

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**North West Kent
College of
Technology**

May 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	2
Responsiveness and range of provision	8
Governance and management	15
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	23
Teaching and the promotion of learning	31
Students' achievements	39
Quality assurance	49
Resources	58
Conclusions and issues	68
Figures	

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 73/97

NORTH WEST KENT COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected September 1996-March 1997

Summary

North West Kent College of Technology is a medium-sized general further education college, based in Dartford and Gravesend. It offers a wide range of courses, which are organised in a way that makes them accessible to as many students as possible. It responds promptly to employers' training needs and has good links with the TEC. The college is involved with a number of important initiatives to boost the economy of the area, some of which have attracted substantial funds from the European Union. Links with schools are poor despite the college's efforts to improve them. The college has a well-informed and active governing body, its procedures for strategic planning are effective and the management of the college is good. The college needs to improve the quality of its management information systems. The quality of tutorials and other aspects of pastoral care is uneven. Learning support is voluntary for students who have been diagnosed as needing additional support and some compromise their chances of educational success by neglecting to take advantage of it. The quality of teaching and learning in the performing arts is very good. Success rates are variable; good in some areas but poor in others. A newly-developed quality assurance scheme covers the work of the whole college. Staff development is well managed and effective. Much of the specialist equipment conforms to the best commercial standards. Accommodation is good on the Gravesend site. The library bookstock is inadequate.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science and mathematics	2	Health and social care	2
Construction	3	Hair and beauty	3
Engineering	2	Performing arts	1
Business studies	2	Art and design	3
Hotel and catering	2	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
Leisure and tourism	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection of North West Kent College of Technology took place in three phases. Student induction was inspected in September 1996, curriculum areas were inspected in January 1997 and aspects of cross-college provision in March 1997. A team of 19 inspectors spent a total of 72 days in the college. They inspected 181 classes, examined students' work and held discussions with college staff, governors, parents, students, the deputy head of one local school, employers, representatives of Kent Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and members of community groups. They examined a range of college documents including policy statements, records of meetings, and performance data such as students' examination results.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 North West Kent College of Technology has two main sites some 13 miles apart. One site, the main administrative centre, is close to Dartford town centre and the other campus is a mile east of Gravesend. A smaller campus adjacent to the River Thames at Gravesend is used for specialist maritime and fire fighting training. In September 1996, the National Sea Training College merged with the college and became a faculty under the name of The National Sea Training Centre.

3 At the time of the inspection, the college had 1,995 full-time and 4,107 part-time student enrolments. Of these, two-thirds were on foundation or intermediate level courses and almost a third were on advanced level courses. A third of all enrolments were in the 16 to 19 age group and 45 per cent of the students were over the age of 25. There is strong competition in the area to attract 16-year-old students. There are four selective grammar schools in Dartford and the surrounding area, and one city technology college. There are two selective grammar schools in Gravesend. All the schools in both the towns have sixth forms. There are two other further education colleges in the neighbourhood, one five miles from Dartford and the other 10 miles from Gravesend. The percentage of students who continue in full-time education after the age of 16 in north west Kent is 80 per cent, and 55 per cent of 16 to 18 year old students remain in school. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3.

4 At the time of the inspection, the college employed 157 permanent and 258 part-time teachers. It also employed 151 full-time and fractional administrative and support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The college is organised in five faculties and two cross-college support units.

5 In addition to catering for the needs of the local community, the college provides training in two specialist areas which recruit nationally. The Hall Training Centre, a college company, provides training in refrigeration and air conditioning and the National Sea Training Centre

runs specialist courses for the British shipping industry. The college is the leading partner in a £5.2 million European Union project to provide training for the new job opportunities which are being created in north west Kent through the construction of an international shopping centre near the terminus of the Channel Tunnel rail link. The college is also active in other European and local economic development projects. It took part in a British Council funded project to develop the construction skills of workers in Russia.

6 The unemployment rate in both Dartford and Gravesend is similar to the Kent average of 6.7 per cent. In Dartford and Gravesend there is more manufacturing industry than is usual in Kent, including a multinational pharmaceutical company, and there are fewer jobs in banking, finance and other service sectors. Dartford and Gravesend are well-established London commuter areas and many people travel from the area to jobs in the capital.

7 The college's mission is: 'to provide high-quality education, learning and training which offers people the opportunity to achieve their potential and contribute to the success of the community in the north Kent area'. The college believes that, in order to fulfil its mission it must plan for a future of substantial, but sustainable growth, which matches the good economic prospects of the area.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The college offers a wide range of courses that cater for students of all abilities. There are full-time and part-time programmes in business, art and design, computing, construction, engineering, hairdressing and beauty therapy, health and social care, hotel and catering studies, media studies, maritime studies, performing arts, sport and leisure, and travel and tourism. There are courses leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 to 4; general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels; first and national awards validated by the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC); and specialist courses leading to City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G), RSA Examinations Board (RSA) and other professional qualifications. The college has recently increased its range of general certificate of education advanced supplementary/advanced level (GCE AS/A level) subjects and it is currently running 12 GCE A levels and one GCE AS subject. It also offers 22 courses leading to the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE). There is a comprehensive range of access to higher education programmes. The college is formally associated with the University of Greenwich, with which it offers a wide range of higher national certificates and diplomas. It also runs the first year of an extended science degree with the university, but this is to be discontinued because of a lack of sufficient demand.

9 Employers say the college responds promptly to their training needs by running courses either at the college or on their own premises. They consider the college's facilities to be good. Their involvement in the curriculum is strong in areas such as performing arts, but it could be improved in catering and beauty studies. Whilst there is some good practice in industrial liaison, standards are not consistent across the college. Some employers would like more frequent and more detailed reports on the progress of their trainees. The college has recently established an enterprise unit to improve its relations with industry. It has carried out an audit of industrial links and drawn up a policy to improve communications with employers and increase their involvement in the curriculum.

10 Considerable economic development is planned for the area served by the college, as part of the Thames Gateway initiative. Developments include Bluewater, an extensive retail and leisure facility which is due to open in 1999 with the creation of 5,000 new jobs. In addition, an international railway passenger terminal at Ebbsfleet for the Channel Tunnel rail link is due to open in 2002. Crossways, the largest business and distribution park on the M25, is already open. There are also plans to build a London Science Park by the Dartford river crossing. The college is involved in a number of these developments. It is the leading partner in a successful bid for European Union funding which will enable it to provide training for the Bluewater and Crossways projects. Relations with Kent TEC are good. Representatives from the TEC commented on the responsive and energetic approach shown by the college to a range of developments, including training for work programmes. The college is involved in a number of TEC initiatives that provide training for small businesses and improve the skills of unemployed people. College managers are members of the local chamber of commerce and education business partnerships. The college has contributed, with other Kent colleges, to a bid for finance from the competitiveness fund for computer-based learning resources.

