

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Northbrook College, Sussex

August 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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The Further Education Funding Council has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education every four years. The inspectorate also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum and gives advice to 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 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-95

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 103/96

NORTHBROOK COLLEGE, SUSSEX

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected September 1995-May 1996

Summary

Northbrook College, Sussex is a general further education college located in and around Worthing in West Sussex. It offers a comprehensive range of mainly vocational courses extending from pre-foundation to undergraduate level. About 35 per cent of the college's full-time students are on courses in art, design and the performing arts. The college has close connections with the community and productive relationships with local employers and with the schools in the area. There are effective procedures for strategic planning which foster the involvement of staff. The scheme for personal tutorials is well designed, as is the flexible childcare provision. Facilities at the main site are modern, attractive and well resourced. The library and a growing number of learning resource centres provide good materials for students in class and for their independent learning. There are matters that require improvement. Management information other than that relating to finances is poor, including the student performance data which staff at all levels need if they are to monitor and raise standards. Student support and guidance services need better co-ordination. The quality of teaching varies widely and theoretical work is generally poorer than practical work. Examination results are mixed. The quality assurance system is complex and is not adequately controlled by the academic board. The corporation board has not given sufficient attention to the quality of the college's work. Much of the college's accommodation is poor.

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		3
Quality assurance		3
Resources:	staffing	3
	equipment/learning resources	2
	accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Construction	3	Hairdressing, beauty and floristry	3
Engineering	3	Health and social care	2
Business, information technology and administration	3	Applied design	2
		Visual arts and design	3
Hospitality, catering, travel and tourism	2	Academic studies	3
		SLDD and basic education	2

INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection of Northbrook College, Sussex took place in three phases. Enrolment and induction were inspected in September 1995, curriculum areas were inspected during the spring of 1996 and cross-college aspects of provision in May 1996. A team of 15 inspectors spent a total of 80 days in the college. They inspected 195 classes, examined students' practical and written work and met college staff, managers, governors, parents, students, employers, a representative of the Sussex Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (TEC) and members of community groups. They examined a range of college documents including records of meetings, policy statements, planning documents and performance data such as students' examination results. Provision franchised by the college to other training providers was under review by the college at the time of the inspection and was not included in the inspection schedule.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Northbrook College, Sussex is a large general further education college in West Sussex. It still owes much of its character to three former colleges which came together to form it in 1986. The college has eight sites, including three in Worthing and others at Durrington, Horsham and Shoreham-by-Sea. Students come from 78 local education authorities (LEAs) across the country and around 40 nationalities are represented at the college. Within 30 miles of Worthing there are 11 further education colleges which offer courses for local students. There are also five 11-18 schools in the Worthing area.

3 About one-third of full-time students at the college are school leavers and the other two-thirds are over 19 years of age. The college is a major provider of adult and continuing education in the area; some 400 part-time day and evening courses are offered. During the late 1980s and early 1990s the college grew quickly in providing both further and higher education. Since 1993, the participation rate for young people staying on in full-time education beyond the age of 16 in the area has reached 80 per cent. At the time of inspection, there were 18,124 enrolments including 6,995 students on recreational courses. Of this total, approximately 1,000 students were attending higher education courses. There has been no significant increase in full-time student enrolments since incorporation. Part-time numbers exclude students on recreational courses and those on programmes franchised by the college to external bodies. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are given in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

4 There are 186 full-time equivalent teaching staff, 56 full-time equivalent staff supporting direct learning, and 131 full-time equivalent other support staff. A full-time equivalent staff profile is given in figure 4. The college has recently reviewed its aims and priorities and has concluded

that it should narrow its range of provision to concentrate on growth areas. The college mission remains: 'to assist individuals to develop their capabilities throughout their lives by providing high-quality opportunities for learning which are relevant and appropriate to their individual needs and the needs of employers'.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

5 The college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time further education programmes which meet the needs of most prospective students. There are courses from pre-foundation to degree level. The college has developed some of its own higher education and has a growing amount of work offered in collaboration with universities. There are 65 full-time further education programmes, including courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and in adult basic education. Full-time access to higher education programmes in humanities and social science are available to mature students wishing to gain entry to university. Next academic year, the college plans to offer only seven subjects leading to the General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and seven subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level. The college has decided to concentrate on vocational education and the remaining programme of general education subjects will relate to the vocational curriculum. Owing to declining enrolment in engineering the college plans to discontinue lower level craft courses from September 1996.

6 Part-time programmes range from foundation to higher national certificate level, and include teacher training and English as a foreign language. There are few part-time art and design courses, in contrast to the considerable strength that Northbrook has in full-time programmes in this area, but the college plans to remedy this next session. Part-time access courses in humanities and social sciences, health studies and computing for women, and evening study in humanities and social science are available. The college offers adult studies on behalf of the LEA and an extensive summer programme.

7 The college takes the interests of the community into account in its planning. The college theatre is a bridge to local organisations, including the youth service, Worthing youth theatre, and community theatre projects. The college promotes environmental awareness and works closely with interested organisations. There are a growing number of partnerships with colleges in the USA, Canada, Japan, Ecuador, Sweden, Denmark, Greece and Poland.

8 Relationships with schools are good. Schools respect the college for the impartiality of the advice their pupils receive. The principal and his marketing team visit schools to provide information on the college to year 10 and 11 pupils. These initial contacts are followed up with a well-planned programme of advice and information, managed by the schools liaison officer. Contacts with local schools which have sixth forms,

and with the local sixth form college, are cordial but less productive. The college organises open days and a series of briefings for prospective students. 'Taster' days for pupils are offered by the academic divisions which enable prospective students to sample courses at the college.

9 The college has strong links with local employers who report that it is eager to meet their needs. Some curriculum areas, such as engineering, have employer advisory groups to advise them on new opportunities for education and training. Other subject groups which were largely defunct are being re-initiated. The work of these groups is not yet co-ordinated. There are many informal links with business which are based on teachers' contacts. Although there are examples of courses specifically designed for local and national companies, overall the extent of this type of provision is modest.

10 There is a fruitful relationship with Sussex Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise. The TEC funds significant initiatives including the labour market intelligence project, and a high level skills programme for unemployed adults which leads to a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 4. The college intends to use its growing expertise in providing labour market intelligence to assist local companies. The enterprise unit is responsible for managing TEC contracts and increasingly helps the academic divisions to devise appropriate courses for industry. It also manages two major training contracts in administration for the police, and in basic food hygiene, health and safety, and customer care for a major leisure company.

