

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Portsmouth College

January 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

By June 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

| Activity | Inspection grades | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Programme area | 9% | 59% | 29% | 3% | <1% |
| Cross-college provision | 14% | 50% | 31% | 5% | <1% |
| Overall | 12% | 54% | 30% | 4% | <1% |

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 06/97

PORTSMOUTH COLLEGE

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected June-October 1996

Summary

Portsmouth College, a sixth form college in south east Hampshire, is strongly committed to meeting the needs of the local community. It offers a wide range of courses for full-time and part-time students, including work at first degree level. It has significantly increased its provision for adults. The college has close relationships with local schools and is involved in several community ventures. Arrangements for the recruitment and induction of students are effective. Examinations results in some subjects are good. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. There is a well-planned staff-development programme. Information technology equipment available to students is of a high standard. The college should address the following issues: the limited provision of foundation level courses and access to further education courses for full-time students; a management information system which does not provide comprehensive data promptly; insufficiently precise development and operational plans for the college to realise all its objectives or to enable it to monitor progress towards meeting them; the absence of systematic identification of students' learning needs when they begin their courses; significant fluctuations in examination results, year by year. In addition, the college should improve: the rigour and cohesiveness of its quality assurance system; and students' attendance and retention rates.

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

| Aspects of cross-college provision | Grade |
|---|--------------|
| Responsiveness and range of provision | 2 |
| Governance and management | 3 |
| Students' recruitment, guidance and support | 2 |
| Quality assurance | 4 |
| Resources: staffing | 2 |
| equipment/learning resources | 2 |
| accommodation | 2 |

| Curriculum area | Grade | Curriculum area | Grade |
|------------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Science and computing | 2 | Art and design | 2 |
| Mathematics | 2 | Humanities | 3 |
| Business | 2 | English | 2 |
| Health and care | 3 | Social studies | 3 |

INTRODUCTION

1 Portsmouth College in Hampshire was inspected between June and October 1996. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected on two separate days, in June and in August 1996, respectively. Specialist subject areas were inspected over 27 inspector days in September 1996. Nine inspectors visited 108 classes. They scrutinised students' work, examination results and students' retention rates. In October 1996, seven inspectors spent 21 inspector days assessing aspects of cross-college provision. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, senior managers, heads of division, staff with cross-college responsibilities, teachers, support and administrative staff, and students. Inspectors talked with a group of employers, a representative from the Hampshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), community representatives, and parents of students attending the college. They examined policy statements, documents describing internal systems and controls, and minutes of meetings.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Portsmouth College is situated on Portsea Island in south east Hampshire. It was founded as a sixth form college in 1984 when secondary education in Portsmouth was reorganised. The college recruits most of its students from Portsea Island. It offers foundation courses at a Salvation Army centre in Portsmouth in collaboration with other agencies, and franchises short courses at the Hampshire Outdoor Centre and a range of evening classes for adults at the City of Portsmouth Girls' School.

3 The inspection took place very early in the college year when the enrolment of students was still taking place. The college could not, therefore, provide full details of enrolments. The provisional number of students enrolled at the time of inspection was 2,910, of whom 852 were full time. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The number of students attending the college has nearly doubled since 1988.

4 There are eight maintained secondary schools in Portsmouth, only one of which has a sixth form. There are also four independent schools, three of which have sixth forms. In 1995, the proportion of 16 year olds in Hampshire who continued in full-time education was 72 per cent. In 1995, the number of students in Hampshire maintained schools who obtained grades A, B or C in GCSE examinations was above the national average of 41 per cent. Five of the schools from which the college recruits students achieved GCSE results below the national average. More than a quarter of full-time students at the college receive minor maintenance awards. The unemployment rate in the Portsmouth area is 8 per cent. It is higher on Portsea Island. The University of Portsmouth and local heritage sites provide significant sources of employment. The navy and defence-related industries also provide employment opportunities, though these have declined in importance.

5 The college employed 96 full-time equivalent staff in the year 1995-96. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The work of the college is organised in three divisions: division 1 which includes science, mathematics, health and care and physical education; division 2 which includes humanities and English; and division 3 which includes business studies, art and design and languages. Heads of division manage both teachers and pastoral tutors.

6 The college's mission is to provide education of high quality for Portsmouth, to respond effectively to the educational needs of the local community, to offer a broad curriculum and to give students individual support in order that they may succeed.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 The college offers a wide range of subjects and courses. This includes 35 general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects, 13 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects and 20 general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects. Twenty GCE A level and 20 GCSE subjects are available for part-time study in the evenings. There are also general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses at intermediate and advanced level in health and social care, business, leisure and tourism, and art and design. The college offers courses leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in four curriculum areas at level 2, in two areas at level 3, and in one area at level 1. At the time of the inspection, 57 per cent of full-time students were enrolled on GCE A level programmes. Fourteen per cent were on GNVQ courses and 8.5 per cent were studying on other courses, including those leading to NVQs. Only 5 per cent of students were enrolled on GNVQ intermediate level courses, and 20 per cent were following GCSE courses. Full-time students on vocational courses are encouraged to combine these with GCE A level or GCSE subjects. There are no opportunities for students on GNVQ courses to take additional GNVQ units. The number of students on GNVQ intermediate courses has declined significantly, from 82 in 1994 to only 30 in 1996. The college has not investigated the reasons for this decline.

8 The college reports low educational achievement amongst the population in its catchment area. The college has a policy of 'open access' to its provision and aims to provide courses which are easily accessible to a wide range of students with varying abilities. The range of courses for students with modest GCSE achievements is limited. There are no access to further education programmes and no GNVQ courses at foundation level for full-time students; the college plans to offer the latter in 1997-98. There are very few courses in adult basic education. There are no childcare facilities at the college.

9 Students are encouraged to participate in a diverse range of short courses and cultural and social activities available in the college's curriculum enhancement programme. This programme includes opportunities for students to take sports leadership qualifications and participate in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Students also take

part in a wide range of drama events which are staged at the college's studio theatre. There are many opportunities for them to participate in sport and other activities. Students on NVQ courses usually spend the equivalent of at least one day a week on a work placement. Work experience and work shadowing are provided for other students on request. Work experience is not necessarily a part of GNVQ courses. In the spring of 1996, the college established an employers' forum and hopes to strengthen its links with companies through this.

10 Since 1990, the college has provided courses for adults at the college and at a centre within the local community. Forty courses were offered in 1993 and 174 in 1996. One-third of the courses for adults are recreational. Adults are encouraged to join daytime classes designed for the students aged 16 to 19, and an increasing number of classes specifically for adults are now offered during the day.

