

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

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# **Richmond upon Thames College**

**June 1994**

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**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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## **THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL**

*The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a statutory duty to ensure that there are satisfactory arrangements to assess the quality of provision in the further education sector. It discharges the duty in part through its inspectorate, which inspects and reports on each college in the sector every four years. The Council's inspectorate also assesses and reports on a national basis on specific curriculum areas and advises the Council's quality assessment committee.*

*College inspections involve both full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have specialist knowledge and experience in the areas they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member from outside the world of education and a nominated member of staff from the college being inspected.*

### **GRADE DESCRIPTORS**

*The procedures for assessing quality are described in the Council Circular 93/28. In the course of inspecting colleges, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also summarise their judgements on the balance between strengths and weaknesses using a five-point scale. The descriptors for the grades are:*

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

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# FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 49/94

## RICHMOND UPON THAMES COLLEGE

### LONDON REGION

Inspected 7–24 March 1994

#### Summary

Richmond upon Thames College is a well-managed institution which has excellent links with the local community, schools, employers and external agencies. It is a major provider of full-time further education courses in the south and west of London offering a broad range of courses to students of all abilities. On almost all courses the teaching by well-qualified staff is good or very good. The outstanding quality of work in English and communication studies, modern languages, performing arts, psychology and classical civilisation is of particular note. Learning is effectively supported by subject-specific workshops and a flexible learning centre where students can develop the habits of independent study. Tutorial support is generally good. Retention rates are satisfactory and examination results are good on most courses. Many of the college's students progress to higher education. In general, quality assurance systems are effective, although the review and evaluation documentation for some courses is cursory. The college's accommodation is adequate although it will have to be used more efficiently if the anticipated growth in the number of students is to take place. Some areas are inaccessible to wheelchair users. The library provides a pleasant environment within which to work, although the quality of the book stock varies across subjects. Computing equipment is good in most subject areas.

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

<b>Aspects of cross-college provision</b>		<b>Grade</b>	
Responsiveness and range of provision		1	
Governance and management		1	
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		1	
Quality assurance		2	
Resources:	staffing	1	
	equipment/learning resources	2	
	accommodation	3	
<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Mathematics,	2	Health & social care	2
Computing, information		Art, design, media	2
technology	2	Performing arts	1
Physics, chemistry,		Sociology, history, geography	2
biology, geology	2	English & communication	1
Construction	3	Modern languages	1
Engineering	2	Classical civilisation	1
Business, economics, law	2	Psychology	1
Catering	3	SLDD	2
Leisure & tourism	2		

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1 Richmond upon Thames College was inspected during the period 7-24 March 1994, its recruitment and induction procedures having been inspected in the previous September. The inspection team of 18 full-time and part-time inspectors spent a total of 76 days in the college. The team inspected courses in catering, media, art and design, construction, English and communication, health and social care, engineering, business studies, leisure and tourism, science, performing arts, computing, mathematics, modern languages, classical civilisation, geography, history, sociology, and psychology. The college's provision for students with severe and moderate learning difficulties was also inspected. The subsequent inspection of cross-college provision drew on evidence from the specialist inspections. Inspectors visited 251 classes, saw some 2,500 students and inspected a broad range of students' written work. There were meetings with governors, parents, students, heads of curriculum sections, managers of cross-college services, senior managers, employers and two representatives of the West London Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). The inspectors also had access to extensive documentation relating to the college and its courses.

2 The report is based on inspections carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. The framework describes a four-year inspection cycle. When this cycle becomes fully established, colleges will have the opportunity to respond to the findings of earlier inspection visits before their quadrennial inspection and the subsequent published report. As the inspection of Richmond upon Thames College occurred early in the cycle, the opportunity for such a response was not available.

## **THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS**

3 Richmond upon Thames College, founded in 1977, was the first tertiary college to be established in London. It is situated on a single site in suburban Twickenham close to the Twickenham rugby ground. The main building was originally a technical college and has been substantially extended since the college's inception. The college employs a total of 794 staff of whom 323 full-time equivalents are teachers and 166 full-time equivalents are support staff (figure 1). There are approximately 4,900 students enrolled at the college, amounting to some 3,800 full-time equivalents. In line with the college's strategic plan, the number of adult students over 19 years of age has been increasing steadily over recent years and currently stands at 19 per cent of total enrolments. Enrolments by age are shown in figure 2. This year, the college has achieved its planned 8 per cent increase in enrolments. Just over 50 per cent of the students are from outside the London Borough of Richmond on Thames, mainly from adjacent boroughs, but a substantial number are from further afield. The college, because of its tertiary status, does not compete for students with schools maintained by Richmond's local education authority. However, it does face substantial competition from independent schools

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with sixth forms in Richmond and beyond, the local adult college and further education and sixth form colleges in nearby boroughs.

4 Thirteen curriculum sections in the college provide a broad range of General Certificate of Education advanced and advanced supplementary (GCE A/AS) level courses, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses and vocational further education programmes. The curriculum areas covered by the 13 sections are social sciences, modern languages, leisure and recreation, learning support, sciences and care, mathematics, construction, English and communications, visual communications, performing arts, business management, engineering and computing. Full-time equivalent enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. In addition to its extensive further education provision, the college offers a limited number of higher education programmes, including teacher training courses.

5 Richmond upon Thames is one of the smaller London boroughs and, traditionally, has enjoyed very high levels of employment. Unemployment rose to almost 8 per cent of the available workforce in 1992 but has since fallen to 6.5 per cent, a figure which is significantly less than those for other boroughs in the region covered by the local TEC. Since the recent departure of British Aerospace, there are relatively few large employers in the area. A majority of the workforce is employed in organisations with fewer than 200 employees. Ethnic minority groups form 5.5 per cent of the population of Richmond compared with 20.2 per cent for London as a whole and approximately 20 per cent for the college's student body.

6 The mission of the college focuses on four key themes: support for all who can benefit from the college's provision; commitment and responsiveness to the local community; support and development for all staff at the college; and cost effectiveness and efficiency in all that the college does.

### **RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION**

7 The college has an extensive and expanding range of full-time courses which provides good education and training opportunities for students of all abilities. In the last five years strenuous efforts have been made to broaden the college's appeal to a variety of potential clients from industry and the community. At the same time, strong links have been maintained with secondary and special schools in the borough.

