

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Rowley Regis College

October 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 123/95

ROWLEY REGIS COLLEGE
WEST MIDLANDS REGION
Inspected January-June 1995

Summary

Rowley Regis College is a sixth form college in Sandwell. It offers a wide range of courses, having successfully extended its provision to include GNVQs, access courses for adults and a Saturday college. The governors have steered the college effectively through a difficult period since incorporation, focusing on financial controls. Although the college has grown rapidly since incorporation, it is not meeting its funded unit targets for 1994-95. The principalship provides strong educational leadership. College restructuring, which has just begun, is aimed at creating more effective educational and business management. There are strong and extensive links with schools, universities, the local authority and with Sandwell TEC. The college has shown much imagination in gaining external funding to develop curriculum initiatives. Guidance and support for students are major strengths. However, learning support is fragmented and the good practice which exists is not being disseminated. Students receive good teaching from well-qualified and experienced teachers. Their examination results are generally below average for sixth form colleges, although many GCE A level students achieve higher grades than are predicted by value-added analysis. The college should: address the poor retention rates on one-year programmes; improve its market research; complete the development of its quality assurance system; strengthen its accommodation strategy; co-ordinate the development of students' core skills; and re-examine its strategy for computer hardware.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and information technology	2	Art and design	2
Business studies and accounts	3	English and communications	2
Health and care	2	Psychology and sociology	2
		Humanities	2

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INTRODUCTION

1 Rowley Regis College was inspected between January and June 1995, enrolment and induction procedures having been inspected at the start of the 1994-95 academic year. Specialist programme areas were inspected during January, February and April 1995. Aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in June 1995. Five full-time and seven part-time inspectors spent a total of 65 working days in the college.

2 Inspectors observed 126 classes and examined students' written and practical work. College documentation was scrutinised at all stages of the inspection and included information on courses, the college's strategic plan, public examination results and minutes of committees. During the inspection of cross-college aspects of provision, discussions were held with governors, parents, students, senior managers and staff. Meetings were also held with a representative of the Sandwell Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), and with representatives of industry, commerce and local schools.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 Rowley Regis College is in the metropolitan borough of Sandwell. The college was founded as an open-access, sixth form college for 16-19 year olds. Diversification under the local education authority (LEA) and the increased flexibility gained from incorporation have led to a rapid growth in enrolments. The mission of the college, with its commitment to raise achievement and increase successful participation, has helped to encourage this growth. By June 1995, enrolments had reached just under 1,600, a rise of over 400 on the previous year. Students over the age of 19 account for almost half of the enrolments, though most full-time students are under 19. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area in figure 3. The college has 92 full-time equivalent staff. There are 67 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 25 full-time equivalent support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

4 The college faces competition from three other nearby further education institutions and another sixth form college. Some local high schools with sixth form provision effectively retain their students who wish to continue in full-time education. The college has no discrete catchment area. It has relatively poor transport connections and is not centrally located. Enrolments to advanced courses continue to rise, but in 1994-95 there was a sharp drop in enrolments to one-year courses at intermediate level. With just over 40 per cent of the students coming from minority ethnic groups, Rowley has a multi-cultural student community.

5 The college has sought to widen access through a variety of compacts with high schools and universities. It has developed access courses for adult students, a flourishing Saturday college, a programme of General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced level, and two degree courses franchised from

Coventry University. There are five teaching faculties: creative studies; humanities; language, literature and communications; mathematics and information technology; and business education and science. The support staff form a sixth administration faculty. Courses are combined in a level 2 and level 3 structure, corresponding to intermediate and advanced qualifications. Courses teams provide student support and guidance and are progressively developing programmes to teach core skills to all students. There is a senior management team of seven, including the principal.

6 The socio-economic context in which the college works has features of both stability and change. The 1994 employment market assessment from the TEC indicated that Sandwell is heavily reliant on manufacturing. Forty-one per cent of jobs are in manufacturing compared with 21 per cent nationally. The number of jobs in service industries has risen by over a quarter in the last decade but it is insufficient to compensate for a 4 per cent reduction in jobs overall. Unemployment fell from 14.3 per cent in November 1993 to 12.5 per cent in November 1994 compared with 8.5 per cent for the United Kingdom. The proportion of people without a job for more than a year has remained unchanged over the last year at 48 per cent.

7 Figures from Sandwell Trends, published in 1995 by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, show that between 1981 and 1991 the overall population of Sandwell fell by 5 per cent, largely through movement out of the area. A small recovery is now projected as the population ages. Nearly 15 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups, the largest being of Indian origin (7.9 per cent) and African-Caribbean (2.7 per cent).

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The college, in its mission, seeks to advance educational opportunity for all members of the local community over the age of 16. It is fully aware of the need to increase access to education and to update work skills in a community which has high unemployment and low levels of educational achievement. The college has been particularly successful in developing courses for adults ranging from foundation level to higher education, although some of these courses recruit low numbers. Relationships with the local authority are constructive. For example, the college and the local authority's economic development unit collaborate in providing programmes of community support.

9 The college's extensive range of programmes includes 35 General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) courses, 35 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subject courses and GNVQ programmes. The college is moving forward with National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). The college was one of the first to offer GCE A level in modular sciences. It has a wide range of performing arts courses. It

also has good provision for foreign languages which helps give a European dimension to the curriculum; there are GCE A level, GCSE and GNVQ courses in German, French and Spanish, and GCE A level and GCSE courses in Latin. A substantial enhancement programme for full-time students includes many leisure, cultural and sporting activities and opportunities for musical tuition. The programme also enables students to begin the study of foreign languages and to undertake foreign visits.

10 Provision for adult students includes basic education courses and a range of vocational courses, some of which are offered off-site in partnership with statutory and voluntary organisations as part of a more determined effort to bring educational opportunity directly to the community. A distinctive and highly-successful innovation on the main site has been the Saturday college which focuses on providing NVQ, GCSE and other short courses. Courses specifically for women have also been developed. The successful promotion and development of this broad curriculum places heavy strains upon the staff and organisational resources of the college. Progress in delivering flexible forms of learning, one of the college's strategic objectives, has been modest. Representatives of the TEC and of the community are agreed that the introduction of flexible forms of learning would help to widen access and make more efficient use of teachers' expertise.

11 The shortfall in recruitment during the current year underlines the need for effective marketing. The development of the Saturday college owes much to the marketing expertise of the TEC. Marketing policy is the responsibility of a senior member of the college staff who receives remission of a quarter of a teaching timetable for this responsibility. There is also some secretarial support. The marketing budget has been substantially increased in the current year. This covers all prospectuses, course literature, advertising, display boards and general promotion. Although the college's marketing committee has been recently reorganised to ensure that all faculties are represented, it is not clear that the importance of marketing has been recognised by the staff as a whole. The college's own survey of the impact of marketing literature has pointed to significant limitations.

12 Relatively little market research has been undertaken to help the college identify how best to promote the courses it offers and the college has only just begun to research markets for new curriculum proposals. Enquiries about provision are recorded and passed to curriculum leaders but there is no overall evaluation of the information they yield. It would be helpful to add marketing questions to surveys of students' perceptions and to place the evaluation of employers' satisfaction with the college's provision on a more formal basis.