11 Marketing is the responsibility of the director of corporate development. A publicity and promotion group, with representatives from the college's academic divisions, has been established. This group selects media for promotion and is responsible for the high quality of printed materials. There is a well-planned programme of marketing events which covers every area of the college's activity.

12 Arrangements for quality assurance in the college cover equal opportunities. The policy for equal opportunities is detailed and an equal opportunities committee has clear terms of reference. It meets termly and discusses a wide range of matters, including accommodation, students' hardship, staff development, facilities for worship for minority religions and the reasons for students' withdrawals from college courses. It produces an annual report for the senior management team which includes some analysis of data. Nevertheless, the work of the committee is not sufficiently tied to the college's priorities. The outcomes of its meetings are not reported formally to the governing body. There has been no staff development on equal opportunities issues during the last year.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

13 The corporate governing body has 12 members: seven from business, two co-opted members, the principal, a member of staff and a student.

At the time of the inspection there were two vacancies. The college intends to add two further business members. The current business governors are senior managers in banking, insurance, education and industry. Areas of experience which require strengthening are estates and personnel management. The governors amended the constitution and membership of some of their committees in November 1995 to meet recommendations made by the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) auditors. The governing body has five committees: finance and general purposes; audit; personnel; remuneration; and a search committee responsible for filling vacancies for governors. Attendance at the six corporate governing body meetings from February 1995 until the time of inspection was good at 88 per cent.

14 Meetings of the board and its committees are clerked by the college secretary, a senior post created in 1995. Minutes are recorded meticulously and comprehensive background information is provided for members. A code of conduct has been adopted which takes account of the recommendations of committees established by government. There is a register of governors' interests. The business of the board is carried out in an orderly and efficient manner. Soon after incorporation, the board considered ways of preventing the repetition of debates held in committee at full governors' meetings. Governors have also considered the distinction between their own role and that of managers. Issues such as student recruitment are discussed, but there has been no detailed scrutiny of students' achievements. Governors should do more to satisfy themselves about the quality of the college's performance.

15 The strategic planning process has been developed, albeit at a modest pace, since incorporation. There is growing support for strategic planning among staff, increasing involvement of governors and greater awareness of resource implications. Teachers have the opportunity to contribute to the strategic plan. The college has developed a set of planning priorities, but they have yet to be translated into clear objectives.

16 After incorporation, and following a period of rapid growth, the principal spent substantial time outside the college with the intention of raising its national profile. In the self-assessment report the principal acknowledges that this led to slow internal progress at a time of considerable national change and resulted in a 'plateau of achievement'. To rectify this, management and academic restructuring have been undertaken. The college has abandoned its earlier faculty structure in favour of four academic divisions, each with a number of programme managers. The new structure is widely supported and many staff appear enthusiastic about it. Communications within the college are considered to have improved since the structure was changed. Staff are still settling into their new roles and not all the programme manager posts have been filled. The structure itself is developing and divisional boards of study are beginning to emerge as forums for academic debate which staff value. The changes that have taken place have resulted from close examination

of the curriculum management needs of the college. Management of cross-college functions has not yet had the same degree of scrutiny.

17 The college has not met its enrolment targets for the last two years. In 1994-95, it fell short of its full-time target by nearly 9 per cent and of its part-time target by over 19 per cent, resulting in a refund to the FEFC. In 1995-96, the college estimates that its full-time enrolments are down by just over 8 per cent against target, although part-time enrolments are expected to substantially exceed the target. The college has responded to this serious situation in a number of ways, including the management restructuring that has already taken place, and an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum leading to the discontinuation of some weaker courses.

18 Changes have been made recently in the way the college allocates money internally. Previously, budget holders were given funds for materials and for agreed major items of equipment. Divisions and programme areas now have a delegated budget for all areas of expenditure, including staffing. Budget holders understand how their allocations have been made, and they receive timely and reliable information to enable them to monitor their budgets with confidence. The college has an average level of funding of £16.77 per unit of activity for 1995-96. The national median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £17.84 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are given in figures 5 and 6. Sufficient work has been done on the costing of courses to enable realistic decisions to be taken about those which are not sustainable.

19 There are significant shortcomings in the college's management information systems and data. There is an urgent need for more accurate information on student enrolment, retention and attendance to improve the tracking of students' progress and to log their achievements. Some student destination data are collected, but the quantity and quality of this important information are insufficient.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

20 There are policies and procedures for the guidance and support of students at all stages of their contact with the college. Many are new and they are not yet applied consistently. Different managers are responsible for each part of the structure, and the formal arrangements to ensure that they work together are inadequate. These deficiencies result in pockets of good practice rather than a properly co-ordinated system of support.

21 Good relationships with schools permit college staff regularly to attend parents' and careers events and publicise the special features of the college's provision. There is a well-publicised series of college open days. First contacts with the college by prospective students are dealt with by helpful, well-informed reception staff. While most students receive clear guidance from the college which leads to their enrolment on an appropriate

course, some are given insufficient information about what their programmes will involve. All courses have an induction phase organised by the course team, but they vary in scope and effectiveness across the college.

22 Tests devised by the Basic Skills Agency are given to full-time students who are considered by their teachers to have a low level of prior academic achievement. The number thought to need help with literacy and numeracy this year is about 100, of whom about 75 are using the support provided. These figures are low, in comparison with many other colleges. The college should consider testing all students' core skills systematically. Although the quality of the learning support provided is good, resources are meagre. A designated room at the Broadwater site has no learning materials, and the few staff involved have to carry the necessary resources to each session. Teachers' awareness of their students' basic skills deficits is generally poor. Facilities to help part-time students are inadequate.

23 The college has a well-conceived tutorial system which outlines minimum entitlements for students. Records are kept of all formal contacts between tutor and student. Students hold a copy of their tutorial record and the actions required are agreed and checked by the tutor at the next meeting. There are examples of sound practice in all divisions, but the most consistent good practice was observed in the division of health, hospitality and leisure. Students, parents and employers reported wide variations between courses in the quality of the tutorial support provided, and especially in tutors' responses to students' absences. The personal tutor system for part-time students is underdeveloped.

24 A well-qualified counselling and welfare team provides a high standard of service to both students and staff, but resources are limited. Careful records are kept which show increasing demand for the service. Accommodation for the unit at the Broadwater site is appropriately located and allows for confidentiality. At West Durrington it does not, and the unit has no settled base at any other site. The unit produces monitoring reports on a termly and annual basis.