8 Students who wish to pursue a GCE A/AS level programme have an excellent choice of subjects. Forty-five GCE A level and 27 GCE AS subjects are offered, the largest number of such courses available on a single college site in England and Wales. In many subjects, students have a choice of syllabuses to suit their particular requirements and aptitudes. GCSE courses are offered in 36 subjects and the college encourages students to combine appropriate GCSE subjects with vocational programmes. Students who simply wish to improve their GCSE grades are carefully counselled when they enrol. They are given guidance on whether it is a

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sensible strategy and about the likelihood of their success.

9 The number of vocational courses is increasing rapidly, particularly those leading to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). Courses leading to NVQs are offered in an impressive array of occupational areas including, accounting, business administration, care, catering, construction and information technology. There is a good choice of intermediate and advanced GNVQ programmes in art and design, business, health and social care, and leisure and tourism. The GNVQ provision will be enhanced from September 1994 by the addition of further programmes, some in additional subjects such as science and the built environment. Pre-vocational courses cater well for the needs of students who have moderate and severe learning difficulties.

10 Many students progress to higher education. In 1993, some 700 students gained places in universities and colleges of higher education. Approximately 25 per cent of them progressed either from vocational courses or access programmes specifically designed to prepare mature students for higher level study. The college is extending its higher education provision and presently offers a range of higher national diplomas or certificates, validated by the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), in subjects such as business and finance, graphic design and construction. The BTEC higher national diplomas are franchised from Kingston University, with which the college has a close relationship. Some 7 per cent of students at the college are enrolled on higher education programmes. Full-time equivalent enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3; enrolments by level of study in figure 4.

11 There are relatively few part-time students. They presently comprise about 5 per cent of the full-time equivalent population. In its strategic plan, the college has identified a pressing need to provide more courses for part-time students. It is intended to second a member of the teaching staff to the marketing unit to research the market for part-time courses and to promote this aspect of the provision. The college recognises that its modular timetable is geared to the requirements of full-time students and is not readily accessible to adult students who have to combine their studies with the complexities of work and personal demands. Accordingly, the provision of evening courses is being expanded.

12 Links with the eight secondary and two special schools in the borough are long-standing and strong. Staff from the schools and the college meet regularly to examine the development and teaching of national curriculum subjects. There is an exchange of staff with the schools, and a number of the college's staff are examiners for the examination boards at key stage four. The commitment the college has to its partner schools and to the local community is exemplified by its guarantee of a place to all the borough's school leavers, including those from the special schools, unless physical disability prevents a student from having easy access to college

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buildings. The college has effective relationships with some schools in neighbouring boroughs. Students from these schools, together with their parents, are invited to college open days or evenings and these are well attended. Just over 50 per cent of the college's students live outside the borough of Richmond upon Thames.

13 The college has responded well to the needs of the community by playing a prominent role in a number of local initiatives. For example, a consortium has been established with private sector care providers to offer care staff courses in basic skills and opportunities to acquire appropriate NVQs. A contract with a local open prison provides basic skills training for prisoners and courses leading to NVQs for prison staff. The college also provides information and advice to the unemployed through its adult guidance centre.

14 Links with employers are very strong in a range of curricular areas. The college is a prominent member of the Richmond Forum, a local employers' group. Links with companies have been especially close and fruitful in the field of computer-aided design and have led to the college providing extensive training for company staff. Students on the BTEC higher national diploma in business and finance have obtained help and advice on their project work from members of the local Rotary group who have also contributed to the assessment of projects.

15 The college has an excellent and productive relationship with the local TEC, whose operational area includes the London Boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow and Hillingdon, as well as Richmond upon Thames. The principal is a board member of the TEC and also chairs its education and training policy group. In consultation with the TEC, the college has identified training priorities for the region which have been incorporated as objectives within the strategic plan. Development funding has been secured from the TEC to promote the achievement of these objectives. This has led, amongst other things, to the establishment of a workshop to support learning in mathematics and also to the formation of a consortium of educational providers in the local TEC region to facilitate the validation of new courses. A member of staff at the college has been seconded to the TEC under the access to assessment initiative, funded by the Employment Department, which aims to improve opportunities for employees in industry to gain NVQs.

16 The marketing of the college and its courses is under the overall direction of the principal who is supported by the marketing unit and the four, newly-appointed curriculum directors. Marketing activities are guided by the college's external affairs strategy and an operational marketing plan is being prepared currently.

17 In line with its strategic plan, the college has established strong links with educational institutions in many European countries, including Holland, Italy, France, Denmark, Spain and Ireland. These have led to numerous opportunities for staff and students to visit and work with



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colleagues from other countries. Modules which address European and international issues have been included in many courses.

18 The college has well-established policies to promote equal opportunities amongst staff and students and these have led to a range of initiatives. For example, assertiveness-training sessions have been provided for support staff and funds from the TEC have been used to develop courses for women. The students' handbook makes clear that sexual or racial harassment will not be tolerated. The college is strongly committed to offering equality of opportunity to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

### **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

19 The arrangements for governance of the college are effective. There is an appropriate delegation of powers from the governing body to the managers of the college. Senior managers and governors clearly understand each others' roles. A high degree of trust exists between them and they co-operate well. There are 20 governors, including two members of the college's teaching staff and one student. The governors have substantial expertise in aspects of business which are relevant to the college, such as finance and human resource management. The governing body also includes a head teacher from one of the college's partner schools and also a school's parent governor. This reflects the good relationships which the college fosters with schools and the wider community. Relationships are further strengthened by the schools' liaison, community liaison and industry subcommittees of the governing body. The other subcommittees cover finance, audit, remuneration, students and premises.

20 Senior managers report regularly to the subcommittees of the governing body on a range of financial, accommodation and staffing issues. Governors have the expertise to scrutinise and comment on these reports in a detailed, knowledgeable manner. The governors also take a close interest in the college's courses and their quality. The vice-principal (curriculum evaluation) is called upon to comment on matters relating to courses at the meetings of the governing body. Overall, senior managers take care to ensure that governors are well briefed on issues and trends within the college.

21 The management structure of the college has been reorganised recently. Four curriculum directors, each responsible for a cluster of three or four curriculum sections, have been appointed. They join the principal, two vice-principals, and the four directors of resources, human resources, students and students services to form the senior management team which is responsible for formulating policies and ensuring that the strategic plan is implemented. An important role which has been identified for the curriculum directors is to improve communications and relationships between senior managers and other staff, which have become strained, on occasions, since incorporation. In addition, it is intended that the appointment of the curriculum directors will allow the principal and

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vice-principals to devote more time than has been hitherto possible to long-term planning.

