

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Orpington College

February 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 05/95

ORPINGTON COLLEGE

GREATER LONDON REGION

Inspected August – November 1994

Summary

Orpington College offers a good range of general education courses, including a popular one-year intensive GCE A level. There is a limited but growing range of vocational courses. Governors have a clear perception of their role and the management of the college is efficient. Informal communications between staff at all levels are good, but there is a need for more formal links to spread the best practice in course management, planning, and methods of teaching and learning. Procedures for the recruitment and guidance of students are effective, particularly in preparing them for entry to higher education. The college should ensure that the tutorial system is made to work effectively across the college. Standards of teaching are high and students achieve good examination results, although the quality of the GCE A level results in some subjects has recently declined. There is an established procedure for annual course review and evaluation, but the recently-developed quality assurance policy has yet to be fully implemented. There is a good range of books in the library. The planned maintenance and replacement of equipment has ensured that there are no major difficulties or deficiencies, except for computing equipment in some specialist areas. Available space is used effectively, but the accommodation is inadequate for the planned growth in the number of students, as the corporation recognises. Learning support for students requires further development. Shortages of staff have been identified and more teaching and support staff are being recruited to meet the demands of new courses and the growth in student numbers.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Sciences, computing	2	Art & design/graphic communications/theatre and media studies	3
Mathematics	2		
Business studies	2	English	2
		Other humanities	3
Health and social care	3		

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INTRODUCTION

1 Orpington College was inspected between August and November 1994. The inspection team of eight full-time and nine part-time inspectors spent a total of 57 days in the college. Provision for guidance, enrolment and induction was observed during the summer vacation period and at the beginning of the autumn term 1994. Inspectors observed some 2,000 students in 151 learning sessions and examined the limited sample of students' work available at this stage of the academic year. They met governors, teachers, support staff, students, employers, staff of the local authority careers service and officers of the South London Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). They attended college meetings and examined documentation, including the college's self-assessment report.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Orpington College was opened as a purpose-built further education college in the south-east of the London Borough of Bromley in September 1972. It occupies an eleven-storey building in the town centre.

3 Bromley is the largest of the London boroughs. It has a low unemployment rate of 9.2 per cent, compared with 16.2 for Greater London. Minority ethnic groups form 4.7 per cent of the population in Bromley, as compared with 20.2 per cent for London as a whole. Orpington College is one of the larger employers in the town of Bromley. Within the area covered by South London TEC, public administration and other services account for approximately 30 per cent of employment. (Note: the figures in this paragraph were obtained from the South London TEC's labour market assessment for 1992-93 and the London Research Centre).

4 The schools in the area include grammar, direct grant, independent, grant-maintained and comprehensive schools, and all of them have sixth forms. The college is one of two further education colleges within the borough, which were intended, under local authority planning, to offer complementary provision. There are two further education colleges close by in neighbouring boroughs. The local adult education service offers some vocational courses, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) courses, and basic education for adults.

5 Originally planned for about 700 full-time students, the college now serves the needs of 1,338 full-time and 723 part-time students. It recruits from the London Boroughs of Lewisham, Greenwich, Bexley and Croydon, as well as Bromley itself and the north-western parts of Kent. About 64 per cent of the students are female; some 95 per cent of full-time and about 14 per cent of part-time students are aged 16-18; about 12.5 per cent of full-time students are from minority ethnic groups. The college has grown by about 11 per cent over the past year, exceeding its enrolment target for 1994-95. 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.

6 During the academic year 1993-94, the college employed a full-time equivalent staff of 119, which comprised 77 full-time equivalent lecturing staff and 42 full-time equivalent support staff. A staff profile with staff expressed as full-time equivalents is shown in figure 4. Additional staff are currently being recruited in response to the growth in the number of students.

7 When it was under local authority control, the college's main function was to provide general education courses for the 16-19 year age group, including a one-year intensive course leading to the GCE A level. About 70 per cent of its full-time students are now studying on GCE A level, advanced supplementary (AS) and GCSE courses.

8 The college now has a growing range of vocational courses for full-time students, and for part-time day and evening students. The new principal's plans to extend the vocational provision further have been agreed by the corporation. New or developing markets have been identified which include international clients, adult returners, and the unemployed. Students will be offered a greater choice of place, mode, and times of attendance. Services offered to local industry and commerce are planned to increase.

9 The college's mission is being revised. Its current mission statement states that: 'Orpington College aims to meet an expanding range of education and training needs for people in the South East London/North Kent area, whilst striving to maintain and improve the efficiency and high quality of provision of further education for which it is well known'.

The college's aims as further defined in its mission statement are:

- to contribute to the economic and social prosperity of the area through the provision of a growing range of education and training opportunities
- to meet the education and training needs of individuals and their present/future employers
- to create a positive working environment in which all college members are valued and take pride in their/the college's achievements
- to monitor and strive continually to improve the quality of teaching and learning opportunities, and of student support services
- to promote equality of opportunity for all college members regardless of age, gender, ethnic membership, social or employment status
- to improve access and progression to higher education and future training
- to respect freedom of speech and the right to academic enquiry
- to demonstrate and promote an awareness of the importance of conserving and enhancing the environment.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

10 The college offers a choice of 24 GCE A level subjects, both as two-year, full-time courses and as one-year intensive courses. The one-year courses are designed primarily for those wishing to improve their GCE A level grades and for adult students. Currently more than 250 students are enrolled on them. About 64 per cent of all full-time students are enrolled on one or other type of GCE A level programme. Students also have the opportunity to take GCE AS subjects on the advice of their tutor. A wide range of part-time day and evening GCE A level courses is also offered.

11 In accordance with its strategic plan the college is reducing the number of places offered on GCSE courses and increasing its vocational provision. The college's present vocational courses, on which 30 per cent of the full-time students have enrolled this year, cover health and social care, business and computing. This year General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes have started in leisure and tourism, an area new to the college, as well as in health and social care and in business.

12 The college makes some provision for 'open learning' to meet the needs of students who cannot attend lectures: 22 students study at home with tutorial support from the college. Responsibility for maintaining contact with the tutor lies with the student. This was not working as well as it could, because too much was left to the initiative of students. Better arrangements are required to ensure systematic supervision and guidance.

13 The college has a computer centre which is well managed and well used. It offers a drop-in facility for students who wish to improve their computing skills or to work on their assignments, and is open to members of the public. Some 50 self-financing short courses in computing were mounted last year, but the college could do more to market such courses to employers.

14 All full-time students can take part in a programme of optional studies. This is limited mainly to sports activities, but also includes photography, and a small number of students are working towards the Duke of Edinburgh award. The facilities of the nearby leisure centre are available to students at preferential rates.

15 Before incorporation, the local authority provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at a nearby college and in local schools, and there are still few such students at Orpington College. Those few receive informal support related to individual need; there is no planned approach or college-wide co-ordination of the work in this area.