25 The college has an efficient accommodation service which provides lists of properties for students to rent. About 350 students use the service each year, including a significant proportion of those who come from overseas. All properties are vetted carefully and there are good working relationships with owners. The college's early childhood centre offers pre-school provision for three to five year old children. It has 24 places and caters for about 50 different children each week. The availability of hourly rates, which allow students to pay in accordance with their college timetables, enables a significant number of students to undertake courses which they would otherwise be unable to follow.

26 A job search programme is available to students. Although not in widespread use across the college, it is making a valuable contribution to the preparation of students for adult and working life. Careers education

and guidance are not well developed. At present, the careers adviser attached to the college has no links with managers, and no annual report is sought by the college.

27 The student union is moribund. A few students are struggling valiantly to encourage greater participation and they are given good support by the student adviser. They are hampered by the ineffectiveness of the student council and by the lack of common rooms and of any identified student union base, except on the Broadwater site.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

28 Inspectors observed 195 teaching and learning sessions with 1,763 students in attendance. Fifty-seven per cent had strengths that clearly outweighed the weaknesses. This is some 7 per cent below the national figure for sessions observed during the 1994-95 college inspection programme, according to *The Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1994-95*. Seven per cent of the sessions inspected had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. The average attendance at the inspected classes was only 75 per cent, which is poor. The average group size shown on the registers for the classes inspected was 12. The following table summarises the grades given to the classes inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level and GCSE		3	5	5	3	0	16
GNVQ		7	9	7	2	0	25
NVQ		4	17	15	2	0	38
Other vocational		10	36	30	5	0	81
Basic education/SLDD		4	8	5	0	0	17
Other		3	6	7	2	0	18
Total		31	81	69	14	0	195

29 There are schemes of work in all curriculum areas. Their quality and level of detail vary among divisions, subjects and courses. The better schemes provide a clear outline of the work to be done and they are shared with students to give them an overview of the teaching programme. The less effective examples lack sufficient detail or are merely a list of topics. Most teachers have lesson plans for their classes and many of them set out aims and objectives as well as a description of the activities and materials required for each session.

30 Most students are taking vocational subjects, all of which include development of practical skills. Practical classes are generally well planned in all curriculum areas. The more successful classes included demonstrations of good practice by teachers and clear reference to

theoretical concepts. In construction, staff use samples of materials and models from their commercial work to give greater realism. They also invite students with site experience to contribute to the classroom debate. A pastry class in hotel and catering concentrated on the food to be served in the restaurant and coffee shop that day, so that students were introduced to the normal pressures of the industry. Some practical sessions were less effective. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, some classes were less effective than they might have been because there were not enough customers in the salon and the pace of work was necessarily slower than would be experienced commercially. In an art and design class, a group of students were researching for a project on mysticism and magic. One student was working from a highly stylised image of Medusa, instead of drawing from life.

31 Theory teaching was generally less well handled than practical work. Some sessions were overloaded; insufficient time was allowed for the teacher to check students' understanding during the class or, in some cases, even to complete all the work in the lesson plan. Conversely, some classes in business and computing were designed with too little content and work was conducted at a lethargic pace, so that students easily became distracted. In some sessions the level of the work or the teaching methods were inappropriate to the subject or to the abilities of the students. In a foreign language session, the primary aim was identified as being the development of students' oral skills, but more than half the session was devoted to learning irregular verb forms. In construction, in some business classes and in most GCE A level sessions, there were very small groups of students which restricted the teaching techniques open to staff. Such small groups did not provide sufficient variety of viewpoint to enrich classroom debate. An engineering revision session was based on a past examination question paper which the teacher used to ask for responses and to provide model answers. One student was allowed to answer all the questions put to the whole class. The rest of the group became visibly disenchanted with this, but the teacher made no adjustment to his style and appeared unaware that the class was being monopolised.

32 In a minority of theory sessions there were well-structured, imaginatively delivered lectures that maintained the interest and enthusiasm of the group. For example, an art history class was looking at the differences between madness and genius as related to two twentieth century movements, Dada and Surrealism. The teacher gave an ambitious but successful lecture in which the issues were appropriately illustrated, and which led onto a practical session. An access to higher education session was also notable. Using one of the set texts, students were invited to perform the roles of the main characters and to analyse their motives and their part in plot development. The success of the class owed much to the imaginative interventions of the teacher and to the careful preparation that students had done beforehand.

33 Staff in the academic studies area and in business and management, generally made good use of the whiteboard and audio visual aids. They also provided students with well-presented handouts to aid their revision. In construction, learning packages have been developed to help students focus their private study, but in hairdressing and beauty therapy students are not always encouraged to work independently. New learning areas are being well used to support classroom activities and to enable students to learn at their own pace, particularly in plumbing, business and management and applied design.

34 Core skills are taught in vocational contexts in hotel and catering and in leisure and tourism. However, in business courses leading to General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), core skills were not related to the vocational activity, nor was the work assessed through a business context. Students' skills in information technology are underdeveloped in academic studies, art and design, construction, and hair and beauty. Students have little access to modern technology to assist their development of foreign language skills.

35 Residentials, work experience and field trips are used in a number of areas to enrich students' experience. Basic education programmes and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities take advantage of all these activities to enhance classroom work. Staff teaching basic education are careful to plan work that is differentiated to meet the needs of students of varying abilities and experiences. They also require students to evaluate what they have learned and achieved at the end of each session, in order to record their learning and to encourage them to progress further each time.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

36 Students produce good written work in a number of areas, including catering, hair and beauty, business studies and art and design. In computing there is an emphasis on written assignments which improves students' communication skills. Students work effectively in teams in many areas including catering, business studies, engineering and adult basic education. Many students, especially in practical sessions, were able to speak knowledgeably and confidently about their work and its theoretical principles. Most practical work is carried out with due regard to health and safety. Students are purposeful and careful in their work and take pride in the quality of what they produce. In engineering and construction, students are developing a range of practical skills which meet industrial standards. The quality of the practical work is good in hotel and catering and leisure and tourism. Students' participation in competitions enriches both hairdressing and floristry programmes. Full-time students in office studies and accounting working towards NVQs, have no workplace assessment and are unable to discover how they would perform in a commercial setting. In art and design, much of the practical work is of a high standard and shows evidence of sound research and development.