22 The academic board has 31 members including the senior management team, representatives of the teaching staff and students. The board and its associated committees provide good support and advice to assist the college's managers in making decisions. In particular, the curriculum review boards, which are answerable to the curriculum quality subcommittee of the academic board, perform a key role in identifying opportunities to develop new courses and their resource implications.

23 In general, the curriculum sections are managed with vigour and imagination. Staff in the sections have developed their own strategic plans which reflect those of the college. However, these vary widely in detail and in the range of topics covered. The levels of communication within sections are good. Regular meetings are held and most heads of section consult widely before taking decisions. Co-operation between sections on staffing and curricular matters is sufficient to ensure that students obtain appropriate coverage of all aspects of their courses.

24 Summaries of the college's estimated income and expenditure for 1993-94 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's unit of resource for 1992-93, set by the local education authority was recorded in the FEFC report, *Funding Allocations 1993-94*, as £2,679 per weighted full-time equivalent student. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges was £2,444.

25 There is limited delegation of funds to curriculum sections to cover such items as books, stationery, materials and small items of equipment. Systems are in place to monitor how these funds are spent. Expenditure on larger items must be bid for and approved by the vice-principal (curriculum planning). Although the strategic plan provides the overall framework for deploying resources, the criteria used to decide upon the relative merits of respective bids are not clearly understood by some curriculum section heads. The college is making good progress towards calculating unit costs for each course in the college. Although the calculations are complicated by the widespread sharing of resources between courses, the college expects to have a complete specification of unit costs by 1995.

26 The college has made good progress in developing a comprehensive computerised management information system. The enthusiastic and knowledgeable members of the team operating the system have a detailed understanding of the information requirements of managers in the college and are steadily improving the capacity of the system to address these. Reports on the attendance and retention of students and the spending patterns of cost centres are produced regularly and the system can quickly produce information on a range of other matters such as room utilisation and staff timetables. College managers are becoming increasingly aware of the value of the management information system in decision making and are making increasing use of it. Curriculum directors and section

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heads do not yet have computerised access to all aspects of the system, although this is planned.

27 The use of performance indicators to guide activities in the college is increasing. Many of the objectives contained in the strategic plan are expressed in quantitative terms. Enrolment targets are set in consultation between curriculum section heads and senior managers. The 1993-94 target of an 8 per cent growth in student numbers has been achieved. There are also set targets for pass rates in examinations, although not yet for the attendance and retention of students.

### **STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

28 The college has a well-deserved reputation for the quality of the support offered to full-time students in the 16-19 years age range. It is now seeking to ensure that the same quality of support is available to the wider range of students it is attracting, including adults, overseas students and refugees.

29 The centrally-organised student support unit, managed jointly by the director for students and the director for student services, brings together an impressive range of support services which are offered to students before entry, on their course and when they are about to leave the college. These services and the procedures involved in their delivery are well documented in a support systems manual which contains clear guidelines for staff to follow. All students' records are held centrally and a computerised system records the progress a student has made since entering the college.

30 The admissions process for full-time students is thorough. The support unit deals with all enquiries and gives advice on the range of courses offered by the college and on welfare matters. Advice and guidance sessions for intending part-time students are arranged on evenings during July and September. Prospective students who require more detailed subject guidance are referred to specialists from the curriculum sections. There are close links between the support unit and the sections. Interviews are conducted by specialist subject staff, who, generally, give unhurried and objective guidance about the suitability of a proposed course.

31 There are excellent relationships with the eight secondary and two special schools in the borough which have helped in the development of effective recruitment processes. Visits are made to the schools by the student support directors and other college staff to promote the college. Discussions are held with school staff about the needs of individual students and interviews are conducted at the schools. There are open days for school students and their parents and 'taster' events at the college. As members of a transition working group, the directors have been involved in designing a standard format for applicants' references to be used by all of the borough's schools. The college is also committed to using and building upon the records of achievement which students have when they enrol.

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32 The adult guidance centre, partly funded by the TEC, provides independent guidance for unemployed adults and also offers support to the increasing numbers of adults on the college's courses. As yet, there is limited accreditation of the prior learning of students. Some students, particularly adults on vocational courses, would benefit from recognition and validation of their prior experience. A policy to implement accreditation of prior learning has been agreed.

33 Enrolment procedures for full-time students are smooth and efficient. Whenever students have to transfer from one part of the college to another during the admissions process, they are accompanied and shown the way by technician staff. The induction sessions for full-time and many part-time students provide an effective introduction to the college and its courses. The documentation which students receive during enrolment and induction, including the students' handbook and course booklets, is of a high quality. Advice and support are readily available for those wishing to transfer from one course to another.

34 As soon as they are enrolled, all full-time students are assigned to a tutor. The role of the tutor is to monitor the progress being made by the students and to offer general support. Four dedicated and sensitive senior tutors co-ordinate the work of the tutors. The support which students receive from most tutors is good.

35 Full-time students meet in groups of 15 for a one-hour timetabled tutorial session each week. This provides tutors with an opportunity to remind students of deadlines, provide information on relevant future events and check on the progress which students are making. Sometimes, tutorials are poorly attended. The college is currently reviewing the effectiveness of the tutorial system. The development of formal action planning, introduced for all full-time students this year, should provide a sharper focus for tutorial sessions.

36 Action planning leads to the preparation of records of achievement. Students are being encouraged to word-process their records of achievements using note-pad computers purchased by the college for this purpose. The records of achievement, building on those produced at school, are used as a basis for the review of students' progress.

37 Systems for diagnosing the needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good. They are based firmly on effective liaison with schools and other agencies and on information received from teaching staff. All students whose needs are identified before enrolment are invited to the college for a preliminary discussion with the co-ordinator for learning difficulties and disabilities. Subsequently, students' progress is recorded and monitored centrally and they are well supported on their course. The scheme whereby those with learning difficulties or disabilities are 'partnered' by other students at the college is proving to be a particularly effective support mechanism.

38 Learning and language support is provided through cross-college co-ordinators for basic skills and English as a second or foreign language.

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A range of subject-specific learning workshops is widely used and appreciated by students. For example, the English section provides learning support through its skillsbase unit, which is staffed throughout the week, and offers all students support in study skills and examination techniques. Further support is available in the new flexible learning centre, which is based in the library, and in the learning support unit for students with dyslexia. The monitoring of students' attendance and progress is an important feature of all these support facilities which are available to students by appointment or on a drop-in basis.

39 There is an excellent range of central support services for students, which includes three professionally trained counsellors, two guidance workers, a full-time nurse, a visiting doctor and a chaplain, and two youth workers, partly funded by the youth service and based in a welcoming youth project area above the students' common room.