11 The college has close links with its partner schools in Portsmouth and provides in-service training for science teachers in some of them. It organises cultural and social events for prospective students in addition to open evenings. There are 'twilight' classes in modern languages for year 10 and year 11 pupils, and 'mathematics master classes' for year 8 and 9 pupils from partner schools. The modern languages scheme is sponsored by an international insurance company.

12 The college franchises Royal Yachting Association courses at the Hampshire Outdoor Centre in Portsmouth and a range of GCSE and office technology skills courses at the City of Portsmouth Girls' School. There are strong links with a range of other external organisations. For example, the college is a major partner in a government Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund project, 'First Chance', which aims to improve opportunities for unemployed people to enter work. Other partners in the project include the city council, the local Education and Business Partnership and social services. The college also works closely with the city council and voluntary sector organisations which sponsor touring company performances in the college's studio theatre. The University of Portsmouth franchises the teaching of the science element in a bachelor of education course for mature students. The university also validates units of the first year of a bachelor's degree course in social sciences which is run at the college.

13 There is an equal opportunities working group. Policies on equal opportunities and racial and sexual harassment are well established and they are displayed prominently throughout the college. There is a special programme for the small number of students with moderate learning difficulties or behavioural problems. These students can gain accreditation in numberpower, wordpower and through the Youth Award Scheme. The college has not analysed overall participation in its courses by gender. College managers are, however, aware of under participation and under achievement by young men. Some departments are strengthening links

with schools in order that more male school-leavers may be encouraged to enrol on college courses. The number of students from minority ethnic groups at the college reflects, proportionately, the total number of persons from minority ethnic groups in the population of Portsmouth.

14 The prospectus for full-time courses is attractive. A separate directory for part-time studies includes information on franchised courses. The prospectus is supplemented by helpful leaflets on each subject. A well-presented newsletter is published each term. A needs analysis group was established in September 1995. The college recognises that its market research into the requirements of potential customers is inadequate and that it has promoted some courses which have attracted very few students. The college participates in a range of projects sponsored by the TEC, which are designed mainly to promote NVQs and GNVQs to employers, and to support the training of college staff who teach on courses leading to them. The college is involved with the TEC and other colleges in two projects which are designed to promote the use of multi-media and telematics technologies for training in local businesses.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

15 The corporation board has 15 members. There are eight independent members, a TEC representative, two co-opted governors, the principal, a parent, and a member of staff. At the time of the inspection there was a vacancy for a student member. The corporation includes six women but there is no governor from a minority ethnic group. Governors decided that all nine business members should be appointed for a four-year term in the spring of 1993 and there may be significant changes in membership in 1997. Governors have yet to analyse the range of skills they possess collectively to determine whether these fully meet the college's changing needs. A search committee has been formed but it has yet to meet and its operating procedures have not been established. Governors have a broad range of expertise, they are enthusiastic about the college and committed to furthering the interests of the local community. A code of conduct has been adopted and a register of interests is almost complete. Governors do not yet formally evaluate their own performance.

16 There are five committees of the board: finance, employment policy, audit, remuneration and disciplinary matters. A governor is a member of the college's health and safety committee, and college task groups, such as the building project group, include governors. There is a harmonious working relationship between governors and senior managers. The clerk to the corporation was appointed in 1995 and she is a head of department in the college. This arrangement, whereby a head of department serves as clerk to the corporation, was due to be reviewed in 1996.

17 Governors monitor financial matters closely, complementing the tight control exercised by the principal. However, they carry out their duty to oversee the curriculum less thoroughly. Students' achievements on GCE A level courses are discussed in general terms at board meetings. There is

little evidence that governors receive detailed reports upon, or debate, the performance of students on the college's many other courses. Little use is made of statistical indicators to analyse the college's success, such as the proportion of students who achieve their qualifications compared with the numbers who originally enrolled. Governors do not receive sufficient data to enable them to judge the effectiveness of the college comprehensively.

18 The college's strategic planning group comprises the principal, the two vice-principals, the chair and vice-chair of the corporation and two other governors. The board receives the draft strategic plan at a meeting each July. The strategic plan for 1996-99 does not include any evaluation of the college's past performance. Governors do not receive reports which allow them to monitor the college's progress towards achieving its objectives. They received a descriptive overview of the college's activities for the first time in February 1996. Governors have agreed that it is for college managers to implement the annual operating plan. However, the college's annual operating plan identifies governors as having responsibility for parts of its implementation. The three divisions' operating plans do not contain dates for monitoring progress towards implementation and the unquantified targets are too vague.

19 The policies on health and safety and equal opportunities, have been approved by the corporation. The college provides opportunities for religious education and for collective worship, and complies with sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*.

20 The senior management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals and the three heads of division. Until 1996, 21 heads of departments reported directly to one of the vice-principals. A new tier of three heads of division between the vice-principal and the heads of department was introduced when the college was reorganised in June 1996. The new structure is generally understood, and roles and responsibilities of staff are clear. Curriculum management at departmental level is generally effective. Some departments are cohesive and well organised; others rely too much on informal arrangements and are less effectively managed. Communication in the college is generally good. There are weekly staff bulletins and briefings, and frequent meetings. Records of meetings do not always identify action which needs to be taken. Since the college was reorganised, the curriculum and tutorial committees have been revised, and a resources and planning committee has been introduced.

21 The average level of funding for the college in 1995-96 was £19.66, compared with the median of £19.73 for sixth form colleges. Figures for 1996-97 indicate that the college will experience a small reduction in funding. The college did not meet its growth targets in 1994-95 and in 1995-96. Underachievement of targets was slight in 1994-95 but it was larger in 1995-96 and the college had to pay money back to the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The principal, finance officer and

vice-principals identify the resources the college needs. Heads of department make bids for resources based on needs. The college has a simple method for calculating unit cost which it will need to refine. The finance officer provides budget holders with comprehensive monthly reports. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

22 Management information is not used sufficiently to assist planning at all levels. Many departmental development plans lack quantitative targets such as those for enrolments. The various management information systems provide the data required by external agencies, but fail to meet the college's own needs for information. The management information system manager also teaches and has no administrative staff. Some assistance is available to him from staff in the college registry, which is overstretched. The college introduced an electronic student-registration system in 1994. This provides reliable attendance information for tutors and departments. Data, however, have not been aggregated to allow the college to make a comprehensive analysis of attendance trends in order to identify ways of improving students' attendance rates.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

23 The college has close links with its partner schools. Nominated staff liaise with each of seven schools from which the college recruits most of its students. Staff make regular visits to schools to give presentations to pupils about the courses available at the college. In some cases, prospective students may shadow students who are already at the college. There are workshops for year 10 and 11 pupils in science and technology, mathematics, and leisure and tourism, which give pupils an introduction to these subjects. There are open evenings, and college staff attend parents' meetings and careers evenings in the schools. All potential students are invited to the college for an 'introduction day' in June which includes course taster sessions. This event is well organised and there is a welcoming atmosphere for the pupils. College staff are available to help prospective students when their examination results are published. The principal meets the secondary head teachers' group to discuss and refine the arrangements for transferring school-leavers to the college. The college informs schools of the examination results and eventual educational or employment destinations of their former pupils.