11 Relationships between the college and most of the schools in the Dartford and Gravesend areas are poor, despite efforts to improve them. There are six selective schools within a short distance of the college's Dartford and Gravesend sites. All the local schools have sixth forms. Schools are reluctant to make known to their pupils the range of education and training opportunities that are available at the college, and there is evidence that some schools fail to distribute the college's statement of its students' achievements and its prospectus. The college deals with this problem by mailing information about its courses to every local household and staff are aware that they may need to purchase prioritised address lists if they are to target their publicity effectively. College staff work closely with special schools to ensure that their pupils progress smoothly to college.

12 The college works hard to meet the needs of local community groups. It supports training and leisure activities for young Sikhs in Gravesend, and it contributes to a European Union project in Denton which helps deprived families and travellers. The college has strong links with the

local youth service. College facilities are made available to community groups.

13 The college has recently set about improving its communications with the public. A new marketing manager has been appointed and a new college corporate image launched. Promotional material is clearly worded and well presented. Staff attend careers conventions and the college holds two open days and a number of specialist faculty events each year. The guidance service and telephone helplines provide a speedy response to students' enquiries. A franchising manager co-ordinates the college's collaborative arrangements for NVQ training for unemployed people and for outdoor pursuit training. Staff have undertaken market research to provide information about future training needs.

14 Managers are committed to improving access to education and training for traditionally under-represented groups of people. Wheelchair access has been improved on both sites; specialised equipment has been purchased; flexible times for course delivery have been arranged; additional learning support has been provided; and nursery facilities extended. The college has an equal opportunities policy and has given staff training in equal opportunities issues. Application of the policy is not yet monitored firmly enough to assure consistency.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

15 Arrangements for the governance of the college are generally effective. There are 13 governors including six from business, a retired senior production engineer, a director of social services, two representatives of the National Sea Training Trust, the principal and two staff governors. All the governors are men. There are three vacancies and two new governors are about to be appointed, one of whom is a woman. The search committee is keen to fill the remaining vacancy with a member from the local minority ethnic community. Committees of the board deal with finance and general purposes, audit, remuneration, student access funds, and appointment of new members. There is a student consultative committee which fosters links between governors and students. Many governors have had a long connection with the college and their commitment to it is strong. The average attendance at corporation meetings held between September 1996 and March 1997 was good at 83 per cent.

16 Governors manage their work efficiently and they are conscientiously supported by the clerk to the governing body, who is the college secretary. There is a schedule of committee and full corporation board meetings, which is well co-ordinated. Papers are meticulously prepared and are sent to governors well in advance of meetings. Care is taken to ensure that discussion which occurs in committees is not duplicated at meetings of the full board. Governors receive detailed reports from senior managers on a broad range of resource issues, and their professional expertise enables them to analyse these reports in a knowledgeable way. There are

annual reports to governors on curriculum developments and students' achievements, but they do not provide a detailed picture of all the college's provision. Senior managers and governors understand each other's roles and responsibilities. The principal and the chair of governors have forged a productive working relationship. Governors have made a register of their interests and have drawn up a code of conduct. There has been no systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of the governing body which might have led to an analysis of their training needs, although every governor has undertaken some form of training in the past 18 months.

17 The college's strategic plan is drawn up after extensive consultation with all staff and with the governors. A notable feature of the process is a joint meeting between governors and the academic board to review the college's objectives in draft form. Once the strategic plan has been agreed, faculties and college service teams prepare annual operating plans which take account of their performance during the preceding year. It is not clear how each of these plans relates to the objectives in the college strategic plan because they are often expressed in very general terms. Enrolment targets have been set and exceeded for the college as a whole and for individual courses, but quantitative goals are not set for other important aspects of performance such as student retention and achievements.

18 The management and organisational structures of the college are clearly defined. There are job descriptions for all managers and the scope of their responsibilities is generally understood. The principal, who has been in post for less than two years, has introduced a consultative approach to management which has improved relationships throughout the college. This open style, coupled with a comprehensive committee structure, has fostered good communications between managers and staff. The senior management team, which comprises the principal, the vice-principal, the college secretary, the five directors of faculty and the director of student services, meets each fortnight. Faculties each comprise a group of schools, the heads of which are responsible for the delivery of courses. Faculty directors meet their heads of schools regularly. In turn, heads of school hold regular meetings with their programme team leaders. Faculties, schools and courses are well managed. There are formal agendas for meetings and their minutes normally include detailed plans of the action to be undertaken as a result. The principal is working successfully with senior colleagues to move away from a structure based on autonomous and often competing units, to a more corporate approach. This trend is gradually allowing more college duties to be devolved to faculty heads, lessening the present concentration of roles on the post of vice-principal.

19 The academic board is chaired by the principal and has 21 members. The National Sea Training Centre is not yet represented on the same basis as the other faculties. The academic board meets termly to discuss aspects of the strategic plan, to review the way the curriculum is developing and to identify resource issues. The principal values the advice offered by the board. The vice-principal chairs a regular meeting of all heads of school to review and plan curriculum developments across the college.

20 The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Expenditure, including depreciation, exceeded income by 8 per cent. The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £16.85 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £17.97 per unit. Funds are delegated to schools to cover course materials and small items of equipment. The system for ordering supplies is time consuming and, on occasions, has led to shortages. Spending by schools is scrutinised closely by the college's finance manager. Directors of faculty and heads of school are sent reports of their spending each month which they find difficult to interpret. Governors also say that they find the college's management accounts overcomplicated. These issues are being addressed. The college does not have a detailed breakdown of the costs of all its courses to guide future developments.

21 The college has recognised the need to improve the quality of its computerised management information and to increase the amount of training in its use for managers. Considerable progress has been made in improving the accuracy of the information and its accessibility to managers, but much remains to be done. Managers still question the reliability of the information and some prefer to maintain their own databases. Basic information such as the names of students and their qualifications can be difficult to obtain. Inspectors found evidence of some significant errors in data on students' achievements and in the information sent to validating bodies.