40 An attractive careers centre provides the focus for effective careers advice. Students can obtain information and guidance on higher education and careers from the college's careers adviser and/or from careers officers who attend twice a week. The careers adviser who is closely involved in the initial guidance and enrolment of students also organises a higher education fair, which is attended by about 90 colleges and universities. Overall, the higher education guidance provided is excellent and includes additional advice for those students interested in applying for places at Oxford or Cambridge Universities.

41 Several innovative projects have been funded through the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI). These include the development of core skills, work experience and careers modules for 60 per cent of GCE A level students, as well as for students on vocational courses. The college has been involved in a Further Education Unit project which has led to the enhancement of the GCE A level programme through optional activities, including sports and the performing arts. The college has, from time to time, sponsored theme weeks for the benefit of all students which have focused on health, equal opportunities and European issues.

42 Relationships and communications between students and senior managers and governors of the college are good. Students are represented on the academic board and on the governing body. In addition, senior managers are keen to talk informally to students and encourage them to make their views known. A college charter has been developed and will be introduced in September 1994. The charter embraces the national charter for further education and is based on a learning contract which is already in existence. It has been drawn up in consultation with the students' union and the student support unit advisory committee.

#### **TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING**

43 All the courses inspected are well planned, often by teams of lecturers who work together effectively. Schemes of work clearly reflect the aims and objectives of the courses. In all cases, these contain an appropriate

balance of theoretical material and practical exercises designed to reinforce and extend learning. In some GCE A level programmes, the coverage demanded by the syllabus has been extended to provide students with exciting learning opportunities. For example, students in the performing arts benefit from imaginative work experience periods with local theatres and dance companies. Students on the GCE A level in communication studies have the opportunity to extend their desk-top publishing and word-processing skills and also to study modules in visual literacy and video production.

44 Overall, the work inspected had many more strengths than weaknesses. In 71 per cent of the 251 sessions inspected the strengths clearly outweighed the weaknesses whilst in a further 24 per cent the strengths and weaknesses were balanced. In only 5 per cent of classes did the weaknesses of the work clearly outweigh the strengths. The following table summarises the inspection grades.

**Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study**

<b>Programmes</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Totals</b>
GCE A/AS level		20	61	22	2	0	105
GCSE		3	14	6	0	0	23
GNVQ		2	10	5	0	0	17
NVQ		3	12	4	3	0	22
Other		12	41	23	8	0	84
<b>Total</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>251</b>

45 The quality of the teaching in the performing arts, English and communication studies, psychology, classical civilisation and modern languages was outstanding. Sessions were meticulously planned with the primary aim of motivating and extending the students' learning. An impressive array of teaching methods was used and some teachers have developed highly innovative ways of promoting learning. For example, GCE A level communication studies students took part in a work-shadowing scheme involving visits to media organisations such as the BBC and various newspaper and magazine publishers. Teachers have devised imaginative ways of studying Shakespeare's plays; for example, students were asked to act scenes which they had re-written in contemporary language. Students of the performing arts benefit greatly from the extensive links which their teachers have with organisations in the arts, links which are extensively exploited to emphasise the relevance of course material. By their sheer enthusiasm, teachers of classical civilisation engender in the students a fascination with the literature and an intense desire to interpret and understand it. Creative, inspirational teaching in psychology is carried out without sacrificing any of the rigour needed for effective study.

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46 A particularly moving and stimulating GCE A level French session was observed. A lecturer's aunt, whose sister and father had died in the concentration camp at Dachau, had provided authentic letters and other documents from the war years which had been made into a booklet for the students. The booklet was read in conjunction with a video recording of an interview which the aunt gave to students when she visited England. By using such unusual and dramatic material, the teacher was able to stimulate and challenge the intellect of the students in ways that may not have been possible with more conventional resources.

47 The quality of the teaching in geography, sociology, history, art and design, leisure and tourism, business studies, mathematics, care, computing and science was good. In catering, construction and engineering, the strengths of the teaching were balanced by weaknesses. Overall, lecturers in all of these areas have a good, up-to-date knowledge of their subject. In most sessions, there was a stimulating variety of activities, tackled at a brisk pace by enthusiastic students. Most lecturers explained clearly the purpose of the task to be undertaken by the students and its relationship with the aims of the programme. However, a few sessions, including some practical classes in engineering and construction, were not sufficiently challenging. In some sessions, lecturers made ineffective use of visual teaching aids. Overhead projectors were used often but students sometimes had to copy extensive notes from transparencies prepared in advance by the lecturer. This adversely affected the pace of lessons and significantly impeded the students' progress.

48 The teaching on the courses for students with moderate and severe learning difficulties was supportive and effective, although the aims and objectives of the pre-vocational programmes lack clarity. In the sessions inspected, the students were involved in negotiating their own individual learning programmes designed to prepare them for employment. A cafe and a wholefood co-operative have been developed to give them experience of working in a commercial environment. They also undertake work placements with local employers.

49 Students on many courses, notably in business studies, the performing arts and English, are encouraged to improve their ability to work effectively in small groups. The importance of developing good communication and presentational skills is emphasised on most programmes. In many areas, students are being encouraged and equipped to take more responsibility for their own learning and to work independently. Staff are developing self-study materials which students can work on at their own pace in subject-based workshops or in the flexible learning areas in the library. However, in a few subjects such as construction crafts and catering, the organisational and study skills necessary for independent learning are not being developed sufficiently.

50 In a minority of subjects, the extent to which students are made aware

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of the role of information technology is limited. For example, the way that information technology can be used to present information and to analyse data could be emphasised more forcibly in business studies and economics. In science, information technology is not employed as extensively as it might be. In contrast, good use is made of computer simulations in chemistry.

51 Assessed work is an integral feature of GCSE, vocational courses and some GCE A level courses. In most cases it is spread evenly throughout the year, although there is some bunching of assignments on the GNVQ advanced course in leisure and tourism which imposes unnecessary pressure on the students. Assessed work is of an appropriate standard and clearly relates to the objectives of the courses. In addition to assessed work, homework is set regularly and allows ample opportunities for students to test their understanding of a subject. The grading of assessed and other work is consistent and fair. There is excellent practice in written work in English and communication studies where scripts are marked twice by different lecturers.

52 Lecturers on all courses keep comprehensive records of the progress of students. On most courses, the students regularly review their achievements with their teachers. In general, the workbooks prepared by students on GNVQ courses and the logbooks detailing the acquisition of NVQ competencies are meticulously and accurately assembled.