13 It is the college's aim to place one news story each week in the local press. A folder of press releases indicates that the college has done well in promoting publicity for students' achievements. News stories about students' achievements are displayed in the reception area.

14 There are strong links with 12 local schools which have led to the development of compacts. The college also has compact and partnership arrangements with 10 universities which have assisted in raising awareness of, and access to, higher education. A science and mathematics foundation course, and the first year of a part-time BA (honours) in social sciences, are offered in conjunction with Coventry University. The college organises a mathematics competition for local schools and offers a Latin week which introduces school pupils to the nature of classical civilisations. There are also media, communications, and information technology days for schools. Other curriculum links are not well developed.

15 Relations with the Sandwell TEC are close and cordial. TEC representatives are highly appreciative of the college's responsiveness to local needs. The college has shown much imagination in gaining external sources of funding to develop curriculum initiatives. It has successfully secured TEC funding as well as matched funding from the European Social Fund to support an initiative on family literacy and vocational guidance. TEC-funded initiatives have included local projects, short courses in access to science, GNVQ pilot courses in health and social care, and business studies for work-related further education. Other collaborative work includes participation in the Tipton City Challenge, which has enabled the college to offer access to adult basic education and access to higher education, and the development of a franchise link with a training provider, aimed at the training of those from disadvantaged groups. The growth of outreach work is helping to strengthen links with the local community. Students frequently visit outside organisations and a large number of local employers offer work placements.

16 The college has an established industrial advisory group to promote links between education and industry. Its many activities have included evaluation of an education industry policy, student industry projects, work experience, industrial support for GNVQ, and a survey of students' experience in part-time jobs as a basis for future guidance. The college has only just begun detailed work on identifying employers' needs. No reference has been made to the community or employers in the college charter. Realistically, the college cannot hope to compete equally with some larger colleges in the range of training courses it can offer employers. It is nevertheless ready and willing to exploit opportunities as they arise: for example, it has developed customised training packages in French for employees of two local plastics companies.

17 Centrally co-ordinated programmes of work experience are offered to all advanced and many intermediate students. Students may also undertake similar activities, including placements in schools and social services organisations, through the curriculum enhancement programme. Some students are also involved in work shadowing. Students are well prepared, employers are given advance information on their students and there is co-operation between employers and tutors. Students evaluate

their work experience and record outcomes in their records of achievement. Employers also complete evaluations.

18 The college welcomes students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but its buildings present problems of access for those with restricted mobility. There is effective liaison with local agencies particularly for students with substantial visual or hearing impairment.

19 The college has a good equal opportunities policy. The policy document, issued to all staff, has helpful sections on the correct use of names for different ethnic and religious groups and a calendar of religious festivals to assist the college in planning its programmes. Staff are also alerted to key equal opportunities issues. An audit of equal opportunities issues within the curriculum has indicated the need to develop improved curriculum materials. Formal college procedures have rarely had to be invoked over matters of equal opportunity. The college monitors enrolments by gender and ethnicity. It is successful in recruiting many students from minority ethnic groups and the numbers of male and female students are roughly equal.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 Governors and managers have responded well to the difficult challenges they faced at incorporation. The closure of a sister sixth form college in 1992 contributed to significant growth in the recruitment to Rowley. Between 1993 and 1994 this resulted in an increase of 372 per cent in part-time enrolments and a 22 per cent increase in full-time enrolments. The college has not achieved its funding targets for 1994-95 and the college governors and managers have had to oversee a rationalisation of the staffing and work to secure the college's finances.

21 The corporation has 20 members. There are 11 independent members drawn from industry and commerce, three co-opted members, a parent, two members of staff and the principal. Two vacancies existed at the time of the inspection, one for another parent member and one for a TEC nominee. The board has accepted the nomination of an independent member with a marketing background to rectify a recognised gap in its expertise. Governors have tried to attain a balanced membership and are aware that, with only three women members and one member from a minority ethnic background, this has not yet been achieved. A representative of the Sandwell LEA and two student representatives regularly attend corporation meetings by invitation. The attendance of the vice-principals is optional. Other staff attend meetings at the request of the governors to provide information on specific issues.

22 Valuable continuity has been provided by members who were associated with the college before its incorporation. These include the chairman, who continues in that role, and four independent members who were part of the former college's industrial advisory group. There have

been nine changes in the membership but vacancies have generally been filled quickly. Governors work hard for the college and the average attendance at corporation meetings has been good. Since its inception, the corporation has increased the frequency of its meetings.

23 The corporation has eight committees: audit; remuneration; finance and resources; personnel; curriculum planning and general purposes; staffing; staffing appeals; and a special committee concerned with student discipline. They are subject to an annual review by the governors and there have been changes to their functions and membership to ensure that they work effectively. Membership of the committees has been arranged to draw most effectively on the expertise of the independent members, which includes business, finance, management training, higher education, health, personnel management and work with local voluntary organisations. Membership of some of the committees is small. The corporation has had to co-opt an appropriate audit committee chairman from outside the ranks of the corporation board.

24 The functions of the committees of the corporation are clearly and simply described but not all of them have full terms of reference. Some procedural matters including the rules on quorum and members' interests are not well defined. Steps have had to be taken to bring the membership of the finance and resources committee into line with the instruments and articles of government. The corporation has not formally determined a policy for attendance of non-members at meetings of the corporation board and its committees.

25 Working relationships between the principal, the chairman of the corporation and the chairman of the finance and resources committee are good and have helped to ensure that corporation and management business have been carried out efficiently. The principal meets fortnightly with these two chairmen to discuss general matters. Members of the corporation have a standing invitation to attend the college board or its subcommittee's meetings; a few have made use of this opportunity. Governors would value further involvement with the senior management team and the college. Governors were in agreement that a recent awareness raising day had been beneficial both for them and for the college's senior managers. Training for governors is a standing item on the corporation agenda and a budget to support training has been agreed for the current financial year. Governors have produced their own induction materials for new members.

26 Governors considered the strategic implications of the college's mission and made contributions to the final version of the mission statement before endorsing it. The corporation had a limited involvement in the initial strategic plan. However, it subsequently received and discussed a monitoring report on the operational objectives in the first year and has been fully involved in drawing up the strategic plan for

1994-97. The corporation receives statistical data on students' achievements and destinations, including some year-on-year analysis. So far, the data have not been used as performance indicators to inform strategic planning. The corporation has considered and approved the college charter. Governors have supported the development of adult basic education and the expansion of off-site provision.

27 The principalship provides strong educational leadership and faculty and departmental policies reflect the college's strategic plan. The academic organisation of the college is clear. The senior management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals, two directors of study, a senior manager (marketing and personnel) and the senior administrator. The weekly meetings of the senior management team have agendas and are minuted. The college takes pride in its informal, open and collaborative style of working but recently communications have been adversely affected by staff tensions arising from the actions required to deal with the college's failure to reach its funded targets. Some staff fail to understand the reasons for the policies being implemented. The college has started a process of restructuring aimed at developing more effective educational and business management. Senior managers view this as necessary to achieve the college's strategic objectives. All members of the senior management group, other than the principal and the senior administrator, have teaching responsibilities which places pressure on their ability to manage the growing range of duties assigned to them. The transition to new standard contracts for sixth form college staff was achieved successfully.