24 The college's enrolment procedures are well planned and managed. Staff are well briefed for them. They are sensitive to students' anxieties and problems. A five-week induction programme familiarises students with college life and provides guidance on study skills. The programme includes presentations on the college's charter and the college's policies on equal opportunities, and sexual and racial harassment. Tutors explain what the college expects of students and its commitments to them. Enrolment and induction procedures are equally thorough for evening

students and include an optional 10-week study skills programme. Between 25 and 30 per cent of full-time students change courses or subjects within the first six weeks of the college year, and this is an unusually high proportion for a sixth form college.

25 Many students on intermediate and advanced level courses obtained low grades at school in GCSE English and mathematics. The college provides these students with an additional hour's teaching each week in these subjects to enable them to take the examination again and improve their grades. There are special classes for speakers of English as a foreign language, which are provided by a full-time teacher whose costs are shared with the Home Office. To ensure continuity, the teacher has close links with schools from which pupils, already receiving this kind of tuition, transfer to the college. Appropriate arrangements are made for statemented students, those with moderate learning difficulties, with dyslexia, and with mobility, visual or hearing impairments. The care and support provided for these students are excellent. The college does not, however, test students' basic skills on entry to determine what additional support they may need to help them with their learning. About 50 students are receiving such support, but almost all of them had their particular needs diagnosed by their schools before they arrived at college. Only six students have been referred by college staff to receive additional support for their learning in their first half term at the college. It is a significant weakness in the college's induction arrangements for students that these fail to include any test of students' basic skills in order that the learning needs of individual students may be identified.

26 Each full-time student has a personal tutor. Tutorial groups are made up of both first-year and second-year students who are not necessarily studying the same subject or on the same course. The present tutorial system is new. There are three divisional tutors who supervise tutors. The system is described in helpful guidelines for tutors which set out their duties clearly. There are four 30-minute tutorial sessions each week. Tutors meet with all students in their tutorial group once a week, to check attendance records and give out information. In the other three sessions tutorials are provided for individual students. It is college policy that individual students should meet with their tutors at least once a term in order to discuss their action plans for their studies. Staff have carried out a review of these new tutorial arrangements and some have expressed concern whether there will be sufficient time for every student to meet with his or her tutor. Tutors are committed to helping their students to succeed. Students expressed their appreciation of the guidance and help they receive from their tutors. In October, a preliminary report on the work of students aged 16 to 18 is sent to parents together with a letter from the principal explaining action plans; and a calendar stating when students' performance will be reviewed and dates on which parents may visit the college to discuss students' progress.

27 Parents of students aged 16 to 18 who are persistently absent are not contacted until students' attendance records have fallen to 70 per cent. Students whose average attendance record is below 85 per cent are required to pay their own examinations fees.

28 As a result of recent restructuring, a new division of student services has been created. This is responsible for careers advice, additional learning support, counselling and welfare services, administration of a small hardship fund and the promotion of the students' union. A well-publicised careers education and guidance programme is provided in collaboration with Vosper Thornycroft Southern Careers. The service meets the needs of students entering higher education or employment. A special feature of the programme is collaboration between head teachers, college managers and local employers to provide students with training in interview techniques. A welfare assistant advises on grants, benefit payments and emergency accommodation. The college has a trained counsellor who refers students when necessary to external agencies. The students' union has not been supported well by students. The college plans to re-establish the students' council whose main aim will be to organise social and fund-raising activities. A student governor is elected annually.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

29 Of the 108 teaching sessions inspected, 68 per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. Only 4 per cent had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. The proportion of lessons graded 1 and 2 is similar to the average for sixth form colleges in the three years 1993-96, identified in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. The following table shows the grades awarded to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

| Programmes | Grade | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Totals |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|---------------|
| GCE AS/A level | | 6 | 28 | 15 | 3 | 0 | 52 |
| GCSE | | 1 | 16 | 14 | 1 | 0 | 32 |
| GNVQ | | 2 | 9 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| NVQ | | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Other | | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Total | | 12 | 61 | 31 | 4 | 0 | 108 |

30 At the time of the inspection, students were still enrolling in classes and some were changing their subjects. The enrolment and attendance data, therefore, changed daily.

31 Courses are well planned. Most schemes of work are set out clearly and include specific activities and dates for assessment of students' work, and a list of the resources needed. In many curriculum areas, teachers

share schemes of work with their students to enable students to see clearly the direction their studies will take. Lesson plans are well structured. In some of the better lessons, teachers began by discussing the aims and objectives of the lesson with the students. However, in other lessons introductory work was too rushed. Students were left unclear about the concepts to be explored and uncertain about the tasks to be performed. In one lesson, the first 15 minutes were wasted because of poor planning. Some teachers do not manage class time well enough to allow students to complete their work.

32 Working relationships between teachers and students are good. Many teachers are adept at giving help to students who are floundering. Some teachers work together to help students build up their work folders in a consistent way. For example, staff teaching modular GCE A level syllabuses in chemistry, physics and biology give their students file dividers which are colour coded, respectively for these three subjects. The students then file their notes within the appropriate dividers. By maintaining their files in an ordered and logical way, the students are enabled to make useful connections between subjects, and also to plan and structure their revision systematically.

33 Many of the handouts and other learning materials used are up to date and relate well to the tasks in hand. Some worksheets, particularly in English, are written in a clear style and in language that is easy to understand. In art and design, teachers use visual aids to good effect. Handouts and overhead transparencies used in some lessons were, however, poor. The content of some learning materials was too difficult for students. On occasions, students spent a great deal of time copying information from the board, which they could have been given more efficiently and effectively on a handout. Some teachers use incorrect spelling when writing notes on boards for students to copy. Teachers sometimes fail to help students with their note-making skills or they do not check students' files to see how accurate or useful the notes in them are. In some subjects, students use information technology effectively for research and in order to produce well-presented work. In other subjects, for example English and health and care, students make insufficient use of information technology.