16 The college offers adult students a route to higher and vocational education through its programme of access courses validated by the London Open College Federation. The course in social, cultural and business studies offers students a wide choice of units. The access course in computer studies is popular, though numbers are limited by the equipment available. Some students enrol on the access courses with no

firm intention of progressing to higher education, although this is the stated aim of the course. At present, there is no planned provision for students who would benefit from some preparation for further study and for whom access courses are unsuitable.

17 The college maintains effective links with further and higher education institutions in the area. There is a strong link with the University of Greenwich; the college offers teacher training placements each year for students on the university's post-graduate certificate of education course for further education. Collaboration with staff at Bexley College and Carshalton College has resulted in the development of common vocational curriculum units in leisure and tourism and in nursery nursing. A number of teachers from Orpington College attend Croydon College to improve their qualifications through study towards the award of a certificate in education. Orpington College is also working with other colleges in the South London TEC area to develop a system of credit accumulations and transfer. This will enable students to gain training credits which will count towards a final award at any of the participating colleges.

18 The college has developed substantial European links over the past two years. It has collaborated closely with the seven other colleges in the local TEC's European network to develop students' work placement exchanges in Belgium, Italy and Spain. This project is being supported by European Community funding and will continue next year. Another link has been established with a group of colleges in northern Spain, and the colleges in the South London TEC area have developed common vocational curriculum units accredited both in England and in northern Spain. Discussions are taking place with further education colleges in Finland and next year the principal and the college's European co-ordinator will be taking part in a visit to Finland, funded by the TEC with a view to arranging exchange visits. During 1993-94, 11 students on a business administration course took part in an exchange with students from a college in Barcelona, funded by the European Community. Another 21 students of business and finance visited Paris for a week. Further exchanges and visits have been planned to take place during 1994-95 involving a greater number of staff and students.

19 The college has strong links with employers in the area who provide work experience placements for students on vocational courses. It has tried to broaden these links by setting up course management committees, with local employers as members but has met with limited success in areas other than computing.

20 The marketing budget has been increased substantially this year and the principal has prepared a marketing and development strategy which has been agreed by the corporation. A plan to promote the college and to improve links with local schools has been prepared. A member of staff has been given specific responsibility for liaison with schools. The college advertises through numerous outlets such as careers fairs, local newspapers and the Orpington College Newsletter which is sent to all

prospective students. The college prospectus and course literature all conform to the college's corporate image. Copies are sent to all local libraries.

21 The college's equal opportunities policy states that education is a right for all who can benefit from it. Although the policy document outlines briefly the ways in which equality issues will be addressed, there is no detail of how the policy is to be implemented in practice. The students' diary informs students of the policy, where they can obtain further information concerning equality of opportunity, and who is responsible for monitoring the policy.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

22 The corporation has 15 members including the principal. The chairman of the corporation and the principal have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. There are 10 independent members, one member nominated by South London TEC, two elected members of staff, one of whom is from the academic board, and one elected student member. The independent members hold senior positions, most in business and the professions, and their expertise has been of great value to the college. It is hoped that links with the community will be further strengthened by the recent appointment of a governor who is a director with a local housing association.

23 The corporation has four committees: finance, employment policy, audit, and remuneration. These are working efficiently. Working parties have been formed when necessary, for example to deal with incorporation. The corporation meets once a term. Members are kept well informed. They receive summaries of the annual course reviews, examination and assessment results, and enrolment figures. They also receive regular reports from the principal, the senior management team and the academic board. Governors consider these reports carefully and initiate action when necessary. The finance committee meets once a month and scrutinises carefully the detailed financial statements from the finance manager.

24 The senior management team comprises the principal, vice-principal, manager of student services, curriculum manager, premises manager and finance manager. It meets every two weeks, and minutes of its meetings are displayed on the staff notice board. Informal communication in this small, single site college is good.

25 Since his appointment in July 1994, the principal has met all college managers individually and has visited a number of the sections to find out about their work and to establish good communications. He has held two full staff meetings and, in response to requests from staff, plans to hold such meetings once a term. Two members of staff with cross-college roles have recently been invited by the principal to give a presentation on a particular aspect of their work to the senior management team.

26 Since 1991, the college has allocated responsibility for course

management to section leaders. There are currently 19 section leaders, reporting to the curriculum manager. They are responsible for the organisation and quality of courses, individual subjects or groups of related subjects. There are also seven course co-ordinators who have a pastoral and administrative role across subjects, for example, the co-ordination of the intensive GCE A level and GCSE programmes. A further four co-ordinators or managers carry responsibility for cross-college functions: computing and information technology, marketing, academic courses, and staff support. All support staff report to a designated senior manager.

27 Communication between section leaders and their colleagues within sections varies in frequency and formality. Some small sections have no more than one or two full-time members of staff. There are many part-time teachers and communication is not always effective. In some cases, matters of policy and planning are not addressed fully at this level, and decisions not properly recorded. Within some sections there is no clear allocation of tasks and responsibilities. Communication between sections is also unsystematic. Working groups are set up to address issues, such as the development of core skills, as they arise, but section leaders do not meet to discuss matters of common concern.

28 The strategic plan has been prepared by the senior managers, with some contribution from other staff, mainly through their discussions with the curriculum manager. Senior managers are aware of the national targets for education and training and have used these as a starting point for strategic planning. However, few of the college teachers had much knowledge of them. The new principal intends to institute a more formal planning process involving staff more widely, as well as the academic board, the corporation and the local TEC. At the section level, the approach to planning varies. Detailed plans have been prepared for business subjects, but few of the other sections have such well-developed plans.

29 The academic board has 17 members: nine are elected members of staff, one is a student and there are seven ex-officio members. Seven of the staff members are teachers, at least two of them from vocational areas. The other two are support staff. This is an active committee. It meets once a month and the minutes of its meetings are displayed on the staff notice board. Working groups drawing in more staff have been set up to address issues such as the development of the college charter and procedures for enrolment and guidance. Individual members of staff can make a contribution to the business of the academic board through an elected member of staff.

30 The college has had a low unit of resource. For 1994-95, the average level of funding is £15.08 per unit, compared with the median of £18.17 for general further education and tertiary colleges. The college's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Resources are effectively deployed and a range of efficiency indicators, such as student to staff ratio, room utilisation, cost per course

and attendance rates, are used to monitor efficiency. The college is planning to further develop its use of performance indicators such as those described in Council Circular 94/31.

31 Procedures for the allocation of funds to academic sections for books, stationery and equipment are well understood. Heads of section discuss their needs with the curriculum manager, and then make bids to the finance manager. The college's requirements for computing hardware and software are discussed in the strategy group for information technology chaired by the curriculum manager, and this group's recommendations have guided the allocation of funds in this area. There is no comparable strategic basis for fund allocation outside the area of information technology, but the procedures are accepted by staff.