28 The college board fulfils a similar role to an academic board. The board reviews performance against the operational objectives derived from the strategic plan and reports these to the corporation. There are 15 subcommittees of the board. The main one is the curriculum subcommittee. Others include finance and resources, equal opportunities, information technology, and marketing. Senior managers are represented on all the subcommittees.

29 The college has policies for information technology, for the promotion of environmental awareness, for health and safety, and for equal opportunities. The responsibilities for these are clearly defined. The college fulfils the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 by providing a weekly opportunity for students to participate in an act of worship and by offering religious education for those who wish to receive it.

30 The corporation receives monthly reports on the college's income and expenditure. The college has delegated budgets for materials and supplies. Reports which detail variances between planned and actual expenditure against departmental allocations are available to budget holders. Systems for calculating unit costing are at an early stage of development. Staffing costs comprise 72 per cent of the total budget. Summaries of the college's audited income and expenditure for the 12

month period to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is £21.87 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.81. The college has made good progress in increasing its funding from sources other than the Further Education Funding Council.

31 The college has used a computerised management information system for three years and senior managers are confident that it meets their needs. The system supplies reliable information for the day-to-day administration and running of courses, including details of student applications, enrolments, examination entries, and financial orders and returns. The college has recently purchased an additional registration and attendance facility but it has yet to be implemented. Administrative staff are available to record student information through networked computers. Only course directors, directors of study and one vice-principal from the academic staff have on-line access to the information. Other staff request data using standard forms. Senior managers make good use of management information data in exercising budgetary and academic control. There is a good management information service policy in which objectives and responsibilities are defined. Staff development in the use of the management information system has been restricted to curriculum directors and some senior staff. It is being widened to include middle managers. The management information system has not been used as a marketing tool although data are used to predict trends. Further staff development and resources will be required to achieve the college's objectives for management information.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

32 The college gives high priority to providing appropriate support for students on entry, during their courses, and in preparation for the next stage of their careers. The support given to individual students is a major strength. Students, parents, and local headteachers praise the caring and friendly environment and the commitment of college staff to raising achievement. In a 1994 survey conducted by the local authority, 45 per cent of students from schools who chose Rowley Regis College gave its good reputation as the main reason for their choice.

33 The college has an extensive programme of information and recruitment events. These include visits to schools, attendance at school careers events and parents' evenings, college open days and special events such as taster days. Headteachers had a very positive view of the college. They thought that their pupils' involvement in specific curriculum activities at the college before leaving school was particularly effective in encouraging recruitment. The college prospectus and course leaflets for prospective students are well presented and give clear and full information. Information on the college and its courses is made available at external locations including schools, libraries, job centres and community venues. The college advertises through the local press at specific points in the year, for example, during adult learners' week and just prior to enrolment.

34 Procedures for admission are well defined. A team of liaison tutors visits schools on a regular basis to talk to pupils and to hold interviews with prospective students. The tutors deal with applications and monitor the process from initial application to enrolment. There is no central admissions system but all applications are centrally logged, then tracked by liaison tutors. All applicants for full-time courses and some applicants for part-time courses receive an interview. Applicants from schools without liaison tutors are invited to the college for interview. Students wishing to enrol on vocational courses have a further interview with specialist staff, as do adults wishing to join daytime classes or the access to higher education programme. An introductory day in July for school leavers who have accepted offers of places allows them to sample lessons in a number of subjects. Introductory sessions are also held for adults wishing to attend the Saturday college or evening classes.

35 Enrolment days are conducted in a friendly and efficient manner and supported by clear documentation. Most paperwork is processed without lengthy queuing, although some delays occur at times. Teams of staff are on hand to advise on the suitable choice of courses although some staff have a concern that subject-specific issues do not receive enough attention at this stage. Careers advice is also available. Guidance and interview arrangements for adults wishing to join Saturday college courses are effective. The college staff monitor enrolment procedures effectively and make adjustments where necessary.

36 Arrangements for induction are comprehensive. A two-day induction event is held to introduce students to the college. A separate one-day induction is held for adults. College surveys show that most students on intermediate programmes and 63 per cent of those on advanced programmes found induction useful. Some advanced students re-enrolling thought that the induction period was not necessary or too long. Some of the general induction sessions were poorly delivered and students on the access to higher education programme complained that their induction did not sufficiently address their needs as adults. High-quality course and study guides and other handouts are provided in a number of subject areas. Students enrolling after the main induction period are provided with an induction pack and receive individual assistance from personal and subject tutors. Students wishing to transfer between programmes or change subjects understand the procedures. Each case is treated on its merits and careful records are kept of all such changes.

37 Students requiring additional support are asked to identify their needs on application forms. Subject tutors also refer students for support where they feel it is necessary. There is good liaison between the college and schools over individuals' special needs. The college provides additional support for a small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on mainstream courses. Although there is a college-wide policy for learning support, staffing difficulties and accommodation changes have

delayed its full implementation. Responsibility for the delivery of learning support is shared between several members of staff. They work closely together but the provision is fragmented. All students on the GNVQ foundation level programme are assessed for basic literacy and numeracy and receive support as an integral part of the programme. There is good liaison between the heads of the English and mathematics departments to develop common approaches to support for basic skills. All students embarking on GCSE English and mathematics courses also receive an initial assessment. Any additional support they may require is provided in class and in special workshops in English, mathematics and information technology. Workshops are available on a drop-in basis to other students but, with the exception of information technology, the take-up has been low. Ways are being sought to ensure that students who would benefit from the provision make good use of it. Learning-centre provision has recently been extended and students can receive support in the use of computers as well as help with research skills. The good practice which exists in some curriculum areas should be extended so that all students can receive and make use of the learning support they need.

38 The college is developing systems for the accreditation of students' prior learning and experience and has run an experimental course for developing accreditation of prior learning portfolios for adults in outreach centres. There is a small amount of accreditation of prior learning within the main college. Four members of staff are trained to help students collect evidence. This work is still at an early stage of development.

39 All full-time and some part-time students have a personal tutor. Whenever possible, tutors teach the students in their tutorial group. For full-time students there are two half-hour tutorial periods each week. One is for students to meet individually with their tutor to review achievement and to discuss personal matters; the other is a group tutorial based on a programme which covers activities such as the development of the record of achievement, core skills, advice and support on careers and progression to further and higher education, and advice on personal organisation and study skills. An impressive feature of the tutorial system is the careful support provided for personal tutors in the form of briefing notes and other materials. The reaction of students to tutorials is mixed. Surveys and discussions show that a significant proportion of students have yet to be convinced of their value and some rarely attend. There have been problems in establishing a satisfactory personal tutor system for the students on access programmes. Several effective sessions were seen and almost all the tutorial sessions inspected were found to be productive.