34 In the better lessons, teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods to maintain students' interest, concentration and enthusiasm. In a GCSE physics lesson, a range of teaching techniques and materials was used to particularly good effect. The lesson involved students recapitulating what had been learned previously on the theory of radioactive decay, watching a video recording of the relevant work of a nuclear power station, and using a worksheet to calculate radioactive half-life and plot it on a graph. Students used a computer simulation to see the workings of a nuclear power station. They then went to the library where the teacher demonstrated the use of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database resources to search the New Scientist for articles about

nuclear safety. In other good lessons, teachers involved all the students in the class in discussion or in answering questions. For example, in a GCE A level law lesson, students had been asked to analyse data and texts on law and precedent, beforehand. There was a lively debate about offences and appropriate penalties. The teacher occasionally joined in but ensured that all students had their say and were able to come to conclusions. In some lessons, teachers asked probing questions which helped to ensure that their students understood the topic fully, and which strengthened their knowledge by guiding them to consider topics from different perspectives.

35 In poorer lessons, teachers displayed unsatisfactory technique in the way they asked questions. When checking the students' understanding of the lesson, teachers put questions to the whole class rather than to individuals. They made no attempt to find out if students who did not respond to questions had understood the lesson. Some questioning by teachers was laboured and prolonged to the point when the students' interest and attention were lost. In some lessons, teachers made insufficient efforts to help students marshal and organise their thoughts and argue a case. Some lessons, especially in humanities and, in a few instances, in art and design, were conducted too slowly. The lessons lacked momentum and insufficient work was covered in the time available.

36 Lessons in which students were studying at different levels or were of mixed abilities, were well managed. Students were provided with learning materials and work packs designed for a range of different abilities, together with clear instructions on the tasks they had to perform. Students worked enthusiastically on these materials at their own pace. Teachers gave individual students help when this was necessary. In some lessons, however, teachers failed to provide their students with enough to do. The more able students finished tasks quickly and had to wait for the teacher to give them more work. Some students needed extra help with their learning but this was not available.

37 In the better lessons, students were often helped to develop their speaking skills and to practise these. Teachers patiently helped the less-able or less-confident students to articulate their views. In some instances, teachers provided good opportunities for students to present their ideas to their classmates. For example, in a GCE A level business studies lesson, pairs of students prepared answers to questions based on a case study of transport and the motor industry. They presented their views to the rest of the class and were challenged to defend them by the other students: the class found the exercise rewarding and enjoyable and by the end of the lesson the students had accumulated comprehensive answers to the questions raised by the case study.

38 In most practical lessons, students received clear instructions on the use of materials and equipment. Most teachers had due regard for their students' health and safety. In some science lessons, however, the instructions given to students were vague. Occasionally, students were

given handouts setting out working procedures which they followed closely and they were not encouraged to think for themselves about working methods and their possible consequences. Some laboratory benches are not cleaned regularly. In some instances, teachers did not ensure that their students wore safety spectacles. In health and care, students studying physiology had no access to laboratories for their practical work.

39 The quality of teachers' assessment of students' work is variable. Some teachers provide their students with written and comprehensive advice on how they can improve their performance. Other teachers' assessment consists of no more than a series of ticks or a bland one-word comment. In some instances, teachers return work with mistakes uncorrected.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

40 Most students enjoy their studies. They carry out practical work competently. Students studying administration, some humanities subjects and science achieve good levels of skill in using information technology. Many students are able to work productively in groups. In areas such as social sciences and humanities, students' note-making skills are poor.

41 The following table shows the number of students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE A level examinations each year between 1993 and 1995, together with pass rates at grades A to E, measured against national averages for sixth form colleges.

College pass rates compared with national averages for sixth form colleges between 1993 and 1995 for students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE A level examinations

| | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Number of students entered | 590 | 441 | 566 |
| Average pass rate (%) | 86 | 80 | 83 |
| National average (%) | 82 | 83 | 84 |
| Number of subjects above national average | 22 | 11 | 17 |
| Number of subjects below national average | 16 | 17 | 11 |
| Number at national average | 1 | 0 | 3 |

42 Since 1993, the pass rates in GCE A level business studies, computing, mathematics and classic civilisation have been above the national average for sixth form colleges. During the same period, pass rates in GCE A level communication studies, French, geology and theatre studies have been below the national average. In other subjects, the pass rates fluctuated widely, sometimes by as many as 33 percentage points, from year to year. Students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1995, scored on average 4.6 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This placed the college among the top third of colleges in the further

education sector on this performance measure, according to data published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). National averages for examination results in 1996 are not yet available. The pass rates for 1996 which were presented to governors indicate that the average GCE A level pass rate at grades A to E for students aged 16 to 18, fell to 79 per cent. Between 1993 and 1996, there was an average of 37 GCE AS entries each year, from students aged 16 to 18, for approximately nine subjects. The average pass rate was 70 per cent.

43 In 1993, there were no GCE A level entries from students aged 19 or over. Between 1994 and 1996, there was an average of 105 GCE A level entries each year from students aged 19 or over. The average pass rate for students aged 19 or over in the college who were entered for GCE A level was 65 per cent. Pass rates were above the national average for sixth form colleges in just three subjects in 1994, and in only six subjects out of 16 in 1995.

44 The pass rates for some GCE A level subjects, measured against numbers of students entered, are high. Some pass rates, however, are considerably lower when compared with the number of students who enrolled on the courses. The following table gives a comparison of 1995 pass rates with the percentage of students enrolled in November 1993 in a sample of courses with more than 29 students enrolled on them.

Pass rates measured against number of entries compared with pass rates measured against number of students enrolled

| GCE A level course | Pass rate (1995) | Pass rates expressed as a percentage of students who were on the course in November 1993 |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Physics | 100% | 69% |
| Business studies | 95% | 66% |
| Sociology | 93% | 55% |
| English language | 91% | 69% |
| Chemistry | 71% | 39% |

45 Between 1993 and 1995 the average retention rate for students aged 16 to 18 on GCE A level courses has remained below 75 per cent. Retention rates improved steadily only in mathematics; they have fallen steadily in accounts, chemistry, computing, design and technology, economics, French and German. In other subjects, retention rates have fluctuated from year to year, in some instances by about 20 per cent. The retention of students aged 19 or over on GCE A level courses in 1994 and 1995 was poor, at 40 per cent. Staff report that the two most common reasons why students fail to complete their courses are: social and financial problems they have to face; and their inability to cope with the level of work.