37 Examination results on engineering courses differ widely. The best results are achieved by students on craft courses. For example, pass rates on the one year full-time City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) mechanics and the C&G electronic servicing courses over the last three years, have ranged from 55 to 79 per cent of the students who started the course. On the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma course in motor vehicle engineering, the proportion of students achieving the award in 1995 fell below 50 per cent, but the results of the first group to finish this year improved to 77 per cent. Pass rates for the national diploma in general engineering and the full-time national certificate in electronics have not been better than 46 per cent over the same period. However, part-time students taking the same national certificate course have achieved pass rates exceeding 80 per cent in the last two years. In the course leading to the Civil Aviation Authority licence without type rating, examination results have been poor; this reflects the national picture of low levels of achievement on this course.

38 Results in the final year of the BTEC first diploma in construction were average with 55 per cent of the full-time students who originally enrolled gaining their qualification. When the first diploma was replaced by the GNVQ intermediate in 1994-95 both the pass rate of 33 per cent and the retention rate of 56 per cent were worse than those achieved on the former course. Achievement levels of part-time students on the BTEC national certificate in construction were very poor, with only 36 per cent gaining the full award. This is largely due to poor retention. Students achieving NVQs in the anticipated time varied from 18 to 100 per cent, but many were able to secure the full award in the following year after additional work.

39 Over the last three years, the results on the BTEC national diploma in general art and design course have been below national averages, with between 61 and 73 per cent of students enrolled gaining the qualification. On the national diplomas in graphic design, three-dimensional design and media, results have been uneven with pass rates ranging from 42 to 90 per cent over the last three years. The low figures are largely due to poor retention rather than failure. In contrast, students' pass rates on the national diploma in textiles were very good at 85 per cent or above over the same period, whilst those of the national diplomas in fashion and performing arts have improved continuously to reach 92 and 83 per cent, respectively, in 1995. Results on the BTEC foundation diploma in art and design course have been consistently good with pass rates of between 83 and 90 per cent and high retention rates. Similarly, in the two years that the GNVQ intermediate course in art and design has run, 80 per cent of the students enrolled have gained the qualification.

40 Results in the advanced GNVQ course in hospitality and catering, and its predecessor national diploma course have been consistently good. In 1995, every student who completed the course gained the qualification, but the retention rate was only 72 per cent. NVQ results in food and drink

service have declined from 88 per cent of those enrolled gaining the qualification in the anticipated time in 1993 to 51 per cent in 1995. In food preparation and cooking there has been a similar decline over the same period from 94 to 43 per cent. Students may complete in succeeding years, but it is clear that a growing number are now taking longer to complete their full NVQ. This is a worrying trend, and particularly so because it has been associated with a doubling of the intake in these areas in 1994-95. There were some good results in single-subject trade certificates, including basic hygiene courses. The BTEC national diploma course in travel and tourism produced good results in 1993 and 1994, with 76 and 71 per cent respectively of those students who enrolled, gaining the qualification. The results dropped to a 55 per cent pass rate in 1995. The GNVQ intermediate course, in the year of its introduction, had a 23 per cent retention rate and 14 per cent of the enrolled students gained the award. However, there was a marked improvement in 1995 with a 97 per cent retention and a 50 per cent pass rate in the one-year target time.

41 Retention in each of the last three years for the BTEC national diploma in information technology applications has been extremely low, resulting in between 29 and 37 per cent of the enrolled students gaining the award. Results on the NVQ level 2 course in administration have been above the national average for the last three years. At NVQ level 3 there were few students but all of them passed in 1993 and 1994. In 1995, the pass rate fell to 40 per cent, despite 100 per cent retention. Results in single-subject office skills courses were generally satisfactory or better, with the higher achievement rates at the intermediate rather than the advanced level. GNVQ business results were poor; last year only 23 per cent of foundation, 33 per cent of intermediate, and 40 per cent of advanced students who initially enrolled on the programmes gained their awards. Achievements on professional courses were better. Fifty-nine per cent of the students who enrolled at foundation level on the Association of Accounting Technicians course, and 74 per cent at intermediate level, were successful. Between 67 and 92 per cent of students enrolled on the certificate in management studies course have gained the award in each of the last three years.

42 Results in beauty therapy courses have been good. In the two year full-time beauty therapy course over the last three years between 71 and 83 per cent of students who started the course gained the full qualification. Pass rates last year on NVQ levels 2 and 3 courses in beauty, and in most specialist courses such as epilation and aromatherapy, were between 72 and 100 per cent. In hairdressing on the NVQ level 2 and 3 courses in 1995, 68 and 53 per cent, respectively of those students who enrolled gained the award. The fact that nearly half of the students do not achieve their qualification in the anticipated time indicates there are problems with the course or its assessment.

43 On the BTEC national diploma in caring (nursery nursing) and other nursery nursing courses, over 80 per cent of the students enrolled and completing the course have gained their qualification. In the first year of the GNVQ course in health and social care only 20 per cent of the students who originally enrolled gained the advanced qualification, 56 per cent the intermediate qualification and 44 per cent passed at foundation level. There have been 100 per cent pass rates for the last three years on the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) certificate in counselling course.

44 Pass rates on GCE A level and GCSE courses have varied; many have been poor. Thirteen out of 17 two-year GCE A level programmes recorded pass rates below the national average for general further education colleges. In some subjects in 1995, results were 30 percentage points below the national average pass rate. In 1994, the profile was slightly better, but in 1993 it had been still worse. In 1995, the results from one-year GCE A level courses were very poor, with the notable exceptions of English, French and photography. GCSE results were close to national averages. Retention is a serious problem on most GCE and GCSE courses. Sixty-five students aged 16 to 18 entered GCE AS/A level examinations in 1995 and scored on average 2.2 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This placed the college in the bottom 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data published by the Department for Education and Employment.

45 Ninety-three per cent of the 274 students aged 16 to 18 in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment's 1995 performance tables were successful. This performance measure places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector. The data published by the Department do not reflect the college's performance adequately for either GCE A level or vocational courses, because they show only the achievements of the younger students who represent just one third of those at the college.