22 The college has an equal opportunities policy. The senior management team is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the policy, but there is little evidence of equal opportunities issues being discussed at their meetings. In contrast, there are detailed arrangements to ensure that the health and safety policy is both implemented and monitored. A health and safety officer is responsible for ensuring that there are appropriate procedures. The health and safety committee raises awareness of health and safety issues among staff across the college.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

23 Students' recruitment, guidance and welfare are managed by a central student services team. Learning support is delivered by a school of supported learning. The staff of the two units form a strong team.

24 For publicity, the college has to rely on the widespread distribution of prospectuses by mail and on open days held each term. Last year, 192,000 prospectuses were distributed to homes and businesses in north west Kent. The college central admissions system has clear policies and procedures. Admissions tutors, who have been nominated by each school and trained by student services, interview all full-time and many part-time students. Careers guidance and learning support staff also attend students' interviews to give advice if it is needed. Interviews are monitored to ensure that they have been conducted according to college policy.

25 Tutorials are the responsibility of each school and faculty. Students are assigned to a personal tutor from their curriculum area. Tutors are responsible for supervising each student's induction, providing personal support, formally reviewing progress twice a year and monitoring students' attendance. Student services set objectives to be achieved during induction. The extent to which these objectives are met is monitored. This year, many tutors have failed to discuss the college charter with every student and subsequently to review students' progress. Students know how to get help from their tutors when they have difficulty with their work and they speak positively about the personal support given by their tutors, but the quality of formal tutorials varies from area to area.

26 Learning support is available for every student regardless of age or ability. The support services include individual help, group workshops, and assistance specifically for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college intends to screen all full-time and some part-time students for literacy and numeracy and achieved 86 per cent of its target last year. Among those who were screened, almost a quarter were referred for learning support. Attendance at the learning support classes is voluntary and about 80 per cent of those who need help take up the offer. Teachers also refer students to the learning support centre and some students seek help themselves. Students negotiate an individual action plan with their learning support tutors and progress in achieving it is reviewed after six weeks.

27 Neither teachers, students nor parents were aware of the commitment given by the college in its charter to provide parents with regular reports on students' progress. In fact the college no longer requires teachers to write reports on the progress of their students, but it has not changed the wording of its charter. Staff in some areas do write progress reports, while others do not. The college makes no requirement of faculties to hold parents' evenings but the curriculum areas with a majority of younger students do so. The college should clarify its position on the general entitlement of students and their parents to receive written progress reports as an aid to learning, and set out its policy accurately in its charter.

28 A student adviser is available to provide personal and welfare guidance to students. Students are able to make an appointment to seek advice at either site. The number of students requiring advice is steadily rising, with almost 500 consultations having taken place between September 1996 and the time of the inspection. Requests for specialist counselling are referred to an external agency.

29 All full-time students are entitled to 10 days' work experience each year. Placements are organised either by the work placement co-ordinator, or by teachers and students using the co-ordinator's database. This year, over 700 placements have already been organised. The co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring that students are properly briefed before they undertake work experience and that feedback is obtained from employers

and students afterwards. The co-ordinator is not responsible for the quality or appropriateness of the placement. Thorough careers interviews are provided by staff from the college or the external careers service. The outcomes are recorded and students are provided with a written report. Advice is impartial and authoritative.

30 A student liaison officer works with the recently reconstituted student union. Students know about the union, its activities and the opportunities that it provides. Although the union is still in its infancy, it is beginning to have a beneficial impact on the facilities available to students.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

31 Of the 181 teaching sessions inspected, 61 per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. This is close to the average of 63 per cent for the further education sector as reported in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. In 8 per cent of the teaching sessions observed by inspectors, weaknesses outweighed the strengths. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was not good at 77 per cent. The lowest attendance was in construction at 69 per cent and the highest in classes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at 87 per cent. The average class size was low at 10 students. The following table summarises the grades given to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	0	1	3	0	0	4
GCSE	1	1	1	0	0	3
GNVQ	0	13	8	6	0	27
NVQ	5	25	17	4	0	51
Other*	21	43	27	5	0	96
Total	27	83	56	15	0	181

*includes BTEC first and national awards.

32 Most schemes of work, although not written to a common format, have clear aims and they are well planned. The best schemes of work are the product of curriculum teams who work closely together. In the hospitality division, schemes of work have been devised for all courses using a common format. These have assisted teachers to plan their work effectively and to ensure that theory, practical work and assessment are co-ordinated. The schemes of work contain information about the content of each lesson and the teaching method and resources to be used. In some areas, and particularly in business studies, teachers have included strategies to develop key skills in their schemes of work. They have also produced assignment timetables which ensure that work is spread evenly through the year. In some areas, detailed schemes of work have been

introduced only recently, but they are already making a positive impact on the planning and delivery of courses. In science and mathematics, and art and design, schemes of work consist only of lists of topics to be covered during the year.

33 Most teachers prepare their lessons thoroughly. In the best sessions, the aims were announced at the outset and they were linked to course programmes and assessment requirements. Reference was made to previous work and the extent of students' knowledge and understanding was checked by the teacher; precise directions were given for the work to be done next. For students with learning difficulties, the best sessions were planned around the students' own experiences. Lesson planning is new to some curriculum areas and although most teachers had a lesson plan, some did not describe their intentions at the beginning or sum up the main points at the end. Lack of planning sometimes led to disorganised lessons.

34 Some teachers find imaginative ways to maintain students' interest. In GNVQ business studies courses, teachers provided students with good learning materials and led interesting discussions about current issues. These included the recent changes in market share between major supermarket chains and the issues surrounding the introduction of a common European currency. In travel and tourism, students were encouraged to use information gleaned from television programmes, films, popular songs and advertisements to build up a profile of the United States of America. All students contributed enthusiastically and were surprised at the knowledge they had gained by the end of the session. A group of care students had a low level of personal and academic confidence, but the teacher encouraged them to work creatively. They wrote short social dramas and then acted them in pairs. The themes were well chosen to extend young people's understanding of social problems, and the teacher drew out their talents so that they grew visibly in confidence and self-esteem. Teaching in performing arts is of a very high standard. Students learn through doing all the jobs in the college's theatre company, which include not only set and costume design, performance, lighting and stage management but also the more workaday tasks of selling tickets and showing the audience to their seats. Not only do they do well subsequently in the theatre, but they also gain a wide range of generally useful skills.