32 Computerised systems are used for recording data on students and staff, financial records and examination results. Information technology is also used in compiling records of achievement and in the recently-introduced student registration system. The present use of information technology is being reviewed to enable the system designed for the college's own requirements to provide the data required by external bodies. All staff have access to the students' records using a computer terminal in the general office. They can also obtain information on request from the management information section.

33 Senior managers make good use of management information, but the use made by section leaders varies. There has recently been some training for tutors on the benefits of computerised systems to help staff to use the available data more effectively: for example, to monitor students' recruitment and employ this information in planning new courses.

34 An overall target of 8 per cent growth in enrolments was exceeded this year when numbers rose by about 11 per cent. Retention rates are monitored at course and subject level. With some courses there have been inter-related problems of poor attendance and poor retention. A new student registration system has been introduced to improve the monitoring of student attendance so that problems can be identified at an early stage and action taken quickly.

35 A destination survey is undertaken once a year following up a sample of students. This shows that the proportion of students progressing from their courses at the college to further and higher education in 1992-93 increased compared with the figure for 1991-92, while the numbers of students entering employment remained about the same.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

36 The college is well known in its locality as a strong and successful provider of courses, particularly GCE A level and GCSE. Students give the college's reputation as the main reason for choosing Orpington College, and a large number come on the recommendation of present or past students. Information about the college and its courses is disseminated

through a series of open days, advertisements in the local press, and attendance by members of staff at careers fairs. 'Taster' days are arranged to give potential students the opportunity to find out more about the college. An evaluation of the 1994 'taster' day revealed that students found the experience helpful in confirming their decision to study at Orpington College.

37 People who telephone or visit the college to request information are able to speak to a subject or course specialist. Students whose needs cannot be met by the college are given objective advice on other possible providers. Advice shops, advertised in the local press, are available after the publication of the GCSE and the GCE A level results. College managers and staff from the local authority careers service are available at the college to offer advice and guidance on courses of study. Literature available at these events comprises a college prospectus, details of other colleges and schools which might offer courses and combinations not available at Orpington College, a book of notes for part-time or full-time students, and leaflets describing individual courses. Together, these provide adequate information for students to aid them in their choice of course.

38 Applicants for full-time courses are interviewed by subject or course specialists. Interviews are conducted according to the college's guidelines. Interviewers and students are provided with a handbook containing details of all GCE A level and GCSE courses. The guidance given is generally good, and well geared to career aspirations and subject combinations. The college plans to improve it further. Staff will meet students with similar interests in groups of about 20 to give them general information about the college, the courses offered and the progression routes before individual interviews with subject specialists are arranged.

39 The enrolment procedures are well organised. Second-year students and other returners enrol at the end of the previous session. Specialist staff are on hand to offer advice to intending full-time and part-time students. General guidance on courses and careers is available for those who need it.

40 The induction programme is brief and used mainly for administrative matters and to give information. It also gives tutors the opportunity to check the suitability of students' course and subject choices. A handbook-cum-diary gives students general information and advice about the college and the services it offers. It tells the student where to find copies of college documents such as the charter, how to make a complaint, and about the equal opportunities policy. Students are able to change course during the first half of the autumn term. The procedure is designed to ensure that wide consultation takes place on the advisability of the change before it is agreed.

41 The tutorial system is the responsibility of the manager of student services. Personal tutors are central to the support of full-time students during their time at the college. Most full-time and some part-time teachers

are tutors and have a clearly-defined job description. Their tutoring skills are developed through annual staff training and new tutors are taken through an induction programme.

42 The GCE A level tutor groups are made up of a mixture of students from year one, year two and the intensive course. The preferred arrangement is to assign each student a tutor who is one of his/her subject teachers. Both staff and students believe that this works best. In the few cases where it is not possible, students receive less effective support.

43 A member of staff has recently been given the responsibility for advising part-time students on higher education applications and the brief will be extended to more general support for these students. At present, part-time students on courses other than the access programme and the diploma in play group practice receive only informal tutorial support from their subject teachers.

44 There is a full tutorial programme supported by a bank of materials for tutors' use. However, most tutors devote the allocated weekly hour to individual interviews, and many students do not receive as rich a tutorial experience as they might. Students are encouraged to contact their tutor at other times if they need to, and tutors' timetables allow another hour per week for this purpose. Good advice and guidance are given on higher education applications, and a small careers room next to the library holds relevant materials such as university prospectuses and computerised databases which give information about different careers and the training and education they require. Students' opinions of the support and guidance they have received are invited in the annual evaluation of the admissions, enrolment and induction procedures. In 1993-94, 60 per cent of the students responding said that the help they received from the college in choosing a course was satisfactory or good.

45 The college has identified poor attendance as a problem, and procedures for monitoring and following up absence and lateness have been changed this year in the hope of improving attendance, timekeeping and retention rates. However, staff are not all applying the guidelines in the same way, and some tolerate lateness at lessons more than others. Course co-ordinators have the job of supporting the tutors in disciplinary matters, and serious cases are dealt with directly by the manager of student services. Students are aware of the disciplinary procedures and the sanctions for persistent problems such as non-attendance. Despite this, only 60 per cent of GCSE students were recorded as attending regularly during 1993-94. Students are made aware of the college's rules and regulations, but the college should consider whether the student agreement signed by all students at the start of their course should stress more strongly the need for punctuality and regular attendance.

46 Tutors help students to formulate and update regularly their individual action plans, and to keep records of their achievements. Many students are, in fact, apathetic or negative about records of achievement.

This may in some cases reflect attitudes in their schools, but a number of the GCE A level and GCSE tutors are themselves unenthusiastic about maintaining the records, and this may influence students. Students on vocational courses are far more positive about records of achievement. A review system is designed to allow students to discuss their progress with subject teachers before a written report is sent to their homes. In practice, there is no time set aside for students to do this systematically with staff other than their personal tutors.

47 Much careers advice is given by tutors and subject teachers. The Bromley Careers Service provides excellent support, with careers officers attending all open events, advice sessions, enrolment days and parents' evenings. Students can book interviews, which are conducted on the college premises, at the college reception desk. Students are kept informed and periodically reminded of this facility, but it is left to their own initiative to make contact with the service.

48 Funding allocated to the local authority by the Employment Department for the technical and vocational education initiative has helped the college to establish a valuable counselling and support service for students. This is run by a qualified counsellor and students can attend by appointment or drop in at lunch time any weekday. Over a period of two terms, about 100 students have made use of the service. It offers confidential help, and referral to appropriate sources of advice, on a wide range of matters. Advice on financial and other problems is also available from a student liaison officer, who works closely with the students' union. He also helps to arrange social events and trips. The students' union is successful in raising money, mainly from the pool table, video games and jukeboxes. The money is used for a wide variety of purposes, such as funding the annual arts festival held at the college, subsidising the costs of field trips, helping with the travel costs of students in need, and purchasing seating for the students' common room.