#### **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

53 There is a good level of achievement by students in most subjects. In no areas do the examination results and general achievements give rise to any major cause for concern.

54 In the sessions inspected, most students were well motivated and enjoyed their studies. They quickly acquired relevant knowledge which they were able to apply to the analysis of information and the solving of problems. Most students participated confidently and effectively in discussions and practical activities, a feature encouraged by the excellent relationships which exist between lecturers and students.

55 Students develop relevant skills at a good rate in most subjects, although the communications and presentational skills of some construction and catering students are limited. Students on most courses are given many opportunities to solve problems and to work on projects in small groups. These opportunities have enabled them to develop effective team-working skills. The majority of students are acquiring organisational and note-taking skills which allow them to study effectively.

56 The quality of students' written work is generally of an average to good standard and there are examples of high-quality work in most subject areas. Work is usually well presented although in some subjects, for example, business studies, surprisingly little is word processed, considering the extensive computing facilities available.



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57 Overall, the results obtained in GCE A level examinations are good. In 1993, there were some 2,200 examination entries from 907 students. The overall pass rate achieved was 83 per cent compared with a national figure of 77 per cent. Fourteen subjects had pass rates in excess of 95 per cent and in only seven was the rate less than 75 per cent. Of the 513 students who were entered for three GCE A levels or more, approximately 70 per cent passed in all subjects and a further 20 per cent passed in two. In 1993, the college's overall pass rate in GCE AS subjects was 75 per cent, 11 per cent above the national average. However, although the pass rate was 100 per cent in six subjects it was below 50 per cent in three.

58 National tables indicate that in 1992-93 the average GCE A level points score for students taking two or more subjects at the college was 13.4, compared with a national average of 14.7 (where A=10 points, E=2 points). This performance puts the college in the top 20 per cent of colleges within the further education sector. An analysis undertaken by the Advanced Level Information Service (ALIS) indicates that the GCE A level achievements of students are better than would be expected from their GCSE results.

59 The results achieved in GCSE examinations are less clear cut. In 1993, 59 per cent of the subject entries resulted in passes at grades A to C, compared with a national figure of 50 per cent. In 10 subjects, the proportion of A to C grades was 70 per cent or higher, but lower than 50 per cent in a further 13 subjects. In English language and mathematics, where all students were attempting to improve grades obtained previously, the proportions of students obtaining grades A to C was 69 and 45 per cent respectively, compared with 57 and 47 per cent for all entries nationally. The success achieved by students who enrolled on GCSE programmes was more limited than these figures might imply. Many students taking a range of GCSEs failed to achieve grades A to C in some or all subjects. In 1993, 59 out of 180 such students, enrolled on up to four GCSEs, did not obtain grade C or above in any subject.

60 The results achieved by students on vocational courses are, generally, good. In 1993, some 600 candidates were entered for BTEC awards in eight vocational areas and approximately 80 per cent gained the full award. In some BTEC national diploma courses, in business and finance, engineering and photography, the pass rate was 100 per cent. City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI) results show a 90 per cent pass rate amongst individual subject entries. Of the 450 students enrolled on CGLI programmes, 65 per cent obtained full awards and most of the remainder accumulated credits which would be counted towards the final award. National tables for 1992-93 show that the college achieved a pass rate of 80 per cent for 16-18 year old students following BTEC and CGLI courses.

61 The achievements of students with learning difficulties are good in CGLI number power, word power and preliminary cookery and in English Speaking Board examinations. They are well documented in records of achievement.

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62 The retention rates on most courses are satisfactory. Approximately 83 per cent of students who enrol on two-year GCE A level courses complete their studies, a figure which rises to 90 per cent in the case of one-year GCSE programmes. Most vocational courses show similarly high retention rates, although in 1992-93 rates were poor on a few BTEC national diploma programmes. For example, in science, only 50 per cent of students progressed from the first to the second year of the course. Many GCE AS subjects have poor retention rates; less than half the students enrolled sat their examinations. Withdrawal from GCE AS courses is largely caused by students deciding to concentrate their energies on their GCE A level subjects once they have received a conditional offer from a higher education institution.

63 The college has comprehensive information on the substantial numbers of students who progress to higher education. In 1993, 78 per cent of students who obtained two or more GCE A levels progressed to higher education. Of the students gaining BTEC national awards, 68 per cent progressed to higher education. A survey of full-time students in 1992-93 indicated that 58 per cent entered higher education, 27 per cent continued in further education and a further 11 per cent entered employment.

#### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

64 The college is committed to the establishment of a total quality management approach which puts the needs of the learner and the quality of the learning experience at the forefront of the college's concerns. There is a clear policy and comprehensive procedures for reviewing and evaluating courses. Course teams are required to monitor the successes and weaknesses of their courses through regular review meetings. The course review process is informed by the reports of moderators, verifiers and assessors, the views of students and the results obtained by students as they progress through various stages of their courses.

65 Each year, course teams summarise their course review findings on a standardised form. Comments are required on a range of matters including examination results, curricular developments, resource issues and the views expressed by students. An action plan is prepared in the light of this commentary. A weakness of some of the review and evaluation forms inspected is their failure to specify a timetable for action and identify who will be responsible for ensuring that action will be taken. In addition, some course review forms are completed in a rather cursory fashion and give little account of the developments and issues arising over a year.

66 There is a detailed process for reporting the findings of course reviews, firstly to review boards and then to the curriculum quality subcommittee of the academic board. These bodies analyse reports submitted to them and recommend actions to improve the quality of the provision. Examples of actions which have resulted directly from this process include the improvement of computing facilities to support

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business management courses and the development of part-time evening and access courses.

67 As with its courses, the college aims to monitor regularly the performance of services, such as the student support unit and the library. The views of users of the services are of paramount importance in this process. In the case of the student support unit, a continuous process of review and improvement has been established. Review and evaluation procedures for the library are less developed and documented and do not yet address fully the extent to which the library's stated objectives are being met.

68 The college's mission statement includes a strong commitment to develop the knowledge and skills of staff. A detailed, clearly-articulated policy has given staff development a high profile in the institution. A staff-development committee, which includes representatives of all the curriculum sections and college services, meets regularly to identify and prioritise needs. The college takes a holistic view of staff development, which embraces the needs of teaching and non-teaching staff as well as of governors. The process of course review and evaluation is an important source of information on course-related staff development needs. During the period April 1993 to January 1994, 2,040 days of staff training were undertaken, involving almost all college staff. Aspects covered included admissions, guidance and support, quality assurance and the college's post-incorporation responsibilities, as well as curriculum development issues identified through the course review process.