35 Some teaching in art and design was less than satisfactory; instruction in drawing was weak. Art and design briefs were also often poor in content and presentation. In too many sessions, teachers relied on students taking notes for long periods often by dictation. In sport and leisure, staff did not direct their questions evenly around the class, but allowed the more vociferous students to dominate the lesson. In construction, students are often taught by the same teacher all day and some theory lessons last for three hours. The teaching methods used in some of these sessions lacked sufficient variety to maintain students' interest over such a long time.

36 In a number of curriculum areas, teaching in practical sessions was good, while the corresponding theory was badly taught. In every practical catering session, teachers treated their students as individuals, listened carefully to what they had to say, talked to them in a relaxed way, and provided appropriate individual guidance. Teachers often used the observation of other students to drive lessons home. For example, two members of a class played the roles of a hotel cashier and a departing guest while their colleagues watched the exchange and the body language of the participants and analysed what took place. The theory lessons, however, were often less effective. Frequently, visual aids were not sufficiently vivid to stimulate students into drawing their own conclusions and thus avoiding lengthy note taking. Question and answer sessions often deteriorated into a dialogue between the teacher and one assertive student. Similar contrasts between the teaching of theory and practice were seen in sport and leisure, media studies, construction, hairdressing and art and design.

37 In most curriculum areas, assignments are set regularly, marked and returned promptly to students. The range of assignments is generally appropriate. The quality of marking is usually good and in the best examples teachers clearly identify students' strengths and the areas where further work is required. Constructive and helpful comments encourage students to develop their knowledge of the topic without wasting time on irrelevancies. In engineering, assessment in some technician courses was ill-planned and students spent too great a proportion of their time being assessed. Consideration should be given to combining assessments across a number of units to ease the load.

38 The relationship between teachers and students is good. Friendly and supportive relationships help students to learn confidently. In mathematics and science, the individual attention given to students encouraged them to think logically. In performing arts, students' opinions were listened to and acted upon. In a few lessons, teachers tolerated immature and mildly disruptive behaviour. With firmer classroom management, friendly relationships could have been sustained without compromising the wish of the majority of students to learn.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

39 Most students are enthusiastic about their studies and speak lucidly about them. In many areas, students demonstrated high levels of knowledge and understanding of their subjects. They also build up good practical skills. In performing arts, students achieved high standards through a disciplined approach to work. In engineering and construction, students carried out their work with proper regard to health and safety.

40 The college is not a significant provider of GCE AS and A level subjects and until September 1995, it offered only one-year courses. There have been too few students aged between 16 and 18 in each of the last two years for significant conclusions to be drawn about their examination

performance relative to national averages. The following table shows the number of students of all ages entered for GCE A level subjects in 1996, and the number who achieved a pass at grades A to E. The majority of these students attended evening classes or attempted a GCE A level as part of a full-time, one-year access to higher education course. The success rates in most subjects apart from English language were poor.

Success rates on one-year GCE A level courses in 1996

Subject	Number started	Number completed	Number passed	Success rate
English language	21	21	16	76%
Psychology	29	19	2	7%
Biology	19	16	3	16%
Mathematics	20	9	3	15%
English literature	75	60	12	16%
Modern history	16	9	2	13%

Note: success rate is the percentage of those enrolled on 1 November who subsequently achieved a pass at grades A to E.

41 The college does not offer a GCSE repeat course, but students are able to choose from a number of subjects related to their vocational programmes. Students on advanced level vocational courses who do not have GCSE English or mathematics at grade C or above are encouraged to attend classes and to take the examination again. The following table shows the number of students entered for GCSE subjects in 1996, and the number who achieved grade A to C passes. Success rates in mathematics and French are very poor.

Success rates on one-year GCSE courses in 1996

Subject	Number started	Number completed	Number achieving A* to C passes	Success rate
Mathematics	173	128	40	23%
English language	139	112	66	47%
Human biology	13	11	7	54%
Media studies	18	12	7	39%
Psychology	19	12	10	53%
French	26	11	4	15%

Note: success rate is the percentage of those enrolled on 1 November who subsequently achieved a pass at grades A to C.*

42 Seventy-four per cent of students, aged 16 to 18, in their final year of study on the advanced vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) performance tables for 1996 were successful. A similar proportion was successful in 1995. On intermediate

vocational courses, 63 per cent of students were successful in 1996. The college was in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector according to this performance measure for both advanced and intermediate qualifications in 1996.

43 The following table shows students' success rates over the last three years on most of the national diploma or GNVQ courses offered at the college. Success rates in excess of 80 per cent are good. The college has been generally successful in making the transition from BTEC national diplomas to advanced GNVQ without the temporary drop in students' achievements which some other colleges have experienced.

Success rates on advanced vocational courses (national diplomas and advanced GNVQs) expressed as percentages

	1994	1995	1996
Information technology	–	50	63
Science	–	40	62
Electrical and electronic engineering	–	75	47
Mechanical engineering	–	25	67
Business and finance	63	55 ¹	53
Leisure studies	73	68	67 ¹
Travel and tourism	82	67	84
Hotel and catering	91	82	88
Health	75	73	85 ¹
Nursery nursing/child studies	86	93	89
Social care	–	68	85 ¹
Performing arts	91	73	91
Media	–	100	92
Art and design	–	–	80 ¹

Note: success rate is the percentage of those enrolled on 1 November of the first year of the course who achieved the qualification.

¹ results of the first cohort to take GNVQ at advanced level.

44 The following table shows success rates among students on intermediate vocational courses. These courses are the vocational equivalent of four or five GCSEs at grade C. In engineering, the success rate has fallen each year, mainly because students fail to achieve the required units even though they stay to complete the course. At intermediate level, success rates did drop with the introduction of GNVQ awards, and recovered thereafter. Success rates among business students rose sharply in 1995 and remained good in 1996.

Success rates on intermediate vocational courses (first diplomas and intermediate GNVQs) expressed as percentages

	1994	1995	1996
Science	92	55	–
Engineering	71	37	25
Business	68 ¹	85	86
Leisure and tourism	–	–	50 ¹
Health and social care	80	50 ¹	63
Performing arts	63	64	73
Art and design	65	53 ¹	66

Note: success rate is the percentage of those enrolled on 1 November who achieved the qualification.

¹ *results of the first cohort to take GNVQ at intermediate level.*

45 The success rates among students on vocational craft courses vary considerably from year to year. Most of the courses listed in the following table lead to NVQs. Electronic servicing has not yet been incorporated into the NVQ framework. The success rate on the full-time hairdressing course in 1996 was particularly poor.