46 The college subscribes to an external service which enables it to calculate the extent of students' achievements on GCE A level courses by comparing their actual GCE A level results with those predicted on the basis of their GCSE grades. Using this measure there has been a decline in the number of subjects in which students aged 16 to 18 performed significantly better than predicted, from 14 subjects in 1994 to eight in 1995. Students' achievements were similar to those predicted in the majority of subjects examined in 1995. The subjects in which students performed above expectation in both 1994 and 1995 were art, biology, English literature, physics, sociology and mathematics.

47 There were over 800 entries of students aged 16 to 18 for GCSE examinations in both 1994 and 1995. The percentage of grades A to C achieved by these students increased from 39 per cent in 1994, well below the national average for sixth form colleges, to 47 per cent in 1995, just below the national average for sixth form colleges. In 1995, students' results were above the national average in about half the subjects examined. This is an improvement when compared with the figures for 1994. Results in some subjects, such as accounting, film studies, French and law improved significantly in 1995. However, results in other subjects worsened and in some subjects the pattern of results has fluctuated significantly over recent years. For example, the percentage of students aged 16 to 18 who obtained grades A to C in biology was 39 per cent in 1993, 65 per cent in 1994 and 11 per cent in 1995. The average retention rate on GCSE courses of students aged 16 to 18 fell slightly between 1994 and 1995, from 70 per cent to 68 per cent.

48 In 1995, 139 students aged 19 or over were entered for GCSE examinations. This compares with 40 students in the previous year. These students achieved 65 per cent grades A to C in 1994 and 62 per cent in 1995. Retention rates on GCSE courses for these students were less than 60 per cent in both years.

49 The college introduced advanced vocational qualification courses in 1992 and has recruited small numbers to most of them. In 1994, 25 students aged 16 to 18 were entered for GNVQ advanced level assessment in four courses. The average pass rate was low at 44 per cent. The average student retention rate was 60 per cent. In 1995, 28 students aged 16 to 18 were entered for GNVQ advanced level assessment in four courses. Although the average pass rate of 64 per cent was higher than that obtained by students in 1994, the average retention rate fell to 57 per cent. The lowest retention and achievement rates were in health and social care where 50 per cent of the students remained to complete the course and 40 per cent of these achieved the qualification.

50 The number of entries from students aged 16 to 18 for intermediate level and single subject vocational examinations has increased significantly from 349 in 1994 to 535 in 1995. Students' achievements in these examinations improved slightly from an average pass rate of 68 per cent

in 1994 to an average pass rate of 70 per cent in 1995. While results in many subjects have been similar over the two years, in some there has been a marked improvement. For example, in GNVQ intermediate business studies the pass rate was only 30 per cent in 1994 but was 56 per cent in 1995. The pass rate for GNVQ intermediate art and design went up from 57 per cent to 71 per cent. In contrast, pass rates in a few subjects have been low or worsened. For example, in 1995 pass rates for GNVQ intermediate courses in health and social care, and leisure and tourism, and in NVQ level 1 administration were all less than 35 per cent. Data on the retention of students show that in 1994 there was a 69 per cent retention rate for GNVQ intermediate courses. This improved in 1995. However, incomplete data prevent comparisons for other vocational courses.

51 In 1995, the average pass rate of 64 per cent for students aged 16 to 18, on vocational courses included in tables published by the DfEE, placed the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector using this performance measure.

52 Results for students aged 19 or over in vocational subjects improved from an average pass rate of 80 per cent in 1994 to an average pass rate of 88 per cent in 1995. This has been achieved in the context of significant growth in the number of these students entered for vocational examinations over the two years, from 44 students to 201 students. However, analysis of trends in the retention of these students is impossible, due to a lack of data held by the college.

53 Students have been successful in events and competitions outside the college. Some students were chosen to play in county teams in rugby and sailing. A group of students took part in an international project which included health and fitness training for children effected by the Chernobyl disaster. Several students have been awarded a Zurich Travel Scholarship which enables them to undertake a project which involves the learning of a European language.

54 The college records the destinations of its leavers, although it is still contacting students who left in July 1996 to ascertain their destinations. The data on students' destinations for the last three years are set out in the following table.

Student destination data for 1993-96

| Year | Total number of students completing their courses | Progressing to higher education (%) | Progressing to other courses in further education (%) | In employ-ment (%) | Other (%) | Unknown (%) |
|----------------|--|--|--|---------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 1993-94 | 384 | 26 | 33 | 24 | 1 | 16 |
| 1994-95 | 421 | 33 | 34 | 23 | 1 | 9 |
| 1995-96 | 456 | 29 | 30 | 22 | 0 | 19 |

QUALITY ASSURANCE

55 The college has carried out a range of quality assurance activities over the years. It was a founder member of a county network of sixth form colleges which carries out an 'external quality review'. The review is carried out by staff from different colleges in the network. Ten reviews in the college have been conducted in the last three years. Other quality assurance activities include the canvassing of students' views on the quality of the college's provision through the use of questionnaires. For example, the college has used external questionnaires about advanced level courses and its own questionnaires about the quality of the induction arrangements for students. The college has analysed students' examination results and has compared these with predictions of achievements made on the basis of students' GCSE results. The college attributes some improvements to these activities. They have not, however, led to improvements in students' retention rates generally or in ensuring consistently good examination results.

56 The new quality assurance system which was introduced in September 1996 has yet to develop fully and demonstrate its effectiveness. Heads of the three divisions oversee quality reviews and it is intended that they will monitor the outcomes of these with the senior management team, of which they are members. There are, however, deficiencies in the way the new quality assurance system operates. In particular, there is little mention of issues relating to quality in the divisions' operating plans for the coming year, and these contain hardly any quantitative targets. One division aims to require its subject departments to set targets only for GCE A level results in subjects in which students have performed poorly for two consecutive years. In another, the timescale for achieving targets is very protracted and the college would not be in a position to undertake comprehensive assessment of its performance against targets, for some years yet. Departmental plans do not contain any reference to the previous year's objectives and the college does not, therefore, gauge whether any improvements have been made, year by year.

57 The contract between the college and a school to which it franchises courses refers to the college's quality assurance system which the franchisee must follow. The college's quality system is not fully operational and cannot be applied at the school. A member of the college's staff visits the franchising school to observe classes and monitor students' attendance. Formal arrangements cannot yet be made for the school to adopt the college's new and developing quality assurance procedures.

58 The college has a charter. Students are aware of its existence. They do not see the charter as a statement of the college's standards of service. The charter has been reviewed but it has not been improved significantly. The revised charter contains only one measurable standard.