46 Many students have achieved regional or national recognition in vocational, cultural or sporting fields. In the past year, a student represented the southern region in the national competition of the Association of Hairdressing Teachers and went forward to the national finals at Blackpool. A student won one of the three UK Simpson scholarships offered by the Chartered Association of Certified Accountants for his performance in accounting examinations. Two students have won RSA gold and silver medals for outstanding secretarial skills. A graphic design student submitted a winning design for an identity symbol for a division of British Airways and a fashion student won an RSA student design award. An adult student won an individual award for completing the national qualification in aromatherapy in spite of her physical disabilities. The college netball and five-a-side football teams have both had successes in their respective Worthing leagues and the college's climbing team were second in the 1995 Sussex colleges competition.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

47 The college has a long-established course review and evaluation system. It requires that course teams analyse performance indicators, including enrolments, retention and examination pass rates. There are some good examples of detailed recording of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as part of this procedure. They also consider the results of student questionnaires, and produce action plans to remedy deficiencies. However, there is considerable variation in the quality of analyses carried out by course teams. Comments on performance range from the objective and analytical to those which are bland or superficial. Some action plans resulting from course reviews are clear and there is evidence that they are monitored. Other plans contain little more than lists of requests for additional resources. Course evaluation documents contain few opportunities for closer examination of teaching and learning methods. Teams are required to report student withdrawal rates of more than 8 per cent, but there is no evidence of any targets for improvement being set. Until September 1995, the system was overseen by the college's academic faculty boards. Since reorganisation this responsibility has been taken up by divisional boards of study. It is too soon to assess the outcomes of the change.

48 A policy covering all aspects of quality assurance has been developed over the last year. Various committees have devised quality indicators and benchmarks which have been recently collated in a quality manual, but this has not yet been circulated to staff. The indicators are organised under 10 different headings. Fifteen groups and committees are charged with monitoring performance against sets of indicators related to each of these headings. Only the admissions advisory group oversees a complete heading. Six of the committees report directly or indirectly to the academic board, whereas the other nine do not. The academic board is responsible for monitoring quality, but it has devolved responsibility to two quality assurance subcommittees. The college should review the remit of the academic board, its numerous supporting committees, and its relationship with the new divisional boards of study.

49 Student questionnaires are issued in the middle and at the end of courses. They give few opportunities for detailed comment on teaching and learning methods and do not match the indicators associated with the quality assurance policy. Several staff teams have devised their own questionnaires which they use more frequently. Students are often invited to join course reviews and there are instances of improvement being made in response to feedback from students, but the practice is patchy. Students reported that they had not been told of the outcomes of questionnaires and that often they received no response to complaints or suggestions made to course teams. There is good practice in the design and analysis of student questionnaires for some cross-college services, for example, the open access supported information study centre. The college does not

collate all student or employer feedback and has no means of knowing the nature or strength of views, nor the extent of any consequent improvements.

50 The college has recently appointed an internal verification co-ordinator for GNVQ and NVQ. The co-ordinator receives all external verifier reports and produces termly papers outlining either particular or common issues, together with recommendations for addressing them. There is also an internal verification network where common concerns are aired.

51 Induction and mentoring are available for all new staff. The college has a well-established staff-development system for teaching and support staff. Staff report they have been granted all the training that they have asked for. There is also a review system for teaching and support staff. It was originally designed to cover all staff over a two-year cycle, but this is being changed to an annual one. Approximately 75 per cent of teaching staff and 45 per cent of support staff have been reviewed so far. The review system includes classroom observation. There is a staff-development plan which is linked to the strategic plan. The college has not systematically recorded industrial or commercial updating undertaken by staff in the academic divisions. Staff evaluate their development activities and managers are subsequently required to report on the relevance and quality of the activities. In 1995-96, the budget was reduced by 50 per cent and is now only just over half of one per cent of the college's recurrent funding from the FEFC.

52 The college charter is given to all students, but many are vague about the college's complaints procedure. The charter contains few measurable standards, and omits key information such as a list of governors, study costs, and sources of financial help. A charter review group was set up in February 1996 and it has made recommendations to address the shortcomings.

53 The college has undertaken a comprehensive and systematic self-assessment, using the headings of the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Generally the report is insufficiently self-critical and some of the strengths and weaknesses are not explicit. The report contains more description than evaluation and is supported by two lengthy appendices. The action plans fails to address some significant weaknesses.

RESOURCES

Staffing

54 The college has 186 full-time equivalent teachers. Restructuring over the past year has resulted in 44 redundancies. Further efficiency gains are planned, including discontinuation of courses in which numbers have fallen or remain low. Overall, more than one third of teachers are part-time employees. The ratio of part-time to full-time teachers is

especially high in construction, where 55 per cent of the teaching is taught by part-time staff, and in the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities where three-quarters of the staff are part time.

55 Forty-six per cent of all full-time staff are male. This percentage of male staff is not reflected at senior levels where only four out of eighteen managers are women. The age profile of staff is relatively high with 76 per cent over 40 years of age and 26 per cent over 50. Staff job descriptions are generally up to date; they are detailed and they include responsibilities for matters such as health and safety and equal opportunities. A number have been revised recently in the light of the changes in the management structure which came into effect in September 1995.

56 There are 186 full-time equivalent support staff who are appropriately qualified for the work they do. They provide a good service which is valued by their teaching colleagues. Many make significant contributions to students' learning. There is a need for increased technician support in hairdressing and for more classroom assistants for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

57 Sixty-two per cent of full-time staff have a first degree or a higher national diploma and of those 28 per cent have higher degrees. These figures are low by current standards, especially in a college which also offers substantial higher education provision. Only 74 per cent of staff have recognised teaching qualifications. Good progress is being made in the acquisition of the qualifications of the training and development lead body which permit staff to assess and verify students' work in NVQ and GNVQ programmes. The amount of recent industrial experience among full-time staff varies widely from subject to subject.

58 Arrangements for staff management are complex and lack central co-ordination. Overall responsibility is vested in a director, but a second director manages the staffing budget and a staffing services officer administers appointment and promotion procedures. While the college has no qualified personnel officer, legal advice is provided by the college's full-time qualified solicitor. Some staffing procedures have yet to be agreed and others are under review. There have been prolonged negotiations to introduce new contracts and significant progress has been made recently.

Equipment/learning resources

59 Northbrook College, Sussex has a wide range of specialist and general-purpose equipment which is appropriate to the courses offered. The college has a good range of teaching aids, including overhead projectors and whiteboards. Audio-visual equipment, including television and video playback facilities are available in all areas. The quality of classroom furniture varies widely, but most is adequate.