Success rates on two-year vocational craft courses expressed as percentages

	1994	1995	1996
NVQ level 2 brickwork (part time)	72	53	64
Electronic servicing C&G 2240 part I	50	41	43
Electronic servicing C&G 2240 part II	–	80	63
Food and drink NVQ level 2	47	58	57
Beauty therapy NVQ level 3	–	90	69
Hairdressing NVQ level 2 (full time)	65	77	9

Note: success rate is the percentage of those enrolled on 1 November of the first year of the course who achieved the qualification.

46 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities speak enthusiastically about their experiences at the college. They respond well to its adult environment and they are encouraged to take advantage of all the facilities. Many are entered for externally-accredited examinations but more use could be made of national accreditation.

47 The college has monitored the destinations of its students for the last six years. Each student who leaves a course is telephoned in an attempt to determine their destination. The college has been particularly successful in having contacted over 90 per cent of its past students in each of the last

three years. The percentages of students going into further education courses and employment reflect the high proportion studying at intermediate level or on industry-related NVQ programmes. Their destinations are shown in the following table.

Destinations of students who completed courses in 1994 to 1996

	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96
Number of students completing a course	804	904	830
Number of students contacted	748	832	747
To higher education	9%	10%	10%
To further education	33%	34%	28%
To employment	40%	38%	39%
Other destinations	11%	10%	13%
Not contacted	7%	8%	10%

48 Students do well in a range of sporting and cultural pursuits. In 1996, the college football team won the Southern England Sports Association Intermediate cup. A former media student has turned one of her final assignments on Jack the Ripper into a tourist guide that is to be published. Students from the catering department have recently won a cookery competition against students from other Kent colleges. The competition was judged by a well-known television cook. Performing arts students play in at least six major productions each year. A number of students who left the performing arts courses last year have formed their own touring company and there have been favourable reviews of their productions. Of the students with learning difficulties who left the vocational access course last year, one has become a trainee manager of a restaurant run by an international fast food chain, and another has become a nursing auxiliary.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

49 For the last two years the college has been developing a quality assurance framework, which it began to introduce in February 1995. There were previously many individual measures used by faculties and service areas which were unco-ordinated and inconsistent. The new policy and procedures are intended to lead towards a 'total quality management' culture. The policy incorporates the quality assurance requirements of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and Kent TEC, as well as the college's own charter commitments.

50 The quality assurance system has three main elements: quality improvement teams, programme area reviews, and detailed course reviews. The quality improvement teams report to the academic board. Six teams have been formed to cover the college's main functions. Each team is chaired by a head of faculty or service manager, and members are

drawn from among the staff of different faculties and services. One group, which deals with teaching and learning, has an assessment team which intends to conduct classroom observations. It has not yet begun to do so. All these groups use the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement* as their starting point. There have been improvements resulting from the work of some of the quality improvement teams. For example, the resources team reviewed classroom equipment and found that there were insufficient overhead projectors. More were bought. The governance and management team recommended that a search committee should be formed and that criteria for membership of the board should be determined. The students' achievement team has not yet considered examination results or retention rates. They chose instead to research the extent to which students enjoy their studies.

51 The second element in the quality assurance system is programme area review. A form is completed for each course or cluster of courses every term. Course leaders consult staff and student representatives before completing these forms. The form requires comments on enrolments, students' retention, resources, and students' views. The last report each year requires an analysis of students' achievements and retention, actions to be taken, the name of the individual responsible for dealing with the matter and a date for completion. The programme review system is new. Only a small proportion of courses have completed a review and the procedure is behind schedule. The rigour with which the forms have been completed varies considerably, from those which deal with every requirement conscientiously to others which show a scant respect for the process among those who fill in the forms. The forms are passed to heads of school and then to faculty directors. Managers are supposed to check that the forms have been properly completed and to take appropriate action, but the uneven quality of the reports suggests that their monitoring is inadequate.

52 The third element in the quality assurance system is a detailed review of two courses each month. The first of these reviews took place in February 1997. A team of senior managers and a governor carry out the reviews, which inquire into any aspect of the course that is poor, including enrolment, students' retention or success rates. Staff incorporate evidence, where appropriate, from industry and from their students. The programme leader, head of school and director of faculty meet the committee to discuss the courses in detail. The review committee makes recommendations which are then taken to the senior management team, the academic board and to the governors. This final stage has not yet taken place. The reviews that have been conducted so far resulted in a plan of action from the committee.

53 The quality assurance framework is described by the college as a 'closed loop system', in which different elements come into play as the year progresses. Nevertheless, there is no structural connection between

the quality assurance and strategic planning cycles. The vice-principal and the senior management team work on both, and they incorporate quality issues into the strategic plan. The academic board has quality assurance as a standing agenda item. Under the new framework, it is proposed that this agenda item will draw on the work of the quality improvement teams as they report their findings. The governors' role in the college's quality assurance procedures will increase with their direct involvement in monthly course reviews.

54 Two years ago the college had four different appraisal schemes, all influencing performance-related pay. These schemes were cumbersome to operate and incompatible with each other. Proposals for a single scheme for all staff were agreed last year. The scheme works on a two-year cycle. Managers appraise their staff, and task or classroom observation is part of the process. Most staff have been trained for appraisal and all senior managers and most middle managers have been appraised. They comprise less than 10 per cent of the college's employees.

55 The college has been working towards the Investors in People award since 1994, with the support of Kent TEC. That progress has been so slow is largely due to changes in senior management. An assessment was held recently and a decision was deferred so that some recommendations could be implemented. The college expects that the award will be made in the next few months.

56 Staff development is the responsibility of the vice-principal, to whom the staff-development officer reports. She plans and organises events at the college and keeps the records. There is a staff-development policy. The budget has doubled from a low point of about £30,000 three years ago, and it now stands at 1 per cent of the college's annual staffing expenditure. The senior management team produces an annual set of staff-development priorities which relate to the strategic plan and include information from each faculty and service. Individual staff may request specific training. Most training is done at the college. The procedures are well managed and detailed records are kept. New staff who are employed at least half time are allocated a mentor and given an induction to the college when they take up their posts.