59 Induction of new staff is thorough. The induction process includes the observation, by senior staff, of classes taught by new teachers. After

their observation, senior staff provide new teachers with helpful evaluation of their work. There is a good staff-development programme for teaching and support staff. It is generously supported with a budget of £20,000 a year. Five days are designated for staff development. Staff are aware that their applications for training must relate explicitly to the college's objectives. The staff-development programme is overseen conscientiously by a staff-development committee. There is a staff-appraisal scheme which operates on a two-year cycle. The college recognises the need for appraisal to take place more frequently. The staff-appraisal scheme includes observation of teachers' work in the classroom. Senior managers are appraised annually. The college hopes to achieve the Investors in People award in 1997.

60 The college produced its first self-assessment report specially for the inspection. Self-assessment is not yet part of the college's routine of planning and review, and the report was not seen by the governors. The report is largely descriptive. Whilst some of the judgements in it concur with those of the inspectors, others do not, and it omits to identify some significant weaknesses found during the inspection. Some assertions are unsubstantiated by data.

RESOURCES

Staffing

61 In 1995-96, the college had 69 full-time equivalent teachers and 27 full-time equivalent administrative and support staff. Sixty-three per cent of the teaching staff and 70 per cent of the support staff are women. There are equal numbers of men and women amongst promoted post-holders at both senior and middle management levels. The number of staff from minority ethnic backgrounds broadly reflects the proportion of those persons from minority ethnic backgrounds in the population of Portsmouth. Most teachers are well qualified and the majority are appropriately experienced for the courses they teach. In four areas, there are some teachers who lack experience, or an appropriate qualification for their work. The college is helping them to obtain further training. Ninety-four per cent of staff have a teaching qualification. Ninety per cent have first degrees in appropriate disciplines and 25 per cent have higher degrees. Thirty-one per cent of teachers have relevant training and development lead body qualifications and a further 25 per cent are working towards them.

62 There are sufficient qualified support staff and technicians. Additional support staff have been appointed recently in finance, computing, estates management and administration. However, because of the increasing demands for management information and for administrative support for the increasing amount of adult education, some staff in the registry remain considerably overstretched. The college is addressing this issue as a matter of urgency. There is adequate technician

support in all areas except languages. The college had a vacancy for a drama technician at the time of the inspection.

63 There are appropriate personnel policies and procedures. A senior manager has responsibility for personnel issues for both support and teaching staff. The guidance and documentation provided for staff involved in interviewing candidates are good. Governors review the workings of personnel policies by examining case studies of staff appointments. The college has contracted an occupational health service to provide it with advice. The college has used this service when investigating reasons for staff absence and for supporting staff who are ill.

64 Staffing requirements are calculated in relation to student numbers. All decisions regarding the staffing budget are made by the principal. Class sizes are monitored. The average number of students in second-year classes, calculated at the start of the college year, was 13. The average class size for the first year of courses, calculated at the start of the college year 1995-96 was 16. At the start of the college year 1996-97 the average class size was 17.

Equipment/learning resources

65 Most curriculum areas are well equipped with a range of teaching aids including whiteboards, overhead projectors and video replay equipment. There are good facilities for painting, sculpture, ceramics and photography. There is a well-equipped workshop with facilities for computer-aided design. This is in an area used for both art and design and craft, design and technology. In performing arts, there is a modern studio theatre which has good lighting and sound systems. Its sprung floor and high ceiling make it particularly suitable for dance. The business studies area has a wide range of modern office computers. The equipment in physics and biology is particularly good. There is a range of texts, video tapes, maps, documents and models in humanities subjects, mathematics and English. There are well-designed teaching materials and information technology resources for sociology and psychology. The college provides good information technology equipment for students. There is one modern computer for every six full-time equivalent students, and the equipment can be used by students outside timetabled lessons.

66 Resources are less good in some other areas. For example, teaching materials are inadequate in religious studies. There are few musical instruments and the college intends to remedy this deficiency over the next three years. There is one editing suite and this cannot meet the demand for its use from students on media studies, and other courses. The language laboratory is outdated. Staff and students in the language department have no access to satellite transmissions or to cable video facilities. Although there is a good range of basic equipment for chemistry, there are insufficient modern electronic measuring instruments and meters. The range of computers available to art and design students is

limited. Students on the GNVQ advanced art and design course have little opportunity to use appropriate software.

67 The library is small but well organised. It has approximately one study space for every 10 students. The college is currently planning a new library which will be operational in 1997 and this will provide one study space for every seven students. The present library has about 14,500 books and additional book collections are held in a number of curriculum areas. Other library resources include 42 CD-ROM resources, about 100 study packs, subscriptions to 47 periodicals, and seven daily or weekly newspapers. An extended Internet link will be installed in the new library. Liaison with departments is informal but effective. Library stock is regularly reviewed and outdated books are removed. Library texts were adequate in all curriculum areas except for business studies and health and care. The library stock is held in a computerised catalogue but the current software used cannot provide the library readily with management information. There are good reprographic and audio-visual aid facilities which are located alongside the library.

68 The college has a central assets register and there are detailed inventories of equipment in departments. It does not have a policy on the replacement of equipment other than that relating to information technology. The college plans to spend at least 1.5 per cent of its annual budget on new equipment.

Accommodation

69 The college is on one site and virtually all teaching takes place in a single, three-storey brick construction which was built in the mid-1950s. The building was extended in 1974, and again in 1984. Its external appearance is drab and uninviting. The interior is bright and welcoming. Most rooms are light and airy, internal decoration is generally good, and effective use is made of a wide variety of display material. The college has improved many parts of the original school building. For example, it has created a health and care suite in an old home economics area; moved computer-aided design and technology workshops nearer the art, design and photography studios; converted disused workshops into teaching areas for leisure and tourism and media and communication studies; and created a studio theatre from an old gymnasium. Most of these newly-created spaces have been planned so that they can be used flexibly for a range of teaching methods. In 1984, the college built an attractive lecture theatre and computing centre. The college has a sports hall, a multigym, rugby, football and cricket pitches, and five hard tennis courts.

70 Facilities for performing arts are scattered around the college. Music teaching is located in a small room which is reached through a bleak hall. Some rooms are far too small for the size of groups using them, particularly in mathematics, English and computing. Apart from the refectory, there is very little social space for students. In sport, art and design and

performing arts there is very limited storage space for sports equipment, sculpture and other three-dimensional design work, respectively, and for stage sets.