40 There is no central student services unit. The college is to receive funding from the TEC to establish a service in the coming year, together with a central admissions unit. Student services are provided mainly through the tutoring system, by course directors and directors of study. Counselling is available for students with more serious personal difficulties.

Staffing problems have precluded the planned appointment of staff as designated counsellors. The service is, at present, provided by teaching staff and there is no male counsellor in the team. Staff undertaking the work have experience of counselling and have developed good links with a range of appropriate external agencies. They provide invaluable support and advice for students and for other tutors. The college administers a hardship fund and an access fund and provides free meals and subsidised bus passes to eligible students.

41 Careers education and guidance sessions form an integral part of the tutorial system. They are designed to develop increasing self-awareness and knowledge of the opportunities open for employment and for progress in further or higher education. There is a well-stocked careers library which has relevant computer software. The college has close links with the Black Country Careers Service and students can request an interview with a careers officer at any time. This year, an established careers guidance event takes the form of a summer conference called 'Moving On'. The college also provides a careers evening for parents. The college offers an advisory service for students during the week following publication of examination results and in early September. Staff and careers officers help students who need it to find an alternative to the course they originally envisaged. Careers support and guidance for adults, particularly those in outreach and basic skills programmes, is less well developed.

42 The college requires all students who are school leavers to bring their records of achievement with them, and makes every effort to encourage them to update them. Excellent examples of completed records were seen during the inspection. Guidance from tutors on personal statements, coupled with the attention paid to the development of core skills, had enabled students to make perceptive and meaningful evaluations of their strengths and to identify areas for improvement. Students are encouraged to wordprocess their records. The use of records of achievement is increasing, but there is some way to go before all students leave the college with a complete and up-to-date version. A recent development has been the introduction of the youth award scheme for advanced level students which provides an extra dimension to the development of core skills and the completion of the record of achievement. The scheme provides opportunities for students to enhance their studies by undertaking additional activities. Some of these lead to qualifications accredited under the youth award scheme and the British Petroleum tutoring scheme, and some to outcomes recorded in the record of achievement. The range of options is wide; it includes community work, work experience, classroom assistance in schools, residential visits, and recreational, sporting and cultural activities.

43 Procedures for monitoring students' attendance are generally effective. Students know that absences will be followed up and, where appropriate, promptly reported in writing to parents. Subject tutors

provide weekly lists of absentees and these are monitored by personal tutors and course directors, using computer-based systems. Some students have poor records of attendance and procedures for following up absences are not rigorously applied in some subject areas.

44 Students are advised of their rights and responsibilities during induction when they receive a college guide containing a summary of the college's charter and information on college services. There is a separate college guide for adult students. The college has a students' council which raises issues affecting students and organises social events. Students are encouraged to play an active part but the numbers prepared to attend meetings have been disappointing. The level of students' satisfaction with the college and the services it provides is high. Some students had suggestions for improvements but few revealed any serious shortcomings in the quality of the support and guidance received. The development of detailed written procedures for some elements of the support systems would help tutors to ensure that the quality of provision is of the same high standard for all students.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

45 Strengths clearly outweighed weaknesses in 68 per cent of the 126 teaching sessions that were inspected. Only 2 per cent had weaknesses that outweighed the strengths. In the sessions inspected the average attendance level was 77 per cent. The following table summarises the grades given as a result of the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		10	41	17	2	0	70
GCSE		2	12	8	0	0	22
GNVQ		6	11	9	0	0	26
Access to higher education		0	4	3	1	0	8
Total		18	68	37	3	0	126

46 All programme areas had detailed schemes of work, most of which contained clear aims and objectives which were shared with the students. The working relations between staff and students were generally good. Teachers used an appropriate range of teaching methods but there were examples of an over reliance on dictated notes and handouts in the sciences, business studies and aspects of health and social care. In physics and in art and design, teachers took good account of students' different levels of attainment in the tasks which were set. In health and social care, and history, there were regular tests to check that learning had been achieved. Few opportunities were provided for students to use information

technology other than in computing and science lessons. The lack of computers, the age of some of the equipment and problems with computer operating systems restricted opportunities for learning in some sessions.

47 In mathematics there were good examples of students developing relevant skills, particularly in problem solving. The pace of the work was appropriate. Good teaching was enhanced by the use of resources which included video materials to support GCSE students and graphical calculators for GCE A level students following the school's mathematics project. There was little evidence of the use of information technology. Some GCE A level students were reluctant to contribute to sessions and some had basic weaknesses in mathematical skills.

48 Computing staff produced high-quality course materials for students to work on. Lessons were well organised. There was good use of technical vocabulary. Project tasks were interesting and students used up-to-date resources. The integration of work for the Cambridge information technology course with work in other subjects enabled students to achieve this qualification while following other subjects.

49 Science was generally well taught. In physics, able students undertook extended practical assignments, or additional written questions, allowing the teacher the opportunity to help weaker students. Science students' assessments were marked fairly against stated criteria or listed objectives. There is no overall departmental policy for recording marks, though all teachers kept their own records. The present system for recording GNVQ assessment scores will become inadequate as courses develop. Practical assessment schemes were thorough and mark schemes good, especially in chemistry. Students' use of information technology included statistical analysis in biology, production of wordprocessed assignment reports and the simulation of radioactive decay using a dynamic modelling programme. Science teachers employed a range of teaching methods although they appeared most confident when giving lectures or using duplicated notes with the students. Most of the experiments observed during the inspection were limited to demonstrations by teachers. Chemistry students did not have enough opportunity to undertake practical work.

50 High standards of teaching were observed in some business lessons. Outline topic sheets enabled law students to contribute to lessons and to expand their notes as these topics were explored. The recording of students' achievements was good, particularly for GNVQ programmes. Assessments were fair and of an appropriate standard. Deadlines for setting, marking and returning work were usually observed. Lessons in law and accountancy were thoroughly prepared and teachers used a variety of methods of working. In business studies courses the range of activities was narrower. In many of the lessons inspected, teachers relied heavily on dictation or the copying of notes when other activities would have been more profitable for students. Some teachers failed to check

that students understood what had been covered before they moved on to the next topic.

51 Lessons in health and social care were well managed and there was a good range of student activities. Teachers made effective use of audio-visual aids on GNVQ courses and GCE A level courses in sociology and psychology to stimulate discussion and support exercises on topics such as health, disability, and child abuse. There is a long tradition of working with pre-vocational students which is used to good effect in GNVQ teaching. In one well-organised lesson taught by a team of teachers, foundation level students participated enthusiastically in a project to survey access to the college buildings for students with restricted mobility. In a minority of sessions, students were given too little opportunity to ask questions or to discuss issues.

52 Art and design staff worked well as a teaching team. Course syllabuses at intermediate and advanced level shared common themes which enabled students with differing levels of attainments to learn together. Lessons topics were supported by written briefs and a variety of resource materials. There was an appropriate vocational emphasis to the work on GNVQ courses. Some of the practical work in design was of a high standard. For example, there was interesting work on a portable support bar to be clamped to a car door, to assist a person with muscular dystrophy. Students' progress is monitored effectively and students have a clear understanding of assessment requirements. The lack of contact between the art and design department and the design and technology department is a disadvantage to students.