57 The college produced a self-assessment report for the first time for inspection. It was developed from faculty assessments of their strengths and weaknesses and from evaluations made by service managers of their work. It follows the headings of the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Teaching and the promotion of learning and students' achievements are dealt with in faculty reports. Inspectors found that each section provided a useful starting point for their work. Most sections contain qualitative judgements, but few make reference to any evidence. In some areas, weaknesses are implied rather than clearly stated. This tends to give the impression that they are less significant than they are in reality.

RESOURCES

Staffing

58 The college has a total of 566 staff, of whom 157 are teachers with permanent contracts and 258 are part-time teachers employed on a sessional basis. There have been substantial changes among teaching staff during the past 20 months. Twenty-three teachers have retired and 138 people have been appointed, 79 of whom are teachers. Among full-time teachers, 98 are men and 59 are women. Among the support and administrative staff 42 are men and 109 are women. There is only one woman in the senior management team of nine, but at middle management level the balance between men and women is more even. Following recent staff changes, the average age of teachers has fallen. The ratio of students to teachers is low at 11:1. The target average group size is 18 students, but there are wide variations and the lessons observed during the inspection had an average of only 10 students in attendance.

59 Most teachers are appropriately qualified in their specialist subjects. Many have degrees and professional qualifications. In a minority of cases, the qualifications held by teachers are inappropriate for the work they are now doing. Current industrial experience is regarded as a priority when appointing new teachers and in some cases, notably in performing arts, teachers continue to practise their professional skills. It is an objective of the college that teachers should be encouraged to update their skills, but there is no strategy to ensure that this happens.

60 Only 66 per cent of teachers have a teaching qualification. Those who are not teacher trained are encouraged to study for an award, but there is no compulsion to do so. After a slow start, the number of teachers obtaining training and development lead body accreditation has accelerated. Almost a third have achieved both the assessor and verifier awards, and 60 more are working towards them.

61 There are sound personnel policies and procedures. Documentation is clear, and staff are given copies of all relevant documents in their manual. A professionally-qualified personnel manager, who is supported by two assistants, oversees the selection and interviewing procedure, which is designed to assure equality of opportunity. Part-time staff are selected on the same basis as full-time staff and have similar entitlements. They are also encouraged to contribute to the development of the courses on which they teach. The personnel manager controls the staffing budget, which is approximately 66 per cent of total college expenditure.

Equipment/learning resources

62 The college has a wide range of specialist and general purpose equipment which is appropriate to the curriculum. Classrooms are well furnished with whiteboards, overhead projectors and video playback equipment. There is good equipment throughout the college but notably in engineering, maritime training and performing arts. Close links with

industry have prompted donations of equipment, including a totally-equipped gas boiler workshop. The same donor has also offered to equip an air conditioning and refrigeration workshop. The equipment at the Gravesend site, in hotel and catering studies and in hairdressing courses is equal to the best in industry. The equipment for similar courses at Dartford, on the other hand, is poor. The range of art and design equipment is too narrow, especially in three-dimensional design.

63 The college has a comprehensive plan to develop its information technology resources. It has 393 computers, of which 334 are modern machines able to run the latest software. There is a ratio of one up-to-date machine to every nine full-time equivalent students. There are large open-plan information technology centres at both sites. They are mainly used for teaching. Students have only limited access to these centres at other times. There are suites of computers for specialist use in some curriculum areas. Their quality is variable, but among the best is the computer-aided design and manufacturing facility in the faculty of technology.

64 There are libraries at both Dartford and Gravesend which have been refurbished recently. They have a total of 20,000 books between them. Although each library has a computerised catalogue there is no link between them. Students at each site have access to only half the college's books. The number and range of books is poor in a number of curriculum areas including construction, catering, leisure and tourism, health and care, hairdressing, performing arts and business. The college invested £75,000 in 1995-96 to improve the number and range of books in the libraries, but not all those that were bought have been entered on the catalogue. Some schools buy their own texts, which are available only to their own students. The Dartford library subscribes to 52 periodicals and journals and the Gravesend library to 92. There is only one compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database terminal in each library. There are a total of 82 study spaces. Each library has a learning support workshop and a careers service resource base. The libraries also maintain the central teaching resources of audio-visual aids and equipment, and there is a video editing suite for staff and student use at Gravesend.

Accommodation

65 The college is located on two main sites which are 13 miles apart. It serves two distinct communities at Dartford and Gravesend. A large proportion of the curriculum and most of the support services are duplicated. At Dartford, which is the administrative centre for the college, the buildings mostly date from the early 1960s. The main building is unattractive, with external cladding that has deteriorated badly. It is no longer weather-proof and the cladding will soon need to be replaced. A hall has been converted into a theatre which is used by the college and also by touring companies. A late Victorian house is being adapted to provide a very good music centre, with recording studios. At Gravesend,

there is a range of buildings which includes those built as a school in the 1960s. The older buildings have been improved. The original school sports hall was refurbished and a second, larger, sports hall was added in 1992. Purpose-built technology and hospitality and catering buildings were also opened in 1992. They provide an attractive environment to work in. A swimming pool is under construction that will enable The National Sea Training Centre to offer survival courses and also improve the opportunities for sport and leisure courses. A third site, close to the River Thames at Gravesend, is used for sea survival and specialist fire fighting training.

66 Most of the teaching accommodation is of a high standard and some of it is exceptionally good. Close attention has been paid to internal decoration. However, some long, bare corridors could be improved with better lighting, more attention to colour and display materials. Access for students with disabilities has been improved. A lift has recently been installed at Gravesend to enable students with restricted mobility to gain access to all floors. Refectories on both sites have recently been improved, but the one at Dartford is overcrowded during busy times. The refectory at Gravesend is larger and more attractive. There is no student common room at either site.

67 There are some huts on both sites, used largely for storage. When the college has more accurate information about its space utilisation it should consider whether it can dispose of these temporary buildings. The estate is professionally managed by qualified staff. The campus is cleaned regularly. It shows little sign of vandalism and health and safety matters are attended to carefully. The arrangement of buildings on both sites is complex and the signs showing customers the way around them are inadequate.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

68 The particular strengths of the college are:

- the comprehensive range of courses at all levels
- the entrepreneurial activities in partnership with industry and the community
- the outstanding provision in performing arts
- the effective governors
- the good communication among staff
- the good central admissions and student support services
- the quality of the accommodation at Gravesend
- the industrially-related facilities at Gravesend, especially the two national training centres
- the well-managed staff-development programme.