71 There is a new estates department and the buildings and grounds are well managed. The college has a realistic accommodation strategy and has begun to develop a 10-year estates plan. It has conducted a survey of the accessibility of the college's buildings to students with disabilities and has used this to identify priorities for minor works. The maintenance strategy was based on condition surveys carried out in 1993. The college recognises that this strategy needs updating. Room allocation is planned and controlled centrally. Some rooms are underused. A new block designed to rehouse the library and the resources, careers and information technology centres is under construction, and is due to be finished early in 1997. A new lift will allow access to all levels of both the existing and new buildings.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

72 The main strengths of the college are:

- its expanding range of courses, particularly for adults
- its close links with local schools and the community
- its good procedures for the recruitment and induction of students
- some good examination results
- the strong support it provides for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- its well-managed staff-development programme
- its good information technology facilities
- its well-managed building programme.

73 If the college is to continue to improve the quality of its work, it should address the following weaknesses:

- the limited range of foundation and access to further education courses
- limited and slow availability of management information within the college
- insufficiently precise plans at all levels for achieving objectives
- the lack of systematic identification of students' learning needs
- the lack of cohesion and rigour in the quality assurance system
- poor retention of students and low attendance on many courses
- fluctuating examination results.

FIGURES

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

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

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

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

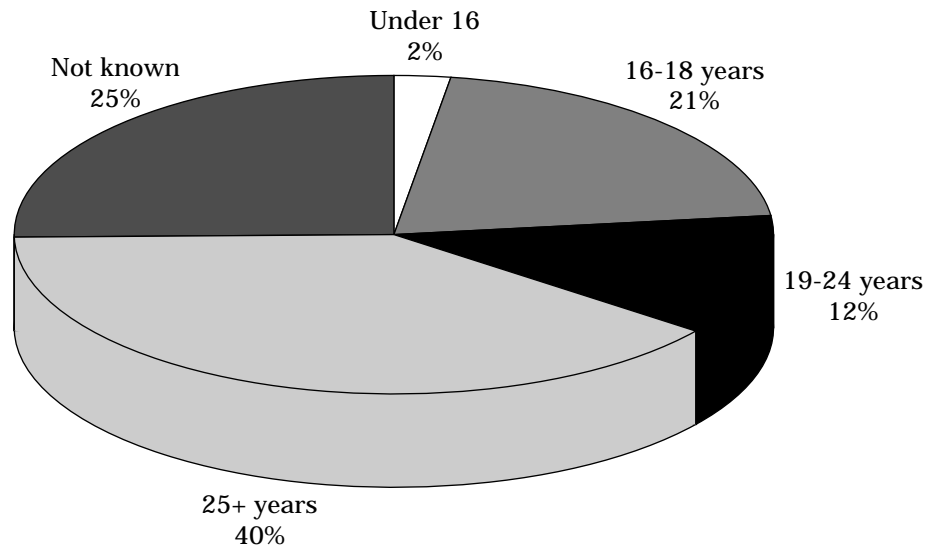
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

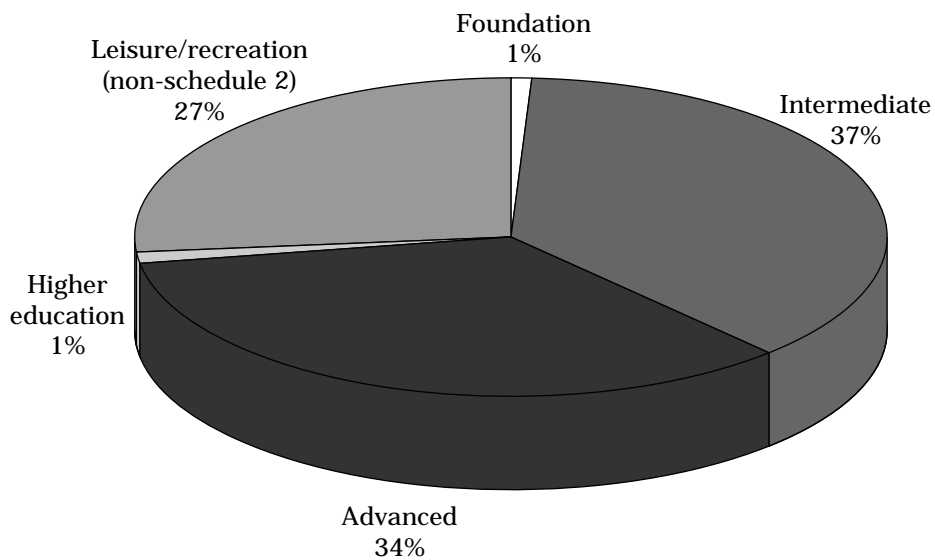
Portsmouth College: percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 3,500

Figure 2

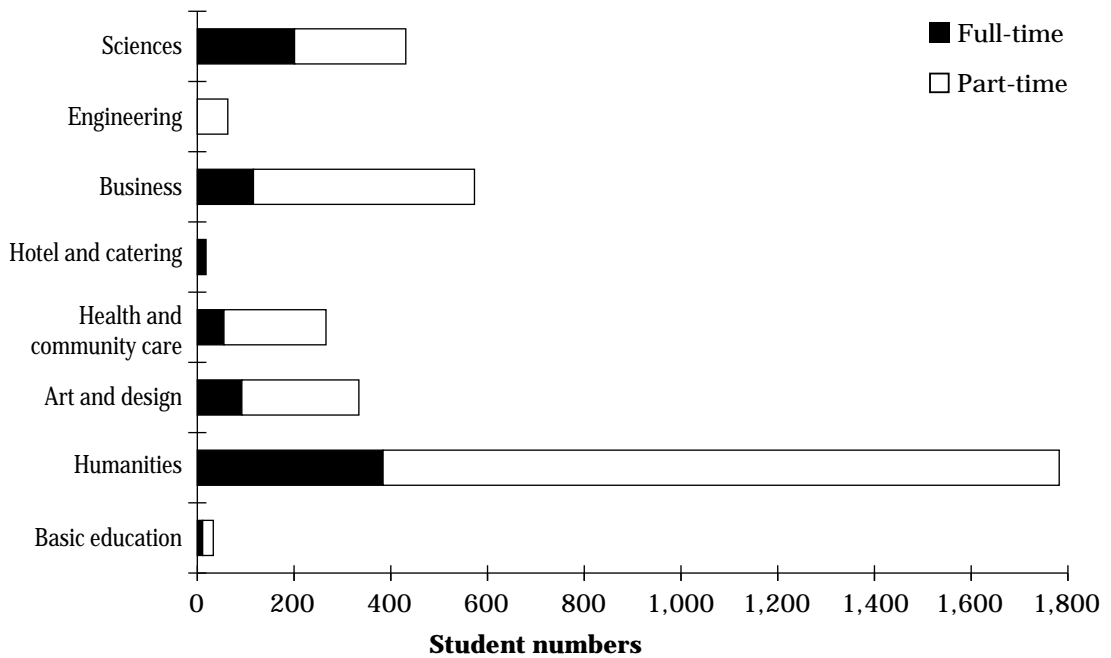
Portsmouth College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 3,500