53 English lessons were well prepared and course documentation is thorough. Methods of working included groupwork and workshops for communications and core skills. In one well-structured and imaginative session, students re-examined the characters in a modern novel by reflecting on the styles of letters written to problem pages of teenage magazines. Students were well motivated and made effective oral contributions in class. Their written work was carefully marked by tutors with perceptive and helpful comments. Students made limited use of information technology and there were few examples of wordprocessed coursework. On average, a third of students were absent from the English classes inspected; attendance at some GCSE classes was particularly poor.

54 History teaching at GCE A level was characterised by clear aims and objectives, authoritative subject knowledge and an emphasis on the analysis of primary and secondary sources. Visual aids and well-produced handouts provided effective support for students' learning. Some of the oral work was of a high standard. For example, GCE A level students engaged in a lively discussion of aspects of the Reformation demonstrated a sound grasp of sixteenth century philosophical and theological concepts. In contrast, most GCSE students were reluctant to ask questions or to join in discussion. Attendance at some GCSE history classes has been poor.

55 Many of the Saturday college and outreach sessions were of a high standard. Lessons were well prepared, the teaching was effective and there was an appropriate range of methods of working. There were limited records of students' progress on some of the courses, and in a small minority of lessons teachers failed to take adequate account of the needs of adult learners. Activities which formed part of the preparation of portfolios for the NVQ level 2 in care were carefully planned; they encouraged students to develop study skills, included practical work and were linked to students' work experience. Wordprocessing classes were well organised and students used high-quality resources.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

56 Many of the college's students have modest GCSE achievements and come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Those who achieve well do so as a result of their own determination and the support of the college. The college is particularly keen to demonstrate the value-added element of its provision for students. The college uses the Advanced Level Information System to demonstrate that students in the majority of subjects achieve better results than might be predicted from their qualifications on entry. Students regularly use information technology to support their work in sciences and art and design. In other subjects the use of information technology varies substantially. English, law and accountancy students made little use of computers, even to wordprocess their assignments.

57 Students are acquiring appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding in the subject they are studying. Standards of oracy vary but there were many examples in the lessons inspected of students speaking clearly and confidently and, at GCE A level, some of the class discussion was incisive and well informed. The quality of students' written work is generally satisfactory and some advanced level coursework is of a high standard. Most students require more guidance on how to take effective notes.

58 The majority of courses offer students the opportunity to work together in small groups. In sociology and psychology these opportunities are few but students are developing good groupwork skills in business studies, biology, physics, chemistry, and health and social care.

59 Practical work is carried out competently and safely in art and design and in GCE A level biology. Chemistry and physics students work well together in group practicals although they do not always wear appropriate protective clothing.

60 The number of passes obtained in GCE A level examinations has increased from 261 in 1992 to 504 in 1994. The 252 students aged 16-18 entered for GCE A level examinations in 1994 achieved an average point score of 4.2 per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education.

61 In the majority of GCE A level subjects, students achieved higher than their expected grades on the basis of value-added predictions. In law and sociology, and to a lesser extent design technology, a substantial number of students achieved grades higher than predicted. In art, geography and general studies students achieved lower grades than those predicted.

62 Pass rates for GCE A level art were 25 to 30 per cent below the national average for sixth form colleges in the years 1993 and 1994. However, students taking communication studies and small numbers of students in music and dance achieved pass rates which were better than the national averages. In geography, the number of passes at grades A and B increased between 1993 and 1994, but pass rates at grades A-E were still 25 per cent below the national average for that subject.

63 In 1993-94 the overall pass rate for GCSE grades A-C was 40 per cent compared with a national average of 49 per cent for all sixth form colleges. The college aims to achieve at least one grade improvement for students taking GCSE and, over a number of years, it has generally been successful. In law, the pass rates at grades A-C were good, but there was a poor retention rate. In English language, 55 per cent of students gained grades A-C which was just above the average of 53 per cent for sixth form colleges. Pass rates in mathematics at grades A-C were 17 per cent below the national average. In 1993 and 1994 there were good GCSE results in accounting, French, German, design and art.

64 Pass rates at grades A-C in GCSE chemistry and physics have improved in recent years but are still below the national averages for those subjects. There are poor results in GCSE biology; only 25 per cent of students achieved grades A-C in 1994 compared with a national average of 40 per cent. In business studies, 43 per cent of students achieved grades A-C compared with 46 per cent in sixth form colleges nationally. In GCSE computer studies, the pass rate at grades A-C (32 per cent) was well below the national average of 51 per cent and had declined by approximately 12 per cent since 1993.

65 Intermediate GNVQ programmes in business, health and social care and manufacturing were started in 1993-94. Eighty-eight per cent of the intermediate GNVQ students completed their courses in 1994 and 54 per cent gained their awards. In health and social care, a number of students had been placed on intermediate programmes because there were no foundation level courses available at that time. This has now been remedied by the introduction of a foundation course. All successful students who remained at the college went on to take advanced courses. In business studies, 50 per cent of the intermediate students went on to advanced provision. Approximately 40 per cent of the health and social care students went on to advanced level and a significant number continued to complete further units at intermediate level. All four students aged 16-18 entered for the BTEC national diploma in 1994 were successful and the national tables prepared by the Department for Education indicated 100

per cent pass rates. However, the number of students is not significant enough for the college's performance to be measured against others in the sector.

66 The college has recorded course completion rates for 1993-94. Some of these figures give cause for concern. Retention rates are low in GCE A level art (47 per cent) and economics (48 per cent). German, music, theatre studies and sixteenth century history recruit small numbers and retain their students. In GCSE subjects low retention rates include music at 45 per cent and Afro-Caribbean history at 50 per cent. The last subject has now been discontinued.

67 There were 486 leavers in 1994. Thirty per cent went to degree courses, 12 per cent to other further and higher education courses and 17 per cent to employment. Two per cent went into youth training schemes and 4 per cent became unemployed. Nearly 35 per cent of leavers' destinations were unknown to the college at the time that the statistics were collected. Further analysis by the college shows a rise in the numbers going into higher education. Many of these entries were to universities in the Midlands. Nearly 25 per cent went to Wolverhampton University, partly as a result of the college's compact with that university. Seventy-five per cent of all GCE A level science students are now pursuing science-based higher education courses. Analysis of the 50 early leavers in November 1994, shows a significant proportion of Asian males (35 per cent) leaving. This is congruent with national norms but no reasons have been determined. Statistics for 1995 show that between 25 and 30 per cent of students enrolled in September had left by the end of May. Over two-thirds of these were not accounted for in terms of destinations or reasons for leaving.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

68 The college is working within the broad principles and framework of its strategic quality management plan to develop an effective quality assurance system. The original quality policy, agreed in 1993, has been amended to include supporting policies, standards and performance indicators for the priority areas of teaching, learning and pastoral care. Considerable development work took place initially but implementation was delayed for a year because of the absence of key staff. Consequently, a quality assurance discussion document, produced in July 1994, has not yet been agreed.