69 In order to improve further the quality of provision, the college should address the following issues:

- inconsistent feedback to employers and parents on students' progress
- poor management information
- the variable quality of tutorials
- poor success rates on some courses
- incomplete implementation of the quality assurance system
- the poor library bookstock.

FIGURES

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

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

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

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

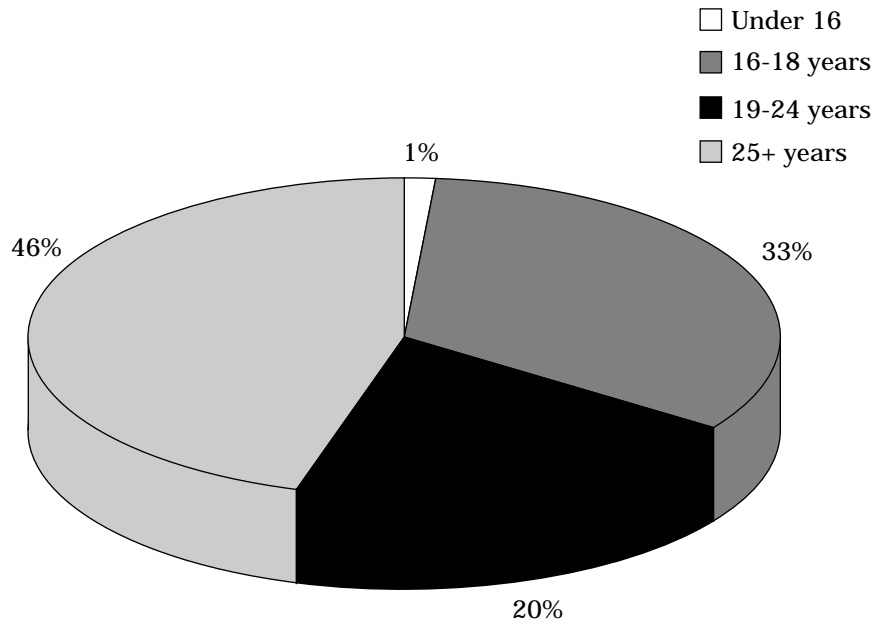
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 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

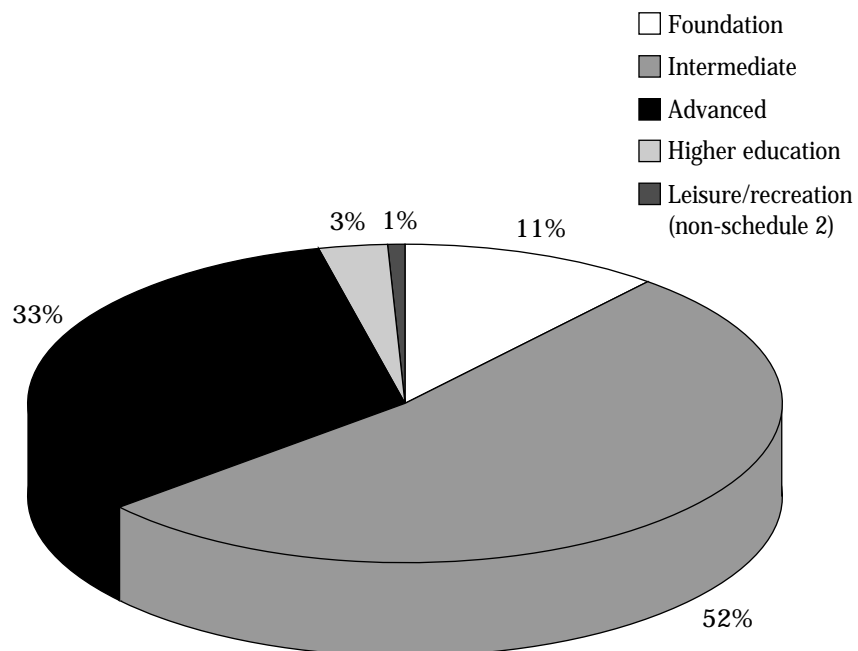
**North West Kent College of Technology: percentage student numbers by age
(as at November 1996)**



Student numbers: 6,102

Figure 2

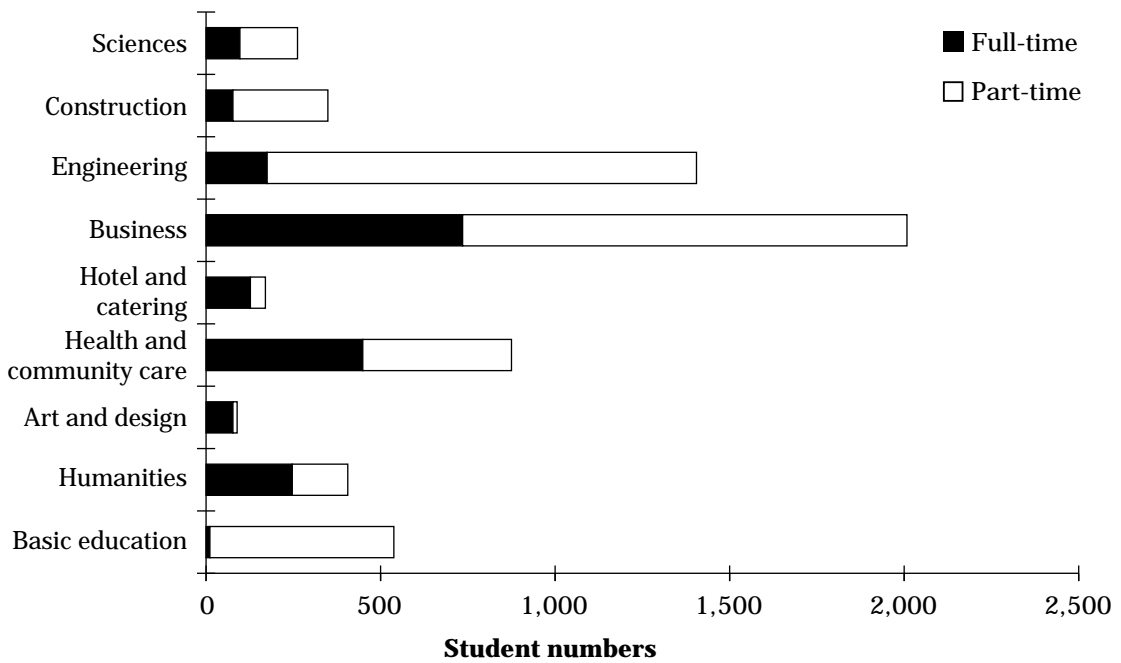
**North West Kent College of Technology: percentage student numbers by level of
study (as at November 1996)**