Figure 3

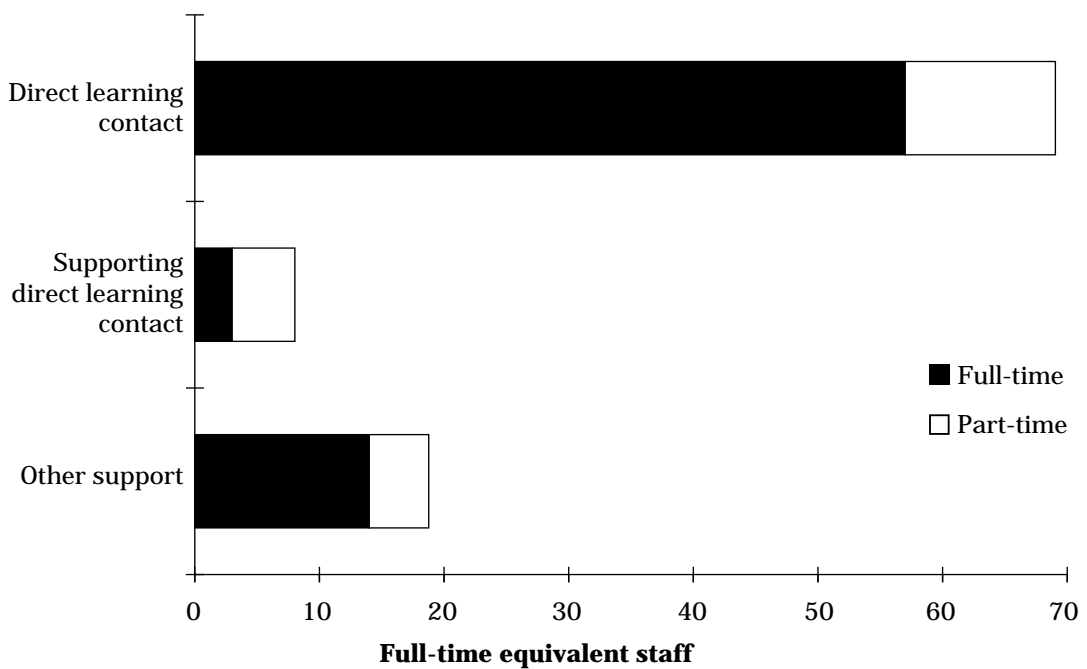
Portsmouth College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 3,500

Figure 4

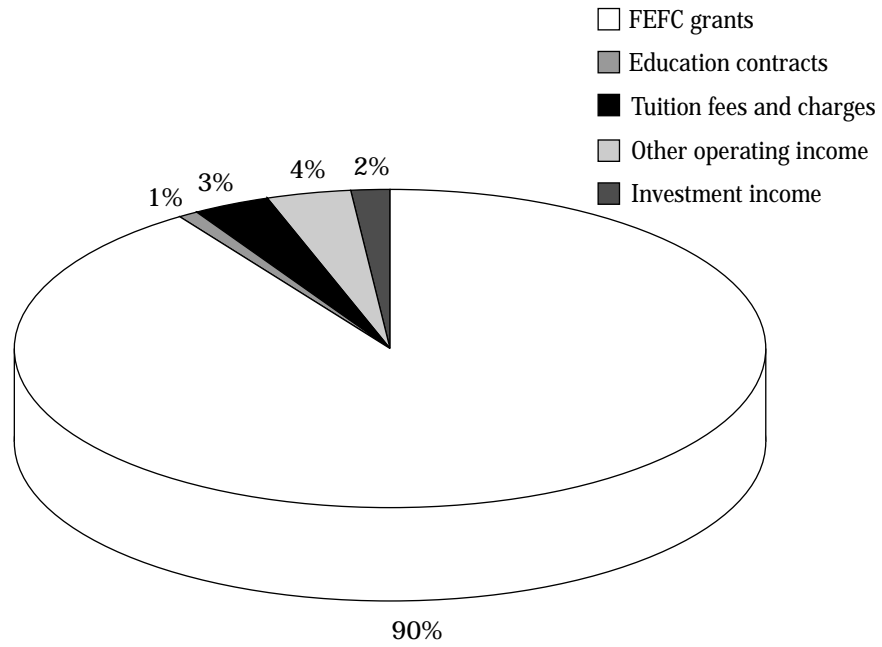
Portsmouth College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 96

Figure 5

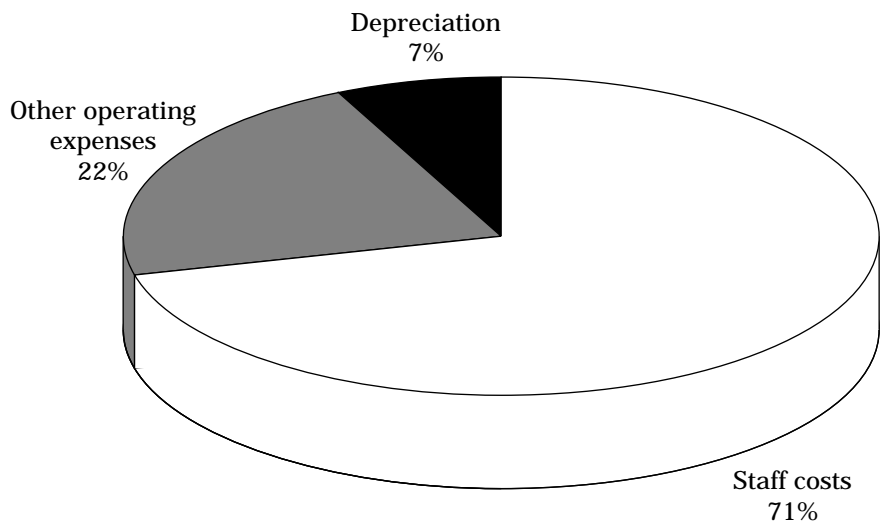
Portsmouth College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £3,172,000

Figure 6

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



Expenditure: £3,333,000

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