69 The quality policy has begun to be implemented through a strategy for setting standards and targets, for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating progress, and for implementing improvements. Considerable work is planned, under the lead of the vice-principal supported by the quality management group. There is still much to be done. The college has developed draft quality requirements for literacy and numeracy provision, together with a system to enable the college to check that the requirements

are being met. Policies for assessment, personal tutoring and enrolment are still under discussion. Standards of service to students, including standards for student commitment and behaviour, are detailed in the college charter issued to all staff and students during September 1994. None of the charter standards have been incorporated within the college's operational plan or cross-referenced to the developing delivery standards. There are no measurable performance indicators in the charter. However, the charter standards are being used to evaluate delivery of programmes and pastoral support. Students are aware of the charter and it was introduced to new students.

70 Standards are being developed to support the emerging policies. Cross-college standards for teaching and learning have been agreed and implemented in three faculties; the other two have still to do this. Policies for college-wide induction and for recording achievement have been implemented. The college responds well to a wide range of standards which have been specified by awarding, examining, verifying and funding bodies. These standards are managed and controlled at course level, documented in the course proposals presented to external bodies and validated by external validators. During 1993, the college achieved approved training organisation status with Sandwell TEC for adult access courses. A service level agreement has been negotiated with the Black Country Careers Service.

71 Comprehensive arrangements have been developed to monitor and review the quality and impact of teaching, learning and pastoral care at cross-college, course and faculty levels. There was evidence that these are working well and are improving the quality of service offered to students. The college has been monitoring performance indicators for several years. These include the size of classes, retention rates, attendance rates, examination results and value-added measures. Draft performance indicators for enrolment have been produced but considerable work remains to be done to develop further clear, measurable indicators for services and their delivery and to establish systems to gather, store and analyse relevant management information. There is some confusion about the difference between targets and objectives, which needs to be resolved. Analysis of the comments received from student surveys during April 1995 helped to establish baselines for measuring performance against standards for teaching and learning and this should enable the college to set realistic targets for the next academic year.

72 The quality policy is supported by regular production of a range of evaluation reports. Conclusions in some correspond to the findings of the inspection. The arrangements for evaluating and improving the college's strategic and operational plans are effective. Students' views on teaching, learning, pastoral care and charter standards are monitored; conclusions from the monitoring process are provided for curriculum committees. They were supported by questionnaires which had been analysed by senior

management to inform course level and cross-college reviews. Students were also invited to comment on their experience through useful subject-specific questionnaires. External moderators, validators and contractors reports were effectively collated and analysed at course level and evaluated by senior managers.

73 The college produced a comprehensive self-assessment report, based on Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report is appropriately critical about several aspects of the college's work, including quality assurance, but there is no cross-referencing to evidence. Some of the conclusions are in accordance with the findings of the inspection.

74 Staff appraisal has been undertaken for three years. Staff perceptions of the appraisal process have been obtained through surveys and modifications to the process have been made as a result. The college has yet to link the setting of development targets for individuals to college-wide objectives. By the end of the 1994-95 academic year it is anticipated that all academic and administrative staff will have undergone aspects of appraisal and many will be in their second year of review. The college aims to achieve the Investor in People standard for staff development. It has received external funding for this purpose, but it did not achieve the standard at its first attempt.

75 Staff development is linked to both strategic and individual objectives. Surveys are used to help in the effective planning of college-wide training activities. Groups of staff have undertaken training in areas such as information technology and pastoral support but little or no formal training has been given in quality assurance. Staff have an in-service training entitlement and are able to bid for funds for training. All those who undertake external training are required to report their findings to others through team or departmental meetings or at training events. New staff have a programme of induction. For experienced teachers this takes the form of a detailed check list of requirements and discussions with the induction co-ordinator or principal. Staff new to teaching are paired with an experienced colleague with whom they hold regular meetings during their first year at the college.

RESOURCES

Staffing

76 Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Ninety per cent are graduates, more than 30 per cent have a higher degree and more than 90 per cent have a teaching qualification. They are deployed effectively. A number of staff are, or have been, examiners in their curriculum areas or sit on subject committees. Several staff already have Training and Development Lead Body awards and others are working towards accreditation. Effective progress towards accreditation is being made in business subjects; in science there is a need for further staff training.

77 Four of the seven members of the senior management team and four of the five level 3 course directors are women. One head of faculty is a woman. The number of staff from minority ethnic groups is small, when compared with the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups.

78 Less than 10 per cent of teaching hours are taught by part-time teachers and this restricts the college's ability to respond to changes in curriculum or student numbers, or to obtain the range of specialist expertise required for some courses, particularly those of a vocational nature. Almost all evening and Saturday provision, and all off-site teaching, is provided by part-time staff but only a very small amount of teaching for full-time students is undertaken by part-time teachers. Frequent changes of staff have led to discontinuities in the teaching of GCE A level and GCSE history, but the staffing difficulties have now been resolved. Several science teachers have previous industrial or research experience and some industrial links are being maintained.

79 The library is staffed by a qualified librarian and two assistants who are employed in term time only. The level of staffing ensures adequate coverage at the main site but not for the Siviters Lane centre. Administrative and technical support staff are suitably qualified; some are graduates. The administrative team work well together to cover reception and switchboard duties throughout the day. Significant progress has been made in the last year with the use of information technology for administration. All staff now use modern wordprocessing packages. Training has been mainly in-house and there is a continuing need for this. Technician staff are suitably experienced although some part-time technicians have few formal qualifications and need opportunities to acquire them.

Equipment/learning resources

80 The college has a clear policy for the purchase of equipment. Budgets for consumables, based on a formula related to the number of full-time equivalent students, are devolved to heads of faculty. Capital budgets are administered centrally and there are additional opportunities for departments to bid into a development fund for large purchases. Furniture, audio-visual aids, information technology equipment and one-off items of equipment are provided centrally.

81 The quantity and quality of resources vary substantially. In business studies, teachers have limited access to audio-visual equipment. There are insufficient books for students, but some compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database materials are available. In law, accounts, and psychology, poorly-maintained roller boards made some board work almost unreadable.

82 In both chemistry and physics, particularly GCE A level physics, textbook provision is poor. In art and design, there is a good range of equipment and facilities. The equipment for music is of a good standard

and other aspects of performing arts are well resourced. However, the dispersed nature of the accommodation for performing arts leads to equipment being transported around the campus.

83 There are library and learning-centre facilities on both sites. The library has responded to the development of new course provision and the service is extended to the evenings when classes are running. Good support is also provided through the learning centres which open for the Saturday college. The library has been underfunded over a number of years. The budget has been increased for 1994-95 and the present deficiencies require that this support be continued. Resources are limited and in some subject areas they are inadequate. A database, ill-suited to library needs, has failed to provide an effective access system for students. A new library manager appointed two years ago has sought to remedy deficiencies. Comprehensive records of library use are kept and a number of plans and reports for improvements have been submitted to senior managers. Progress on these is constrained by resources.