69 To reinforce its commitment to staff development, the college is seeking Investor in People status. An action plan has been developed in consultation with the local TEC and the college is working towards the achievement of this status by the end of 1995.

70 After an extensive period of consultation, and a number of pilot projects, a staff review process has been introduced. It is intended that this will enable staff to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in relation to their current role and the college's priorities. The procedures are clearly defined and thorough and all staff will be subjected to a review every two years.

71 Good progress has been made in training assessors and verifiers for the expanding NVQ and GNVQ provision. So far, some 150 academic staff have achieved the national standards of competence for assessment or verification established by the Training and Development Lead Body. Good use is also being made of the strong links between the college and employers in providing staff with opportunities to work alongside managers to improve and update their knowledge of industrial and commercial practice.

72 Many staff-development activities are attended jointly by teaching and non-teaching staff but some events have been designed specifically to meet the needs of non-teaching support staff. These include assertiveness

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training, courses in client care and programmes to improve reception staff's awareness of NVQs so that well-informed advice can be given to potential students.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Staffing**

73 Lecturers are committed and well qualified for the teaching they undertake. Most have teaching qualifications. Many staff have relevant commercial or industrial experience, recent in areas such as drama but dated in the case of some business studies lecturers. Approximately 18 per cent of the teaching hours are covered by part-time staff. No curriculum area is excessively reliant on the services of part-time lecturers.

74 Non-teaching staff comprise approximately one-third of all staff. In general, the level of technical and administrative support is good. However, technicians are managed centrally rather than through the curriculum sections which has led sometimes to a lack of technical support in a few areas, for example in science.

### **Equipment/learning resources**

75 The library provides a pleasant environment for private study and group work. The 10 full-time equivalent staff provide a friendly and efficient service and the library is well used by students. There are over 200 study spaces and four rooms available for group work. At times during the day these are all used heavily. The range and quantity of books varies widely across curriculum areas. In some areas, the bookstock is very good. For example, there is a large collection of English literary texts and also sections on American, Scottish, Irish, Black and Asian literature. In other areas, such as construction, the book stock is more limited. There is dated stock in a few subjects such as economics and business studies. The provision of journals and periodicals is adequate for most students but will need to be extended to meet the requirements of higher certificate students. The library provides students with a range of other resources, including, audio-language tapes, video tapes in a variety of subjects, music on compact disks and newspapers on read-only memory disks (CD-ROM). The recently- opened flexible learning workshop located in the library provides an attractive environment, a good range of materials and sufficient support from the staff to encourage independent learning and the enhancement of students' study skills.

76 The quality of specialist equipment used to support teaching and learning is adequate in most areas and good in some. Engineering students have access to computer-controlled machines and art and design studios have extensive stocks of materials. Although adequate, some of the surveying and drawing equipment used by construction students is old and some of the equipment in the materials testing laboratory is poorly maintained. Equipment levels for science are satisfactory but some items are dated.

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77 Good information technology facilities are available to support the work of most curriculum areas. Notable examples are to be found in art and design, business studies and construction. The college also has a well-equipped, computer-aided design centre which offers commercial training to industry. In contrast, computing facilities to support mathematics and science are inadequate and information technology facilities in the library, although sufficient to meet the current demand for word processing, are heavily used.

### **Accommodation**

78 The college is located on a single site. Because the buildings have been adapted and extended at various times, the layout is labyrinthine. Although there is adequate space for current requirements, teaching sometimes takes place in unsuitable rooms. For example, the use of the drama studio for theory sessions in the performing arts is unsatisfactory. A major weakness of the accommodation is that access to some areas is difficult, or impossible, for people with restricted mobility. For instance, the first floor of the library is inaccessible to wheelchair users. In order to cater for the anticipated growth in the number of students over the next few years, the college recognises that it will have to make more effective use of the current accommodation. There are also plans for a new building, financed from revenue income.

79 There is a rolling programme for re-decorating and re-furbishing rooms and communal spaces. Many areas have already been attended to, including the entrance area which now presents an attractive image of the college. Some of the areas which have not yet been upgraded are drab, uninviting and in poor decorative order.

80 Some specialist teaching accommodation is of a high standard and provides an attractive and stimulating learning environment. Examples include the music block, television studio, electronic office and training restaurant. Other specialist accommodation is less satisfactory. For example, some science laboratories and engineering workshops, are shabby and cluttered with unused equipment. Leisure and tourism students do not have an area equipped as a travel shop which would allow them to simulate a realistic working environment more effectively.

81 Social and private study areas for students, limited at present, are being improved and steadily extended. Some good recreational facilities are available to students, including, extensive sports fields, a large well-equipped gymnasium, a concert hall and practice rooms for playing musical instruments.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

82 The college succeeds in its aim of providing high quality programmes of education and training within the context of an outstanding overall system of support for students. The college has many strengths:

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- an extensive and expanding range of full-time courses which provide good opportunities for students of all abilities
  - excellent links with local schools, West London TEC and employers
  - effective governance arrangements including effective working relations between governors and college managers
  - efficient management of the college at all levels
  - a computerised management information system which is responsive to the needs of managers
  - excellent pastoral support for students at all stages of their course
  - teaching that is often outstanding
  - good examination results at GCE A level and in vocational courses
  - good achievements by students with learning difficulties
  - a high profile for staff development which gives consideration to the needs of both teaching and non-teaching staff
  - committed, well-qualified and talented staff
  - good information technology facilities in most areas.

83 The quality of the provision would be improved still further if the following issues were addressed:

- the quality of the teaching in a few areas, although adequate, does not match the good or outstanding work elsewhere
- the results achieved on GCSE courses do not compare with those on GCE A level or vocational courses
- some course reviews, and the evaluation of the service provided by the library, lack necessary detail
- there are parts of the college which are inaccessible to people with restricted mobility and some accommodation is drab and uninviting.