60 There are 481 modern computers available for students' use; a ratio of one machine to eight full-time equivalent students. The availability of machines across the college is uneven. The facilities at the Broadwater

and West Durrington campuses are good, and students have easy access to computers. At Shoreham, Horsham and Union Place, the ratio of machines to students is less good and availability is insufficient for student demand. The college has three computers with access to the Internet for students' use, but it is only now setting up its first compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) server at Broadwater. Academic computing is under the direction of a computer services manager. A team of four technicians efficiently maintains the machines and networks. Most computers are between 18 and 36 months old and the college aims to replace them after four years.

61 Library and information services are located on four sites. The larger libraries, at West Durrington and Broadwater, have a comprehensive range of books. The smaller libraries, at Horsham and Shoreham, serve only the courses located there. There are in total almost 40,000 books and a wide range of periodicals and journals. In 1995, the library budget was almost trebled to £144,000 in the first stage of a three-year plan of improvement. The college has developed centres where students can learn independently, the most significant of which is the OASIS centre, opened in January 1995 on the Broadwater site. It has good facilities, including information technology and learning packages dedicated to specific programme areas and to general core skills. Other, smaller centres are located in most curriculum areas and more are planned. Support staff are available to assist students in these centres. There are close links between the senior librarian, the learning resource centres manager and divisional and programme managers to ensure that facilities are used effectively. The libraries and learning centres together constitute a good service.

62 The technology division has good equipment to support its courses, including an extensive range of motor vehicles and aeronautical equipment in the workshops at Shoreham. There are modern cars with engine management systems and others with diesel engines, and the necessary machines for engine and body repair. There are five non-flying aircraft licensed to taxi, one that is airworthy and a Tiger Moth which has been restored to flying condition. The mechanical and electronic equipment at Broadwater is old but still appropriate for the courses. The woodworking machine shop, adjacent to the practical assembly area, has a full range of equipment. Students are able to test and commission plumbing systems.

63 There is an extensive range of equipment to support media studies, design and theatre courses at the West Durrington campus, most of which is shared with higher education courses. There are well-equipped workshops for fashion, textiles, knitting, theatre, dance, three-dimensional design and media studies. However, the level and range of equipment, including specialist information technology, are less good at the other sites and particularly so at the Horsham and Richmond Road sites.

64 The college has good equipment and facilities for catering and hospitality at West Durrington. There are two restaurants, one of which is for 'fast food', where students develop their cooking and service skills. There are four well-equipped production kitchens. There is a satisfactory range of equipment for hairdressing and beauty courses. Two hairdressing salons and one beauty salon are located in the older wooden buildings at the Broadwater campus. Although externally unattractive, the rooms have been well maintained and the equipment has been improved recently.

Accommodation

65 The college is located on four main and two smaller sites. The two largest sites are the West Durrington campus at Goring-by-Sea three miles west of Worthing, and the Broadwater campus a mile from the town centre. The other main sites are at Union Place in the centre of Worthing, and at Shoreham airport five miles to the east. The college has smaller buildings in central Worthing and at Horsham, 20 miles to the north. The college rents accommodation to provide adult and continuing education.

66 The standard of accommodation varies markedly from one site to another. Most students study only on one site and their perception of the college's accommodation is necessarily formed by that site. Groups of art and design students are located at all the sites, with the exception of Shoreham airport. The applied design, media studies and performing arts courses are at West Durrington, which has an attractive arrangement of low-rise brick buildings including the college theatre, set in 25 acres of grounds. The buildings are arranged around two courtyards with well-maintained gardens. Other art and design students on general courses are housed at the Broadwater site in old, single-storey wooden huts and some are at Union Place which comprises a small group of buildings of varying ages and styles. Some of the studios here are spacious and well lit, but the classrooms and workshops in huts are poor. The remainder study at either Horsham or Richmond Road. The Horsham accommodation is a nineteenth century house and one modern hut. The house has a neglected appearance both inside and out. The teaching spaces are too small for the size of groups using them and are not fit for their purpose. At the time of the specialist inspections, Richmond Road was used for art students. It consists of two large rooms, but has no adequate lavatory and washing facilities. The college intends to use this accommodation only for occasional classes in the future.

67 The Broadwater site also houses leisure and tourism courses and the main computing facilities in a new building. Specialist accommodation for science and for health and beauty, and some of the classrooms, are in the oldest and least attractive wooden buildings. The external appearance and internal decoration of these rooms is poor and, although they provide a basic learning environment, they do little to stimulate good work. Some engineering and construction courses are located in a 1960s brick building that has a leaking flat roof, but several workshops have been improved through self-help projects.

68 Motor vehicle and aeronautical engineering courses are based at Shoreham airport. The college buildings are located between accommodation for small businesses and the aircraft holding area. They make an unusual and exciting environment for studying engineering. The administrative building is wooden and is nearing the end of its life. Classroom teaching takes place in the Bader block, a modern two-storey building. The roof of this building leaks and its internal decoration is poor. There are three good workshops for motor vehicle engineering, body repair and aviation courses.

69 There is a professionally qualified estates manager. The team of two electricians and 11 caretaking staff has a comprehensive range of skills to maintain the buildings. A ten-year maintenance programme has been planned, but work has fallen behind schedule. There is a detailed accommodation strategy that includes options for the disposal of some buildings and for further development of the West Durrington site. Students with restricted mobility can gain access to all parts of the West Durrington campus and most of the Broadwater campus. Only the ground floors of the other centres are accessible to wheelchair users.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

70 The strengths of the college are:

- its strong involvement in the community
- effective procedures for strategic planning
- the well-designed personal tutorial scheme
- flexible and supportive childcare arrangements for students
- the strong contribution of teaching support staff to students' learning
- the accommodation and facilities at West Durrington
- the co-ordinated library and learning resource provision
- the resources for aeronautical engineering courses.

71 If it is to continue to improve the quality of its provision the college should address the following:

- poor student data management information systems
- the lack of attention to the college's performance by the corporation
- co-ordination of student guidance and support across the college
- incomplete basic skills screening and support
- inadequate quality monitoring by the academic board
- over-complex quality assurance procedures
- limited analysis and poor data on students' performance, retention, attendance and destinations
- some poor accommodation at every site, except West Durrington.