49 There are few students with identified learning difficulties attending the college. Students are asked at interview to identify any health problems, and staff handle each case individually, giving the necessary support to enable them to attain their learning goals. For example, a student needing regular medical treatment has been loaned a computer, and open learning modules have been designed to enable him to follow his Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) course over three years instead of two. Such cases are mostly dealt with by the course co-ordinators. There is no member of staff with overall responsibility for such students.

50 Teachers are flexible about allowing students to attend extra lessons with another group if they need help with a particular part of their course. An English and mathematics workshop provides support for students referred by their tutor or seeking help of their own accord. At present, there are no formal systems for reporting progress in this workshop to the

students themselves or to their tutors. The English support is mostly targeted at academically-able students who need help with spelling or grammar. At present, opening hours are limited, and students cannot use the materials without the help of a tutor. A grant of £14,000 from the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit will be used to improve the service provided by the workshop in a number of ways, including the extension of its opening hours, and to assess its contribution to the development of core skills.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

51 The inspection of teaching and learning took place mainly during the first full week of the academic year. During the previous week, new students had been introduced to the college and teaching had started for some groups. Inspectors observed the first meetings between the students and the teachers in a number of subjects. In most classes good relationships between staff and students were established quickly; students were given the opportunity to get to know their peers; and there was already a good atmosphere conducive to learning.

52 Overall, the strengths of the teaching and learning outweighed the weaknesses. Of the 151 sessions inspected, 58 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses and 30 per cent had strengths balanced by weaknesses. In 12 per cent of the sessions, the weaknesses outweighed the strengths. The following table shows the grades awarded.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		9	38	27	12	0	86
GCSE		0	9	10	0	0	19
GNVQ		1	3	3	5	0	12
NVQ		3	4	0	0	0	7
Other		4	16	5	2	0	27
Total		17	70	45	19	0	151

53 Most courses are well planned and have schemes of work which ensure the syllabus is covered. In the best practice, detailed and methodical schemes of work specified the teaching methods to be adopted and the activities, such as educational visits, which had been arranged. Schemes of work and syllabuses were in many cases shared with students. The best lessons had clear aims and objectives. Plans for them indicated not only teaching and learning activities but also what prior knowledge was expected of students, how progress would be assessed, and what resources were to be used.

54 There were detailed schemes of work in business subjects. The organisation of the teaching and learning was imaginative and the

vocational courses were well structured and up to date. An appropriate balance of emphasis between developing knowledge and developing skills was evident in NVQ and GNVQ business programmes. The good teamwork in computing was reflected in the course planning. In several subjects there was planning for visits and field work: students in government and politics will attend a conference; art students will visit Paris; and geography students will join a residential course which is held annually in Wales.

55 A suitable variety of teaching and learning strategies was seen in many subjects and courses. These included introductory activities, practical exercises, group work, pair work and whole class teaching. Some teachers regularly assessed their students' abilities, knowledge and understanding through exercises, such as producing text using a wordprocessing package, and through careful questioning. Most teachers were enthusiastic and had a good knowledge of their subject and much of the work challenged and extended students. Some of the best sessions made good use of visual aids. In many lessons students took an active role by asking questions, raising their own issues or engaging in discussion with each other and the teacher.

56 In most subjects, the teaching was effective. In business studies, mathematics and English the activities undertaken by students engaged and sustained their interest. There was a good balance between theoretical and practical work in science. In computing, early 'hands-on' experience for students formed an integral part of course induction and diagnostic assessment. In economics, theory was well illustrated by practical examples. In government and politics, and history and geography, good use was made of questions and of the responses from individual students. A strong vocational emphasis was evident in the well-established BTEC national diploma nursery nursing courses, and this was supported by good organisation and effective monitoring of students' work experience placements.

57 In about 20 per cent of the sessions inspected, the range of teaching strategies was too limited or the teaching methods inappropriate. In psychology and sociology, some of the lectures were effective; others were less so. There was limited use of teaching aids in some classes, including law, theatre studies and media studies, where these would have assisted learning. In some modern language classes, students used the language being studied effectively; in others, the teacher took too dominant a role and there was insufficient opportunity for students to practise their speaking skills. The effectiveness of a number of classes was hampered by the poor quality of photocopied teaching materials.

58 In computing, geography, history, government and politics, art, and art history, teaching was well structured to take into account the differing levels of ability, knowledge and experience of the students, but this was not general across the college. Most students make adequate progress, but the more able are not always stretched and the less able or the poorly motivated are not always effectively supported.

59 Practical work is included in courses where appropriate. At this early stage of the term, new students were being briefed about procedures and introduced to new techniques and equipment. Computing students were using a learning package to get to know how to use the software. Students on the second year of a chemistry course were investigating the rates of chemical reactions.

60 In all courses, assignments suited to the aims of the course, and pitched at the right level, were set and marked regularly. In their marking of work many teachers made constructive and helpful written comments. There is an effective system for ensuring that students are reaching the required standard in GCE A level work. Every 10 weeks assessment tests are set for all students on the two-year course. The results keep the college and students themselves informed of their progress.

61 The quality of teaching and learning was variable, even within specific areas of work shared by two or three teachers. The planning and delivery of lessons should be improved by the identification and dissemination of good practice across the college and through better communication, particularly between full-time and part-time staff, and between teachers who teach the same groups.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

62 Most students at the college appear enthusiastic about their studies. On GCE A level courses especially, many display a sound knowledge and understanding of their subjects.

63 In a few sessions, students were being encouraged to work effectively in groups. In business studies courses, they were enthusiastically engaged in a variety of group assignments. Work in pairs was being well used to develop in students the confidence to contribute later to full group discussion. In computing, students were working in groups to prepare a presentation on the strengths of their team work as computer consultants. In GCSE English, teachers pay particular attention to the development of students' ability to join in discussion and debate.

64 Some courses made explicit provision for the development of study skills. In humanities, some students were using an excellent study skills guide, which could with advantage be used more widely in the college. Given the different levels of ability in some groups, the need for learning support is at present not effectively diagnosed, so the required help is not being provided.

65 Staff and students generally are not exploiting information technology sufficiently, either as an aid to teaching and learning, or for wordprocessing. There is little evidence of the development of information technology as a core skill, except where it is a requirement of the course. Students on computing courses and some students of GCE A level mathematics use the open computing centre. In GCE A level art and design, business subjects and sciences, opportunities are missed to develop students' skills in information technology.

66 Students' work in computing, economics, art, mathematics and English was of a high standard. In GCE A level art, students produced competent and imaginative work using a wide variety of media. The quality of the students' written work in the humanities and the sciences was appropriate for the level of their courses.

67 In 1994, the examination pass rates at GCE A level were generally higher than those achieved nationally. In English, government and politics, art and sociology over 90 per cent of candidates passed with grades A-E. Only in law, accounting and theatre studies were results poor. Overall, 73 per cent of students sitting GCE A levels passed with grades A-E. In 1993, 77 per cent of students achieved a pass grade compared with a national average of 66 per cent for all general further education and tertiary colleges. Although the GCE A level pass rates compare favourably with national figures, the success rate in a number of subjects was lower in 1994 than for the previous two years.