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## FIGURES

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1 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)

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2 Percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)

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3 Full-time equivalent enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)

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3 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)

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4 Recurrent income (1993-94)

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5 Estimated expenditure (1993-94)

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

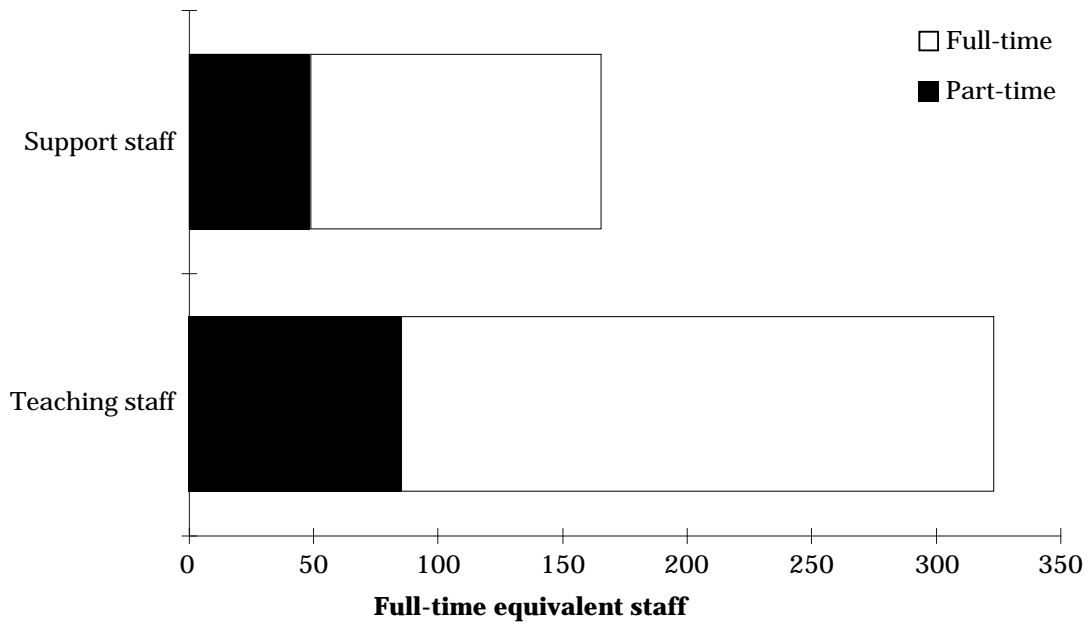
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**Figure 1**

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**Richmond upon Thames College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)**



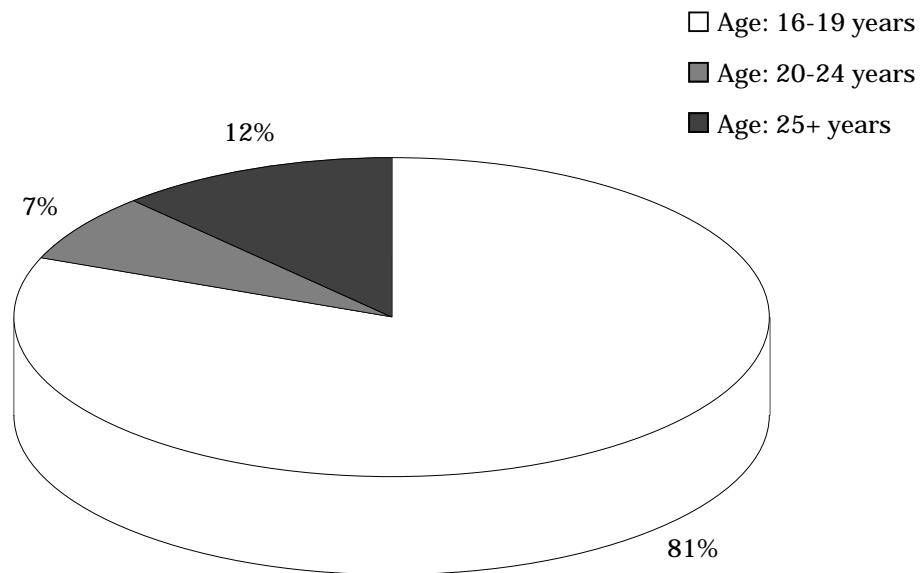
Full-time equivalent staff: 489

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**Figure 2**

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**Richmond upon Thames College: percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)**