FIGURES

-
- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at May 1995)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at May 1995)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at May 1995)

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

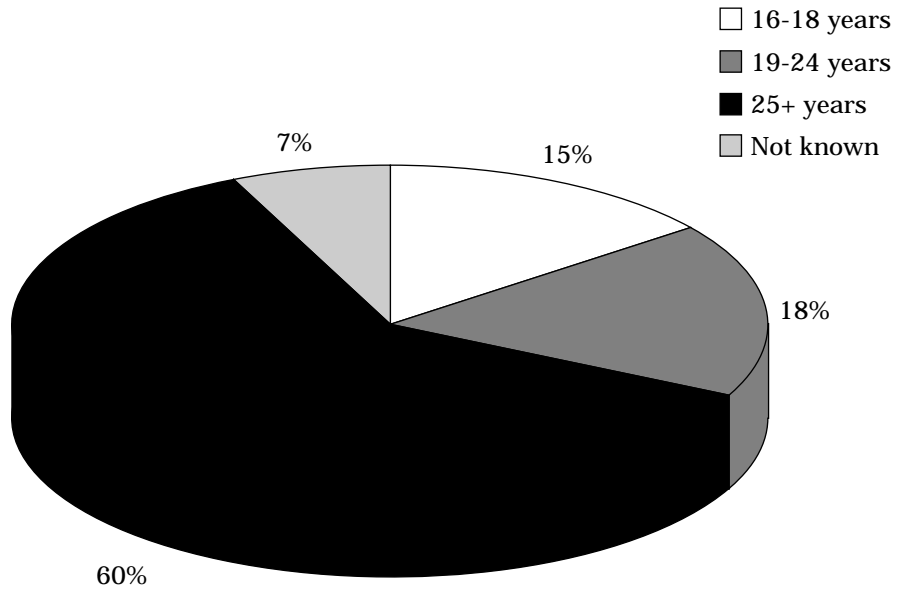
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

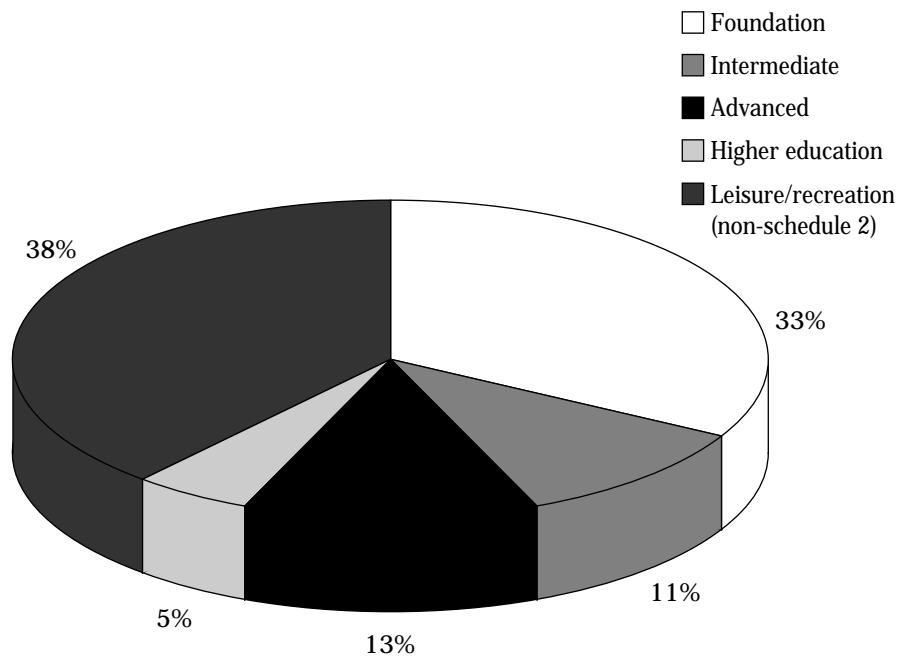
Northbrook College, Sussex: percentage student numbers by age (as at May 1995)



Student numbers: 18,124

Figure 2

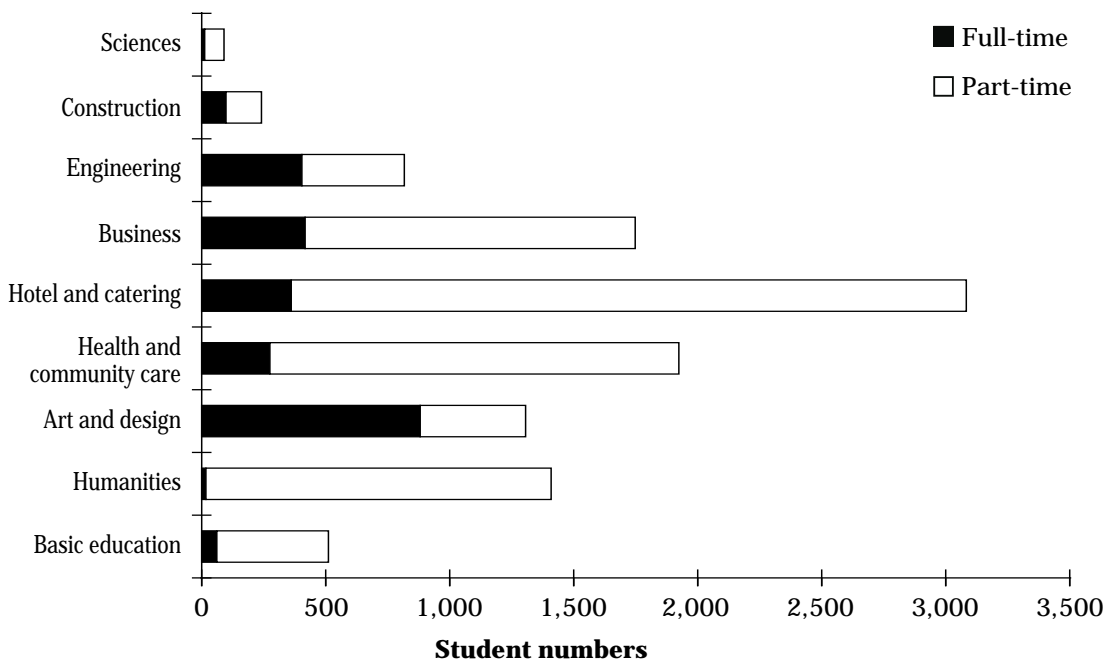
Northbrook College, Sussex: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at May 1995)



Student numbers: 18,124

Figure 3

Northbrook College, Sussex: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at May 1995)