68 In 1994, the 398 students at Orpington aged 16-18 taking two or more GCE A/AS level subjects obtained an average point score of 9.5 (where A=10 points and E=2 points), compared with 10.6 in 1993. The points score for the other six further education and tertiary colleges in the London Outer South area ranged from 6.9 to 13.7, and for the three sixth form colleges from 10.7 to 14.1. The 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education also show that the average per subject entry, for all AS/A level entrants from Orpington College, was 3.6. This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure.

69 The results for the one-year GCE A level course, where many of the students are having a second attempt at the examination to improve their grades, are often better than for the equivalent two-year courses. In 1994, pass rates in the one-year course in biology, physics, geography, French and English were between 9 and 15 per cent higher than for two-year courses in the same subjects. Particularly good results were achieved in English where 62 per cent of those on the one-year course gained grades A-C and 27 per cent achieved a grade A.

70 Over recent years the proportion of students gaining grades A-C at GCE A level has on average been just above 40 per cent, which is about the same as the national average for all colleges in the further education sector.

71 Since 1990, the college has been conducting its own exercise to relate students' results at GCE A level to their GCSE qualifications on entry to the college. The exercise has shown that GCSE grades are not a reliable predictor of A level results: other factors clearly influence the outcome. The college now participates in the Advanced Level Information System. The findings from this are that the two-year A level students achieve very slightly more than would be expected from their GCSE results.

72 Last year, the college's entry requirement for GCSE courses was four

GCSEs at grade E or above. This was waived in special cases, for example if a student had missed lessons because of illness. Students on the GCSE courses are retaking some subjects. The results for the past three years have been better than national figures for all students. In successive years from 1992 to 1994 the percentage of those sitting for the examination who passed with grades A-C was 65.5, 62.4 and 61 per cent. Though once again the trend shows some decline, these figures are considerably higher than the national figure of 39 per cent for students aged 16-18 years in general further education and tertiary colleges, and the figure of about 50 per cent for all schools and colleges.

73 In 1994, good results were achieved by students on vocational courses in computing, business studies and caring. Of those completing BTEC national diplomas, the full award was gained by 87 per cent in nursery nursing, 76 per cent in business and finance, and 94 per cent in computer studies. The Department for Education's 1994 performance tables indicate that of the 31 candidates at the college aged 16-18 who entered for BTEC national diplomas, 27 gained the full award. This success rate of 87 per cent places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector. Fifty-nine per cent of the 104 students enrolled on the final year of part-time access courses in 1993-94 gained a certificate. The figure for the access to computing course was 76 per cent.

74 The college's annual destination survey is based on replies from about 700 students. In 1992-93, just under half the students completing their course at the college progressed to higher education. This is higher than the equivalent figure for 1991-92. About 25 per cent went on into other non-advanced further education and about 20 per cent into employment. The rate of progression from access courses to higher education is not high: 51 per cent of those enrolled on the social, cultural and business course, and 35 per cent of those enrolled on the computing course went on to higher education.

75 The retention rates for courses are variable. Last year about 80 per cent of the one-year GCE A level and GCSE and 75 per cent of the access students completed their courses. Overall, 86 per cent of students completed vocational courses, but the rate for individual courses ranged from approximately 50 per cent to 100 per cent. Ninety-two per cent of students in the second year of the two-year GCE A level course completed the course. However, the college is right to be concerned about the number of first-year students who do not progress into the second year. Of the 312 students who were still enrolled on the first year GCE A level course in November 1993, 248 entered the second year in September 1994; a drop-out rate of 21 per cent.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

76 The vice-principal has overall responsibility for quality assurance. Systems for monitoring and reviewing the quality of courses have been in place for a number of years. The college has recently introduced a quality

assurance policy covering all curriculum and service activities. The policy commits the college to the systematic monitoring, review and improvement of courses and services, taking into account the views of students, staff and employers.

77 The policy is backed by detailed procedures for its implementation, with the emphasis on the curriculum. Standards are set and responsibilities allocated to individual senior managers for the recruitment, guidance and support of students, courses and programmes of study, quality assurance documentation, course evaluation procedures, staff and resources. However, implementation of the policy and procedures is at an early stage.

78 There is little detailed reference in the policy to quality control in such functional areas as finance or human resource management. Managers in these areas rely on frequent informal discussions about aspects of quality. Although evaluation of the performance of senior managers and academic board members by a peer review process has been identified as central to quality assurance and the achievement of the college's mission, it has not yet been put into operation.

79 The curriculum manager is responsible for quality control within the curriculum. There is a systematic course review and evaluation procedure, with a checklist for staff to follow. It includes a consideration of performance indicators such as examination and assessment results and retention rates. Each course and subject is reviewed in the course of a full or half-day conference, and an annual report and action plan are produced. Good examples of course evaluations were seen where the work of the conferences led to clear action plans. In mathematics, a thorough and detailed analysis of examination results had been undertaken for some years. In computing, the course reviews took account of the views of course moderators, employers and students. In most areas, however, course evaluations were not sufficiently analytical and did not provide clear agenda for action.

80 The course review reports are summarised by the curriculum manager, whose summary is considered by the senior management team and the academic board before being presented to the governing body. The summary report seen lacked consistency in the treatment of different areas of work, which may reflect variations in the approaches of different sections to the task. The summary would be improved if it included performance indicators and detailed action plans with named individuals responsible for taking matters forward within a clearly-defined timescale.

81 Issues relating to quality are discussed regularly by the senior management team, the academic board and the governing body and action is taken as a result. For example, the entry requirements for GCE A level have been raised from four to five GCSEs at grades A-C in response to the decline in examination pass rates.

82 An internal quality assessment report was prepared for the inspection

and provided a useful summary of the college's own perceptions of its strengths and weaknesses. Those identified by the inspection team were broadly similar to those contained in the college's document, but some specific weaknesses such as the uneven working of the tutorial system were not picked up by the college. There was little reference in the college's report to the evidence which supports the judgements.

83 The college charter was completed in July and was circulated to staff at the beginning of September. At the time of the inspection, it had yet to be distributed to the students and had not been widely publicised in the college. It includes explicit statements of intent which are clear and understandable, but standards are mainly expressed in qualitative terms; the only quantified target is a response to complaints within 10 days. Charter objectives include responding to inspection reports, and improving the handling of enquiries from employers and the local community. Procedures for measuring and monitoring the college's performance against the charter standards have yet to be developed.

84 Students were unaware of the charter but felt that they were provided with opportunities to make their views known about college services. Although students are not represented on most course teams, they have contributed to course evaluation in some areas. Feedback is obtained from the students through the course tutorial system. A survey of students' perceptions of the college and their courses takes place three times a year, but the use made of these surveys varies.

