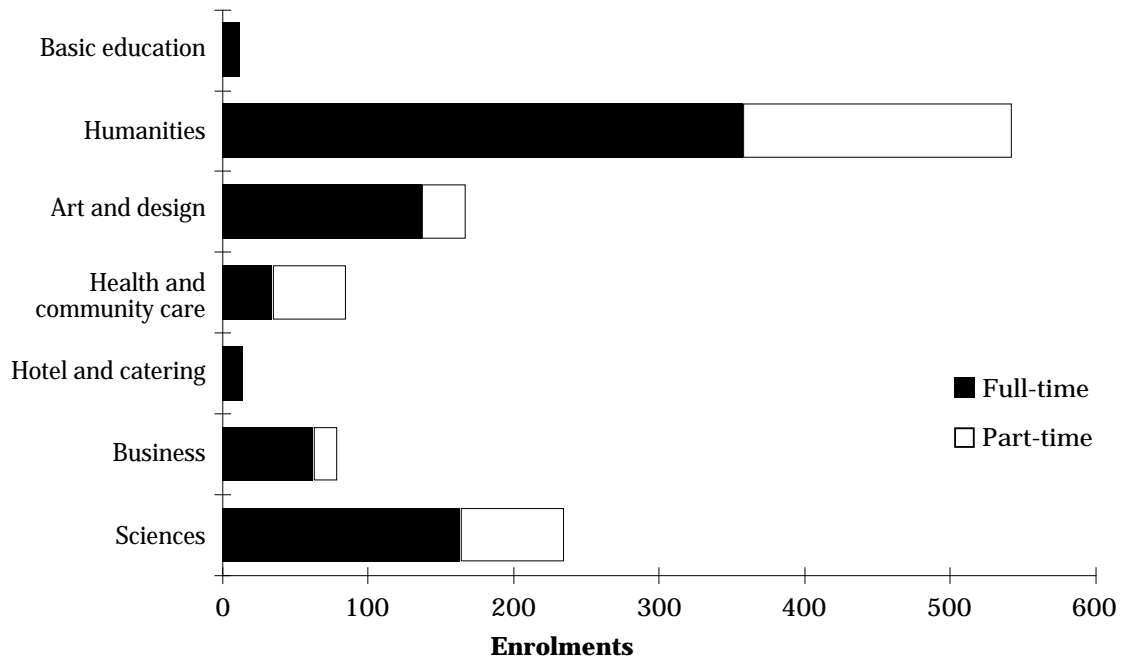


Figure 4

Varndean College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

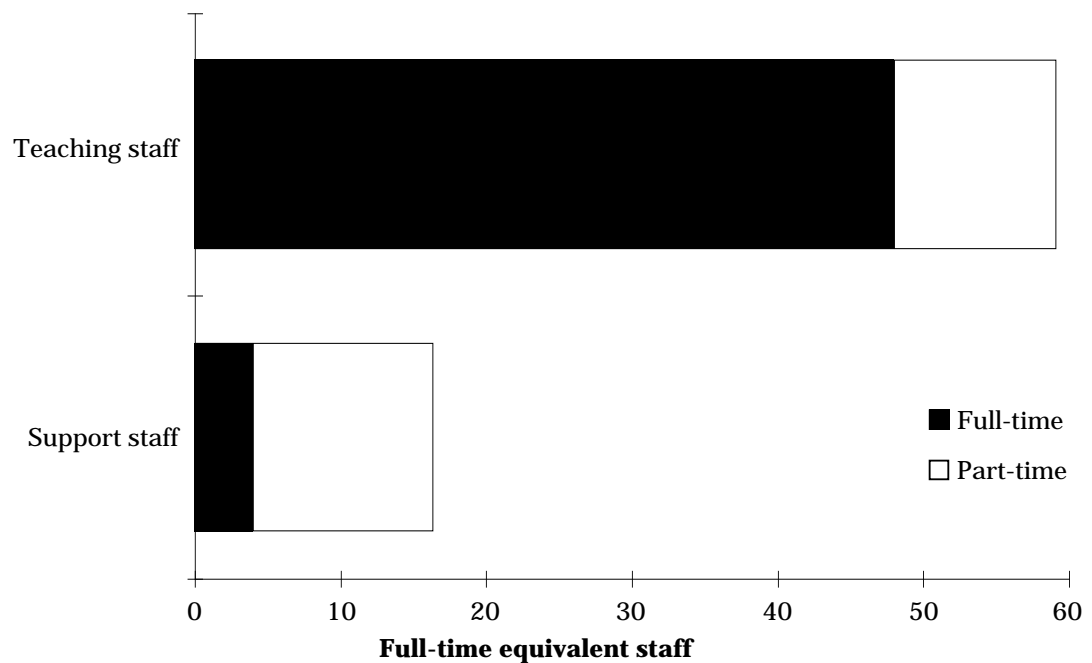
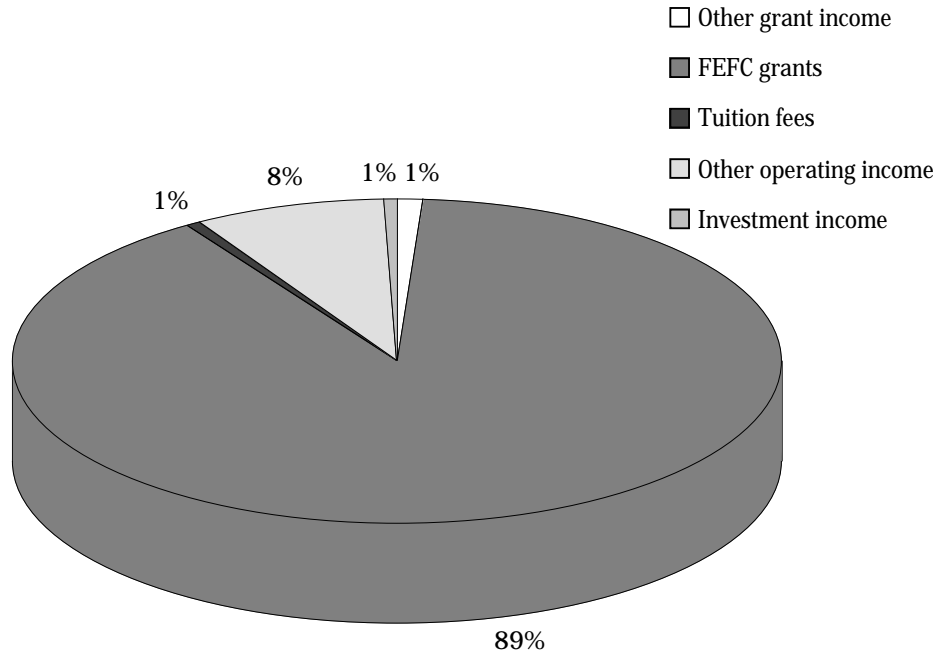


Figure 5

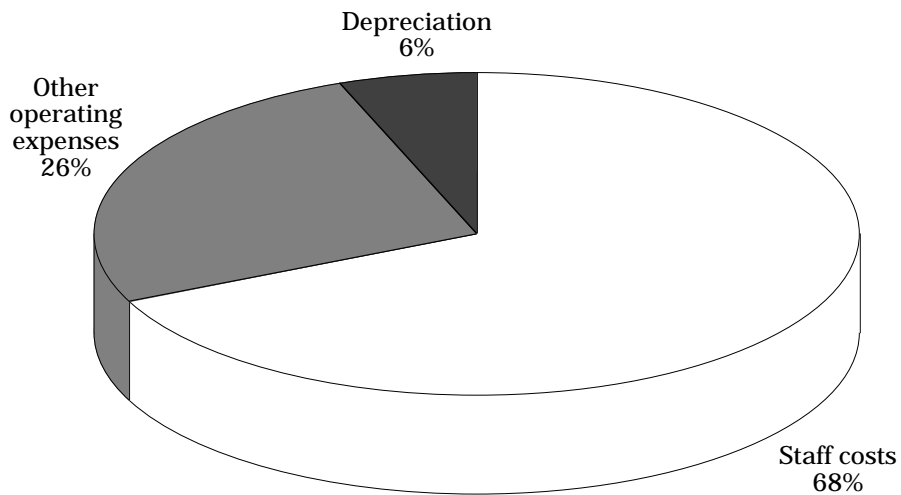
Varndean College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £3,223,000

Figure 6

Varndean College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £3,367,000

Note: this chart excludes £4,000 interest payable.

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