84 Liaison between the library and curriculum areas has been uneven in the past but has now significantly improved. Some heads of department have been more active than others in seeking library resources for their subject areas. This has led to disparities between subjects. The librarian is aware of the need to rationalise the bookstock and the need for consultation with subject staff. In 1993-94, significant purchases were made in the areas of sociology, psychology and art and design. More science books are needed to match the recent growth in provision for this subject. The library has a security problem. Business studies staff expressed a reluctance to make purchases because so many of their books are lost from the library. The librarian has sought to remedy this by encouraging a short-loan system for books purchased for business studies.

85 The college has a ratio of full-time equivalent students to computer workstations of about 8.5:1. However, the computer workstations that have been purchased are of two main types with non-compatible standards. In consequence, some students have to change operating systems and application packages. The educational benefit in enabling students to experience a variety of computer types is offset by the necessity to maintain and support different systems. There are few open access machines in the library areas. There is a need to improve the quality and quantity of printers available to students. Access to CD-ROMs in the library and other areas is limited.

Accommodation

86 The college has two sites within five minutes walking distance of each other. The main buildings, dating from 1962, are those of the former grammar school with some later additions. A second site, at Siveters Lane, has accommodation based on school buildings of the early 1900s which are being refurbished. The main site houses science, art and technology. The

accommodation ranges from good to unsatisfactory. The structure of the Siviters Lane buildings limits the modifications which can take place to improve their appearance and use. Each site has a number of temporary buildings in varying states of repair. The amount of social accommodation for students is inadequate.

87 Most internal areas are well decorated and have been renovated to an acceptable standard. The renovation of parts of the Siviters Lane centre has produced pleasant study facilities which are conducive to learning. There are problems with acoustics in the areas with high ceilings. Buildings are clean. Many areas on both sites have displays of students' work from subject areas, visits and other activities. This work is of a high standard, celebrates students' success and is a notable feature of the college. The main site foyer is used for the display of students' work and contains a television notice board used to convey messages to students. There is no reception area to welcome visitors.

88 The college has sufficient teaching accommodation; the space available is not used to its full capacity. Some classrooms suffer from poor acoustics, poor lighting or extremes of temperature. Some are of an inappropriate size for the classes using them. Drama teachers have to contend with dispersed accommodation and textiles are housed in poor temporary accommodation. There has been a major refurbishment of the science laboratories, and plans are being drawn up to rectify some of the other deficiencies. The college is undertaking a feasibility study to determine ways of rationalising its accommodation.

89 Access for those with restricted mobility is generally poor on both sites. The construction of the buildings makes access difficult, even to parts of the ground floor. The first and second floors of the central building on the main site are not linked and there are no lifts. There are extensive grassed areas adjacent to the main site of the college, some of which are suitable for new building. Both sites are landscaped. There is ample car parking space for staff and students at each site.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

90 The college is working hard to achieve its mission. Its strengths are:

- the commitment and support of the governors
- strong educational leadership
- college committees' close adherence to the strategic plan
- good value-added achievements at GCE A level
- success in obtaining external funding
- increasing provision for adult students
- well-qualified and experienced staff
- good standards of guidance and support for students
- the high level of students' satisfaction with the college and its services.

91 If it is to build on its strengths and make further progress towards achieving its mission, the college should:

- complete the implementation of its quality assurance system
- improve retention rates
- reconsider the responsibilities and workloads of some senior managers
- make better use of performance indicators to inform strategic planning
- improve market research
- co-ordinate the development of core skills
- improve its use of available space
- improve access for those with restricted mobility
- improve library provision
- rationalise its computer hardware.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at May 1995)

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

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

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

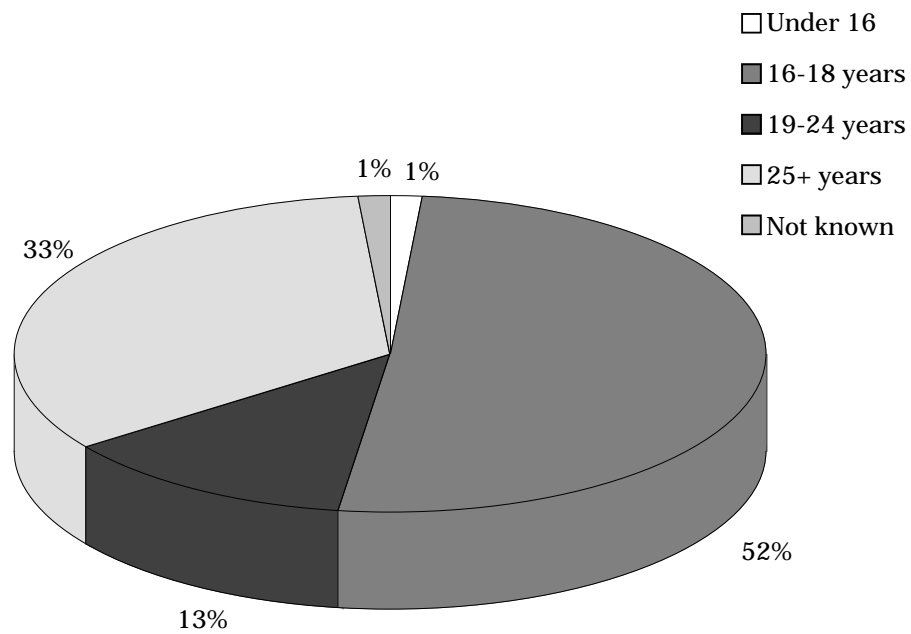
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

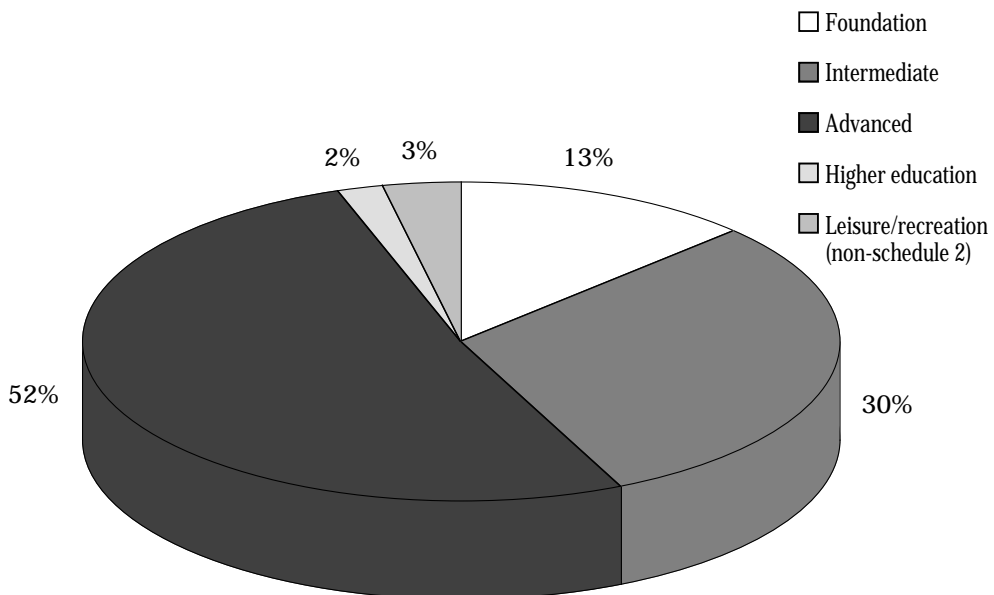
Rowley Regis College: percentage enrolments by age (as at May 1995)