85 The vice-principal is responsible for personnel matters including staff development. The staff-development policy is sound and there is a clear staff-development plan. The college has begun the process which it intends will lead to gaining the Investors in People award. However, it has not been active in pursuing this since last November due to the pressure of other personnel commitments.

86 The budget allocation for staff development is £35,000, less than 1 per cent of the total budget, but other funds or resources significantly support this work. Apart from income from the technical and vocational education initiative, teaching hours are reduced for those taking part in training activities, particularly in-service teacher training and some training in the use of management information systems is also funded from a separate budget. Priorities for staff development 1994-95 are in areas concerned with NVQs/GNVQs, incorporation, information technology, student services including records of achievement, curriculum themes such as Europe, and quality control systems. There is no explicit strategy to guide the allocation of the staff-development budget to different priority areas or to direct future planning, largely because the financial allocation is thought to be generous and sufficient to meet all present requirements.

87 There has been substantial staff development. During the 16-month period since incorporation, a total of 71 full-time and associate teachers,

44 sessional teachers and 26 support staff benefited from staff development activities which have used 678 teacher days. Recent activities include a range of training courses on: information technology, curriculum development in the area of GNVQs and NVQs, course evaluation procedures and tutoring. Staff have attended a number of certificated courses. During 1993-94, 12 staff were trained to become NVQ or GNVQ assessors. Staff who are not teacher trained are expected to take and pass the certificate in education. There have been no secondments for the purpose of gaining commercial or industrial experience in the last two years because teachers do not feel able to ask colleagues to take on their teaching and other professional commitments during their absence.

88 All staff complete an evaluation form after any staff-development activity. The vice-principal takes account of the responses and the assessments influence future approval to attend events.

89 There is an appraisal scheme for full-time teaching staff which includes observation of their teaching, and offers the opportunity to identify needs for training and development. All staff are introduced to the appraisal scheme during their induction and are trained in appraisal procedures prior to their appraisal. Teachers generally value the process. The scheme is being extended to support staff and at present about one-third of them have been appraised.

90 New full-time teaching staff undergo an induction programme. Part-time staff are inducted by section leaders and the process is checked by the vice-principal or the curriculum manager. Part-time staff are paid to attend team meetings and are encouraged to participate in staff-development activities.

RESOURCES

Staffing

91 Teaching staff are well qualified in their specialist subject areas and are effectively deployed. They are highly committed and provide strong and caring support for students. They are assisted in their task by competent and qualified technical, administrative and clerical staff. In some subjects, especially those new to the college, additional teaching expertise is needed to support further curriculum development and growth. There are insufficient non-teaching staff to support the curriculum on some current courses including theatre studies, computing and media studies.

92 Personnel policies and procedures are well developed. There is an effective system for allocating the budget for part-time staff, to match staff resources to course requirements. It is a policy that for the college overall, and for each section, not more than 25 per cent of teaching hours should be provided by part-time staff. The staffing is regularly reviewed to check that this figure is not exceeded, although it is not always possible for

adjustments to be made immediately. The college should ensure that the management and co-ordination of the relatively large number of part-time staff is effective across all sections.

Equipment/learning resources

93 Equipment and learning resources are generally adequate and there is a good range and standard of specialist equipment in theatre studies, media studies, social science, science, computing and business studies. A well-managed system of planned maintenance is operated with repairs and refurbishment carried out by support staff. Some equipment is dated but nevertheless functional.

94 The quantity and range of books and journals are good. The library has a bookstock of 35,000 volumes. Its funding for the period April 1993 to July 1994 was £22,450. A sum of £2,500 was allocated to purchase compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database equipment, with 20 disks including careers information, data from the 1991 census, an encyclopedia, a world atlas and the illustrated works of Shakespeare. Approximately 20 per cent of the non-equipment budget is allocated to journals. Audio-visual and information technology facilities in the library are inadequate for the numbers of students and are heavily used.

95 The librarian is a member of the academic board. She liaises with section heads and involves them in the regular and systematic review of the bookstock. Students are encouraged to provide comments on the quality of the library provision. The library staff have produced a video which gives an introduction to the library and its facilities. There are heavy demands on the library, and the main constraint on its ability to meet them is insufficient space. A card index system is used for loans, stock control and accession but there is no computerised system. The manual stock accession records were last audited two years ago. A security system is in operation and is effective in minimising losses.

96 The well-equipped open computer centre is readily accessible every day from 09.00 to 16.30 and on Monday evenings from 19.00 to 21.00. A member of staff is present at these times to provide advice and help. Use of the centre is free to all full-time students; other students are charged a small hourly rate. Last year 4,000 users were recorded. The centre is sometimes oversubscribed.

97 There is a sound information technology policy which includes the upgrading of computing equipment from a low base of outdated hardware and software. There are both the latest 486 DX and the previous generation 386 machines. Some of these are networked. The ratio of work stations to full-time equivalent students is satisfactory at approximately 1:10. Most machines are located in the four computer rooms and the open computer centre. There are others in business studies classes but few in the accommodation for art and design, mathematics and science. There is a limited range of microprocessor controlled devices and computerised equipment.

Accommodation

98 The college is situated on a single site within the busy town centre of Orpington. The main building is an eleven-storey tower block with a linked single-storey building used for non-teaching purposes. The recently refurbished Lychgate building provides six classrooms and a staff room. The two buildings together provide 6,476 square metres of floor space. The site covers 1.98 acres. The land surrounding the buildings is generally open with a large car parking area. On weekdays this is used by the college and at the weekend as a public 'pay and display' car park run by Bromley Council.

99 The classrooms and specialist teaching accommodation are generally adequate, but the space is limited for the number of students using it. A specialist classroom at the Poverest Centre, about three miles from the college, is rented from the adult education service. It provides accommodation and resources for groups of students studying for the BTEC national diploma in nursery nursing.

100 The corporation has recognised that the limited capacity of the existing buildings may conflict with the growth targets in the college's strategic plan. As part of the college's accommodation strategy, a report has been prepared by specialist consultants working with the college management. The report gives costings for five options. The option supported by the corporation involves the redevelopment of the main entrance to the college and the construction of a three-storey building next to the existing structure. This will provide an improved reception area and two floors giving eight classrooms sufficient for 160 students. A separate report on the main building was commissioned in January 1994 to investigate problems with crumbling concrete and unsafe windows. The cost of the essential works was estimated to be £680,000.

101 In anticipation of incorporation, the college appointed a premises manager who has established an effective programme of planned maintenance and refurbishment. Classrooms are light and well ventilated. The accommodation is well decorated and in good condition. Students respond co-operatively in maintaining the quality of their environment. There was little evidence of litter except in the outer approach used by smokers. There was little educational display in the college, except in areas used by business studies, English and modern languages.