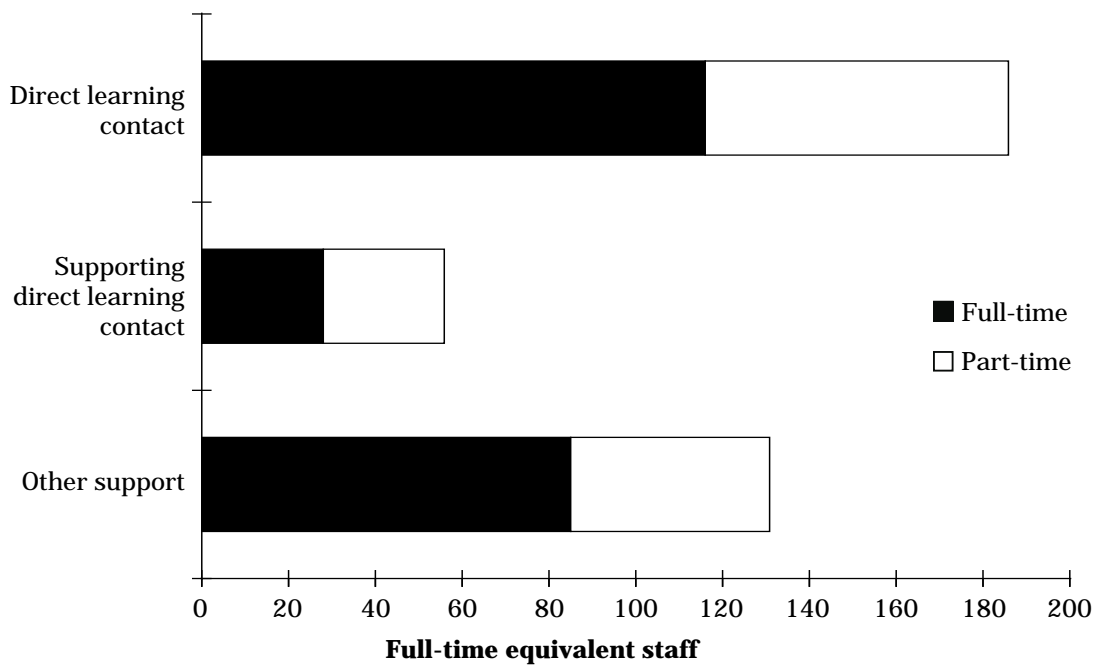


Student numbers: 18,124

Note: 6,995 students are on part-time leisure/recreation courses.

Figure 4

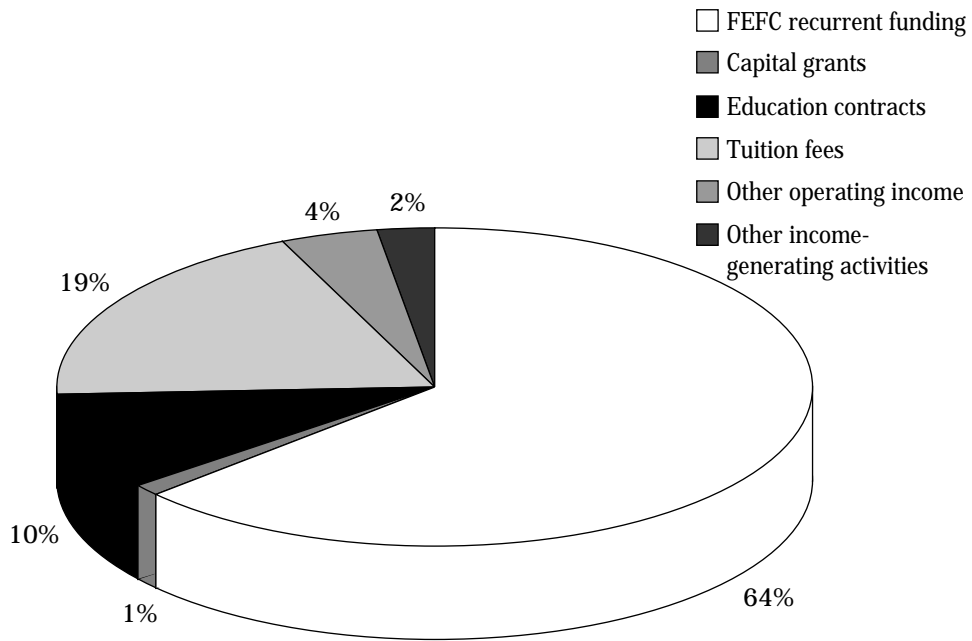
Northbrook College, Sussex: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 373

Figure 5

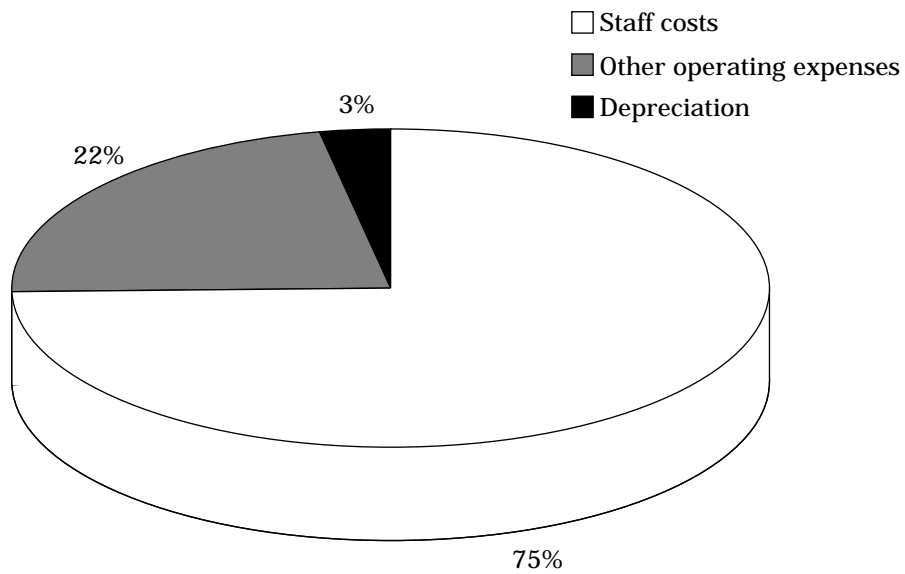
Northbrook College, Sussex: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £12,166,003

Figure 6

Northbrook College, Sussex: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £12,088,438

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