Enrolments: 1,559

Figure 2

Rowley Regis College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at May 1995)



Enrolments: 1,559

Figure 3

Rowley Regis College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at May 1995)

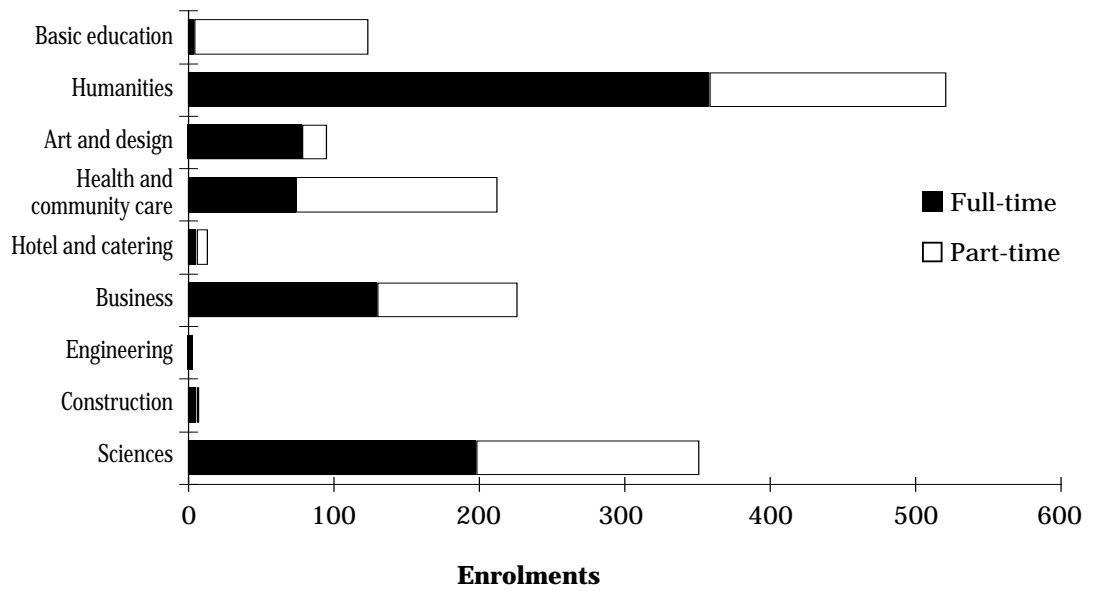
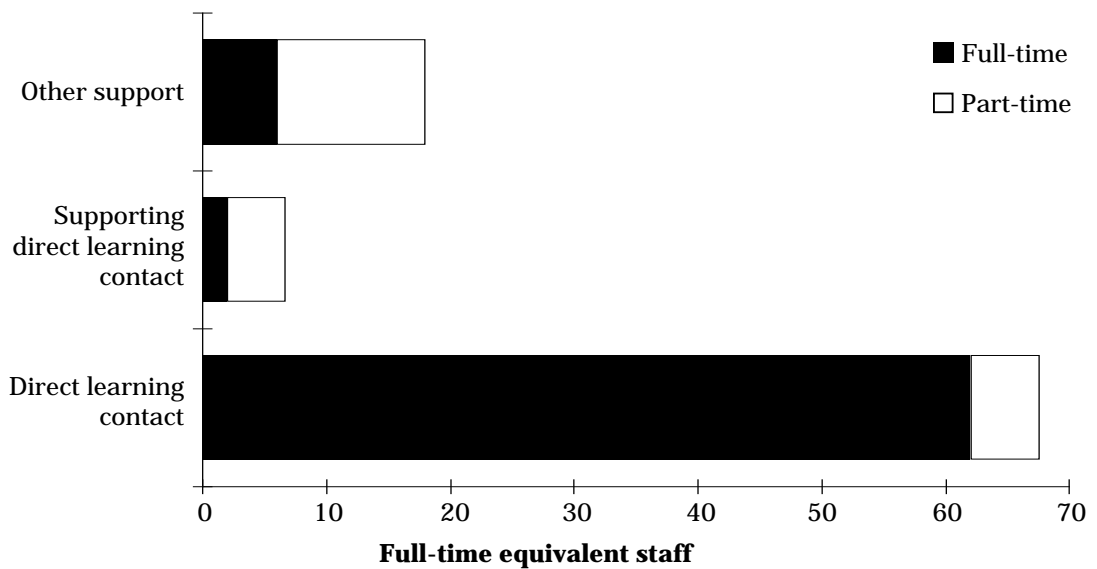


Figure 4

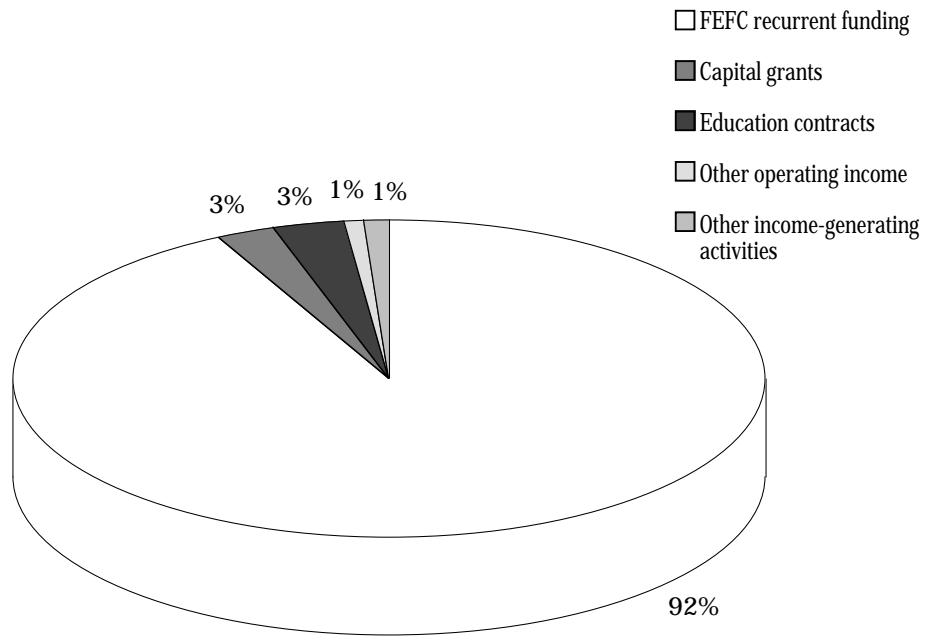
Rowley Regis College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 92

Figure 5