102 Teaching space is effectively used but there are only limited facilities for students to work outside timetabled hours. The library is heavily used for private study throughout the college day and cannot meet all demands at break times and during the lunch period. It is also available for private study during the vacation. The refectory is used as a study area, but it becomes noisy at times because it is close to the highly popular student common room. Staffroom accommodation is also limited.

103 Most parts of the college are accessible to students with disabilities, including those using wheelchairs. Detailed procedures are in place for

evacuating the buildings in an emergency.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

104 Incorporation has offered Orpington College the opportunity to develop. This is reflected in its mission and the college is making progress in achieving its aims. Its particular strengths are:

- a good range of general education courses, which includes the intensive one-year, full-time GCE A level course
- strong European links
- efficient governance and management and good informal communication between staff at all levels
- effective procedures for the recruitment and guidance of students and good support for applicants to higher education
- good standards of teaching in most areas
- high levels of achievement in many GCE A level examinations and on most vocational courses
- established procedures for systematic course review and evaluation
- a sound staff-development policy and plan
- well-qualified teachers and technicians, and highly-motivated administrative and secretarial staff
- a good range of books and journals in the library
- the planned maintenance and replacement procedures for equipment
- the planned refurbishment and maintenance of the accommodation, and a strategy to cope with space limitations.

105 The college should address the following issues:

- the narrow range of vocational courses
- the development of better provision for study skills, core skills and learning support
- the lack of a forum for formal communication between sections, which inhibits the sharing of good practice
- the variable effectiveness of the management of the sections
- the variable delivery of the tutorial programme
- the uneven application by tutors of procedures to monitor absence and punctuality
- the development of a broader range of teaching and learning methods in some subject areas
- the decline in the examination success rates in a number of subjects offered at GCE A level over the last three years

-
- the absence of a college-wide approach to the implementation of quality assurance
 - the insufficiency of technical support in media studies, computing and theatre studies
 - the insufficiency of computers for use in some specialist areas
 - the inadequacy of accommodation to meet the planned growth targets
 - the insufficiency of study space for students.

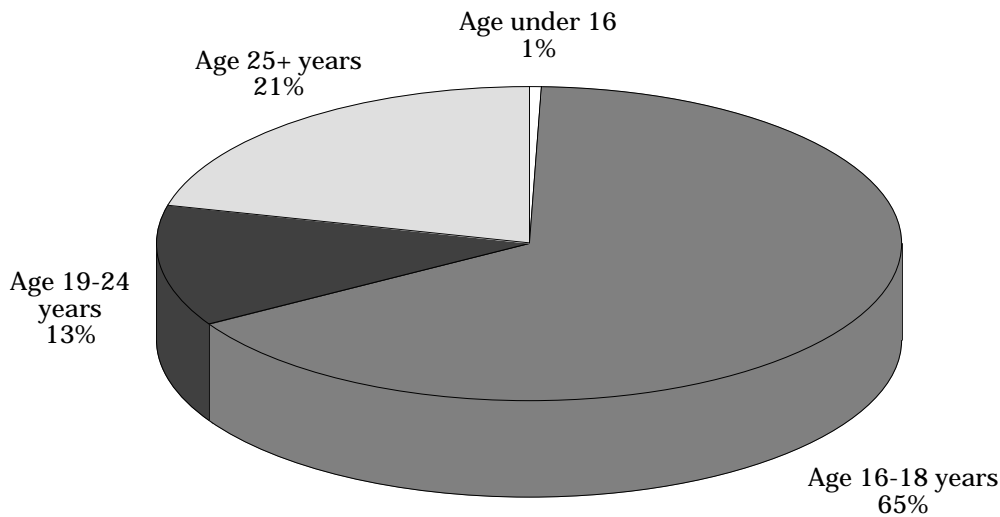
FIGURES

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| 1 | Percentage enrolments by age (1993-94) |
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Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

Figure 1

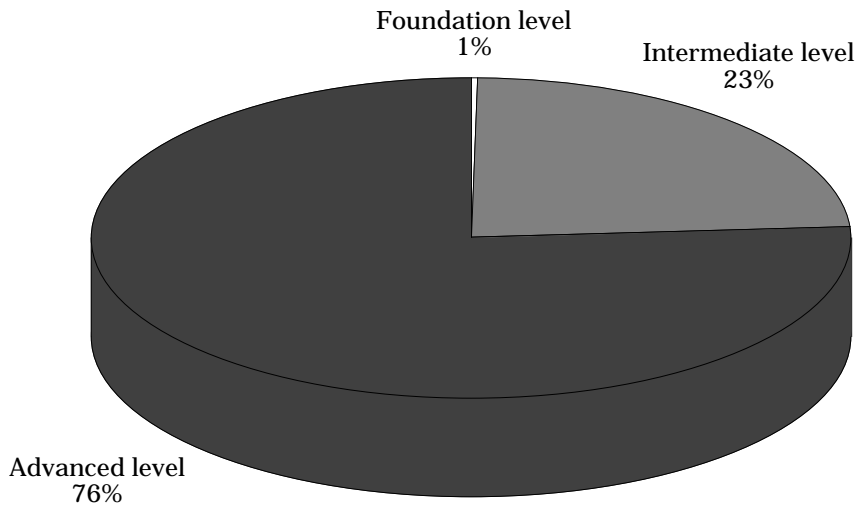
Orpington College: percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)



Enrolments: 2,061

Figure 2

Orpington College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)



Enrolments: 2,061

Figure 3

Orpington College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)

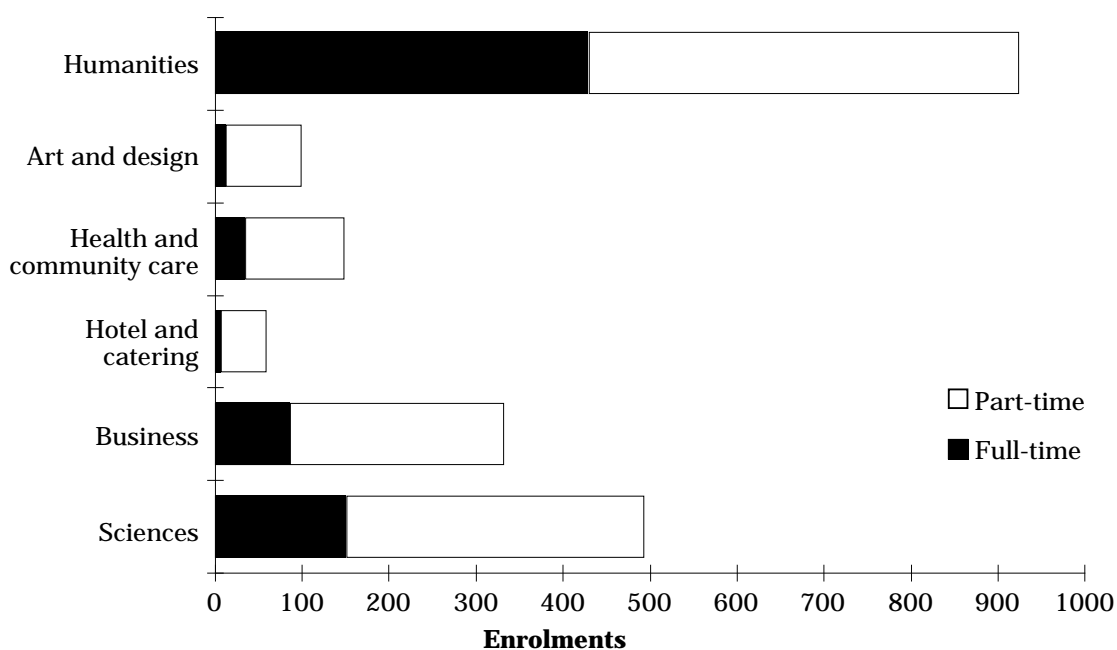


Figure 4

Orpington College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)