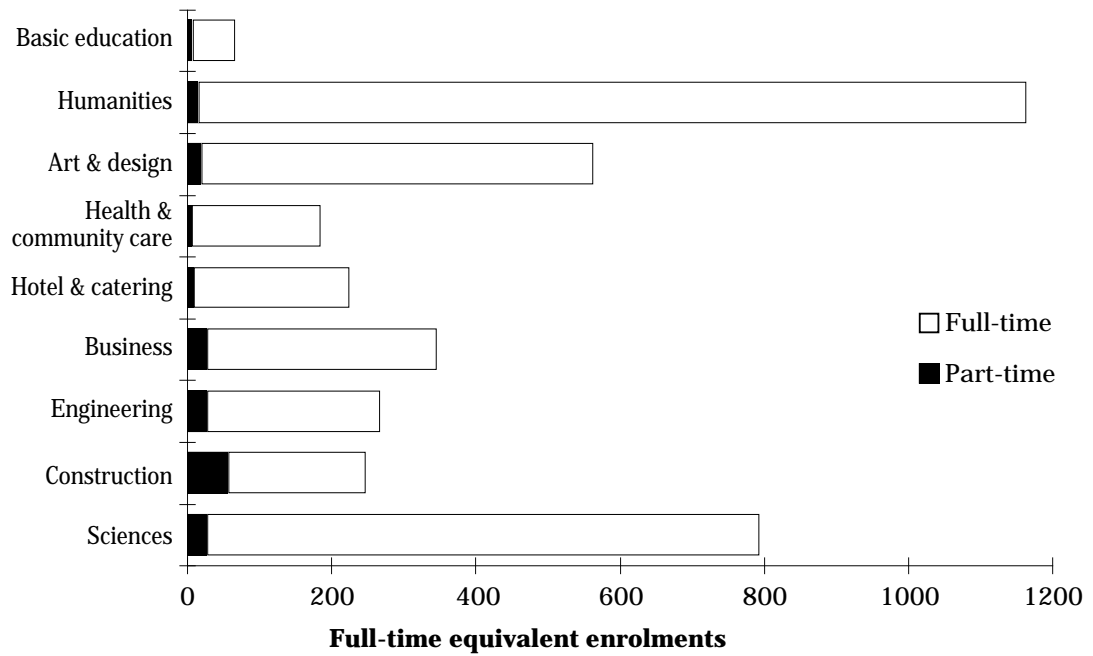
Enrolments: 4,891



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**Figure 3**

**Richmond upon Thames College: full-time equivalent enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)**

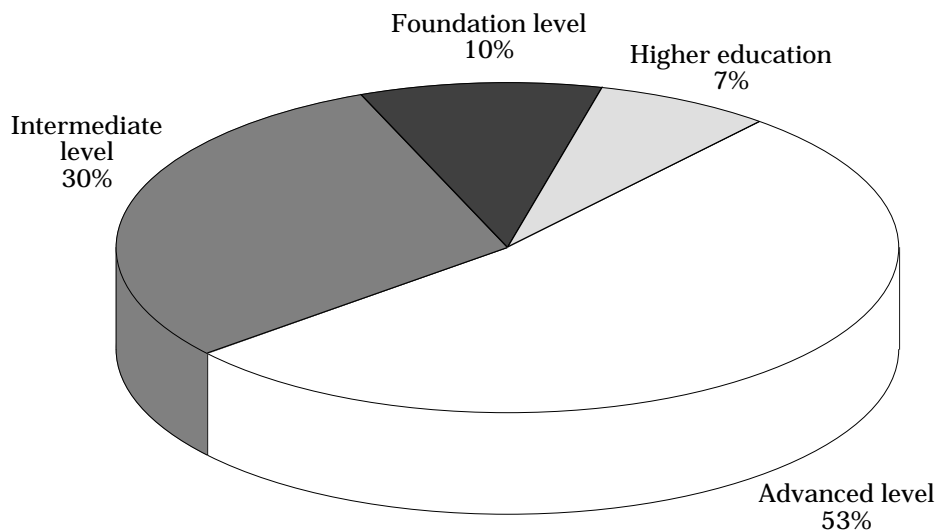


Full-time equivalent enrolments: 3,861

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**Figure 4**

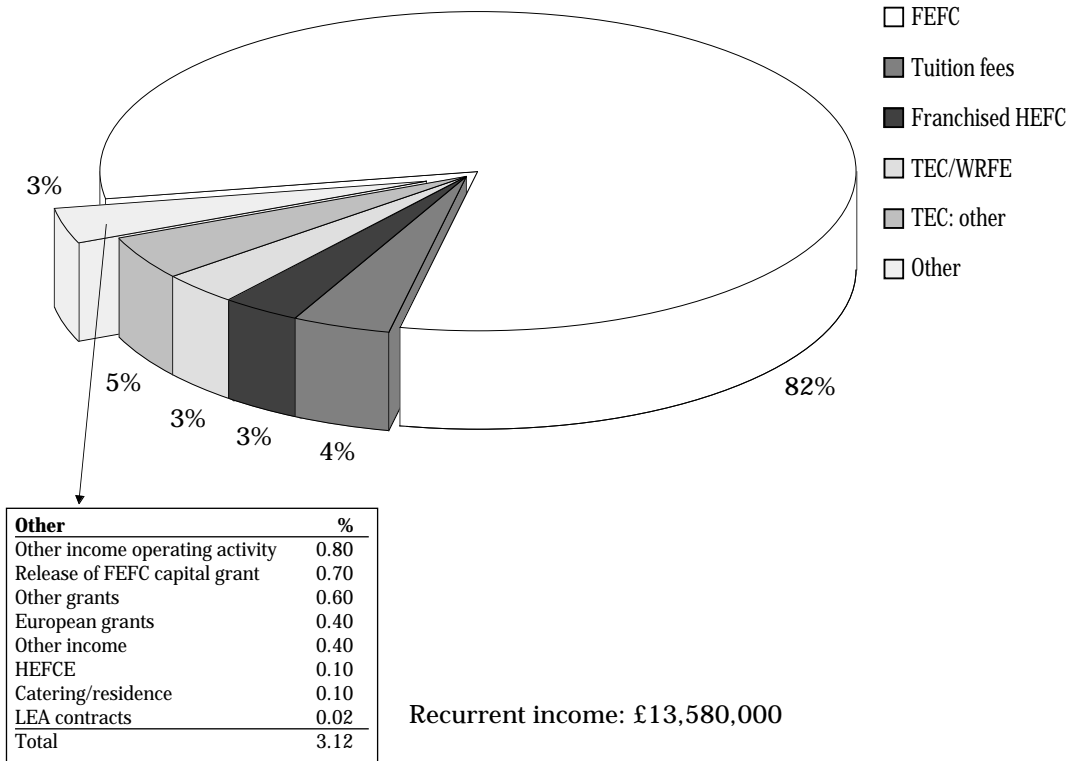
**Richmond upon Thames College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)**



Enrolments: 4,891

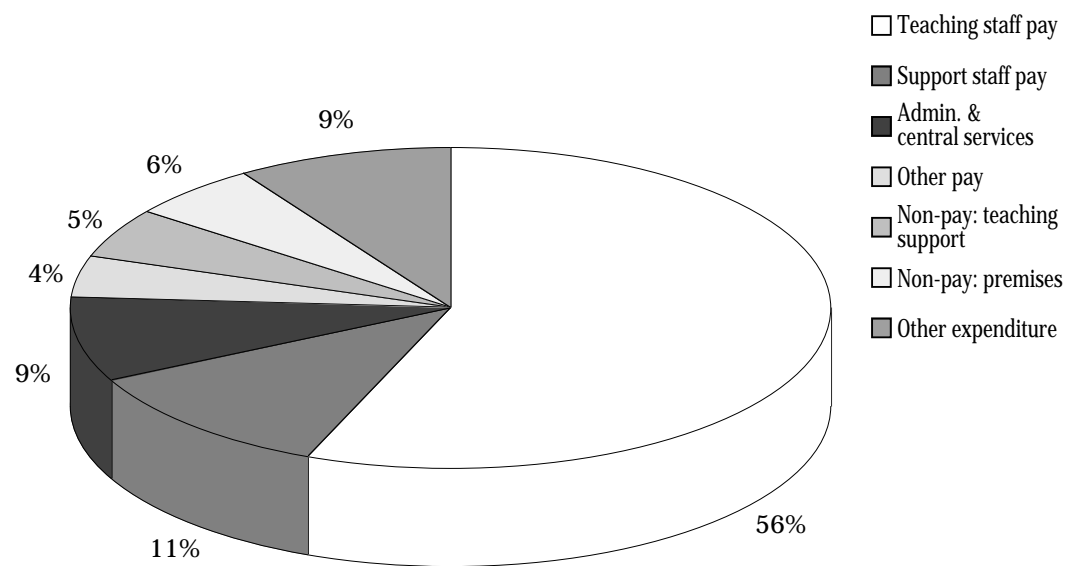
**Figure 5**

**Richmond upon Thames College: recurrent income (1993-94)**



**Figure 6**

**Richmond upon Thames College: estimated expenditure (1993-94)**



Estimated expenditure: £13,808,000

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