Student numbers: 6,102

Figure 3

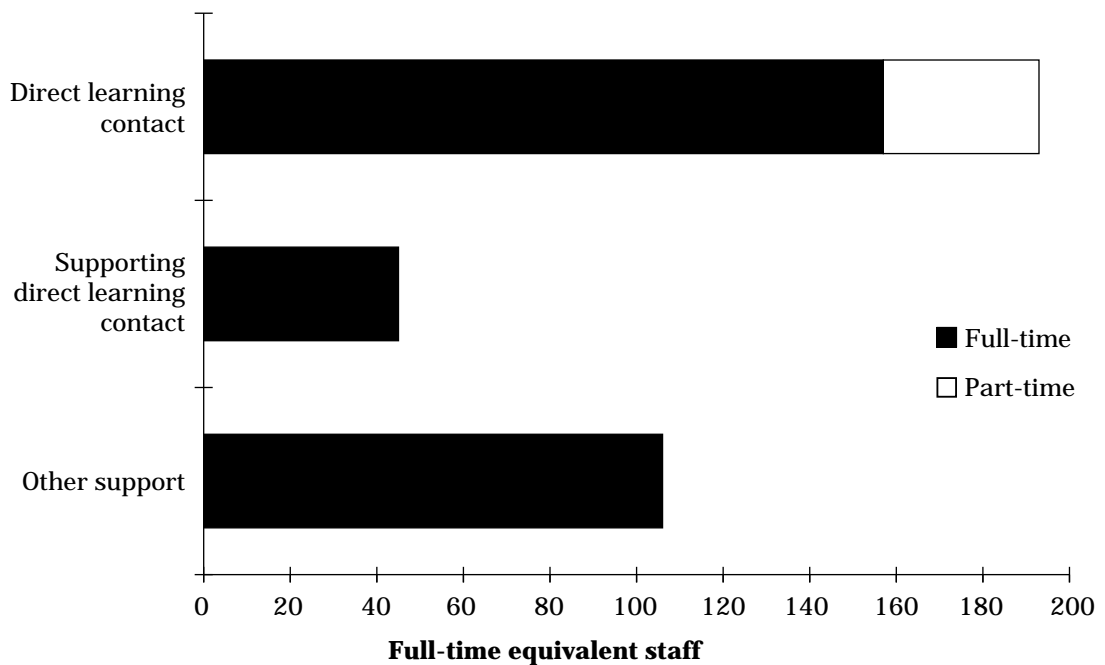
North West Kent College of Technology: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 6,102

Figure 4

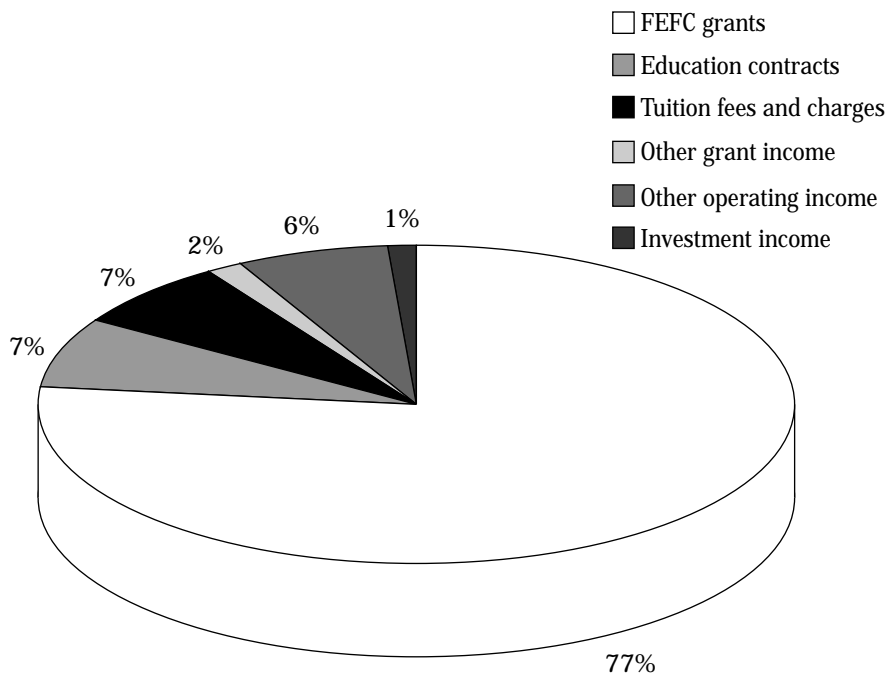
North West Kent College of Technology: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 344

Figure 5

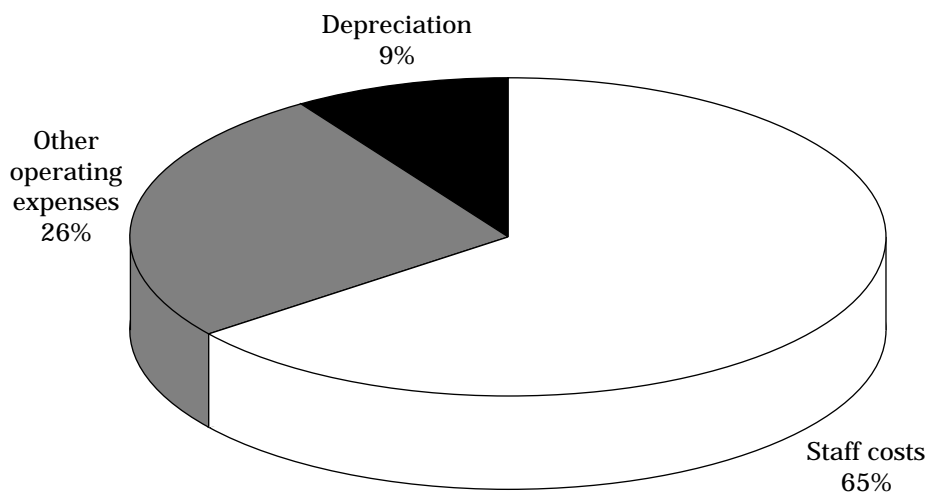
North West Kent College of Technology: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £8,470,000

Figure 6

North West Kent College of Technology: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £9,186,000

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
May 1997