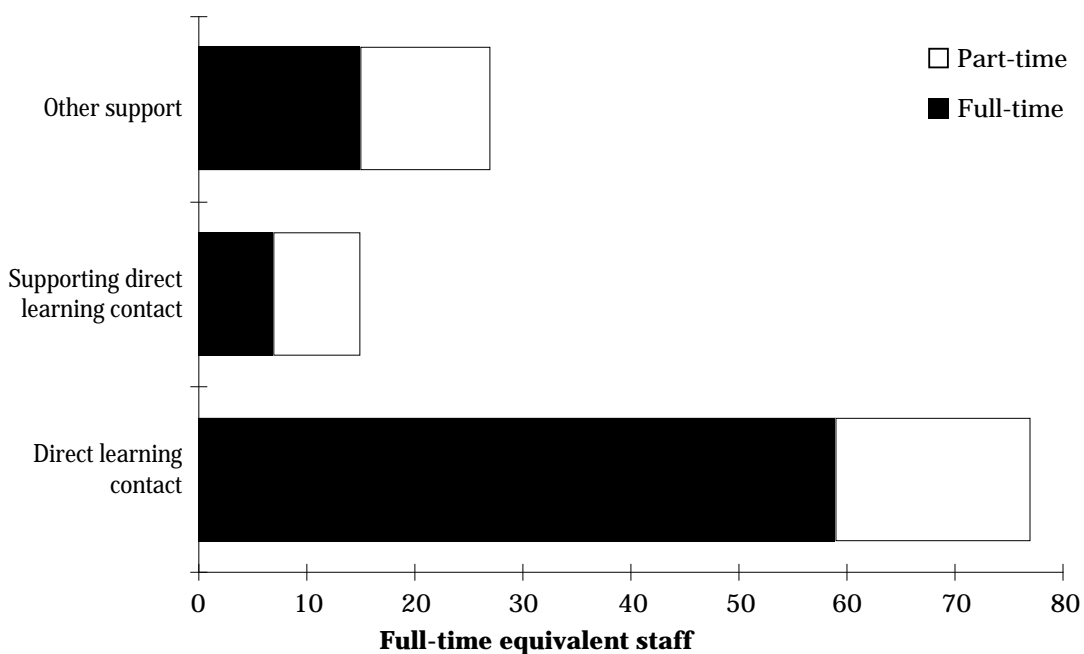
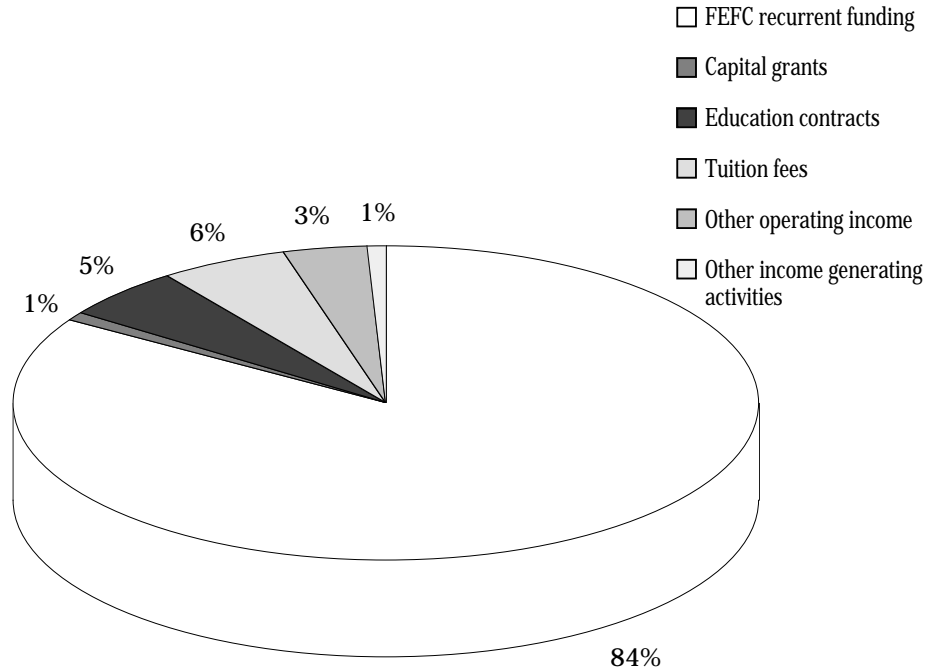


Figure 5

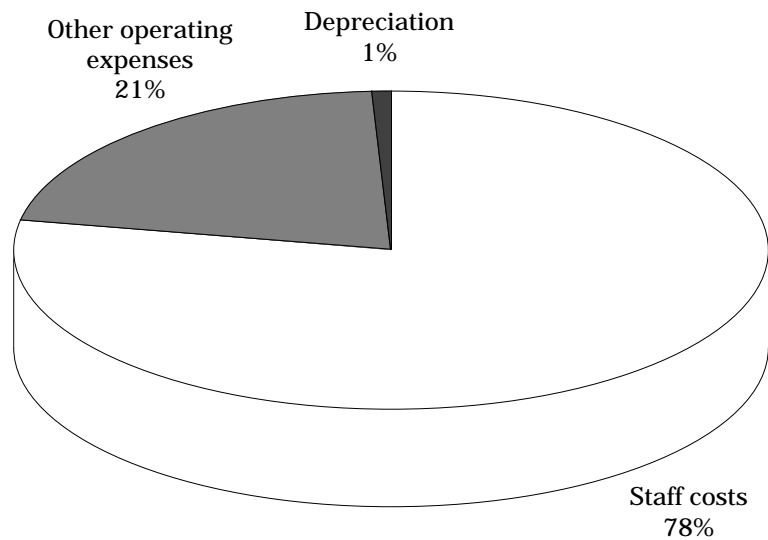
Orpington College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £4,222,000

Figure 6

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



Expenditure: £4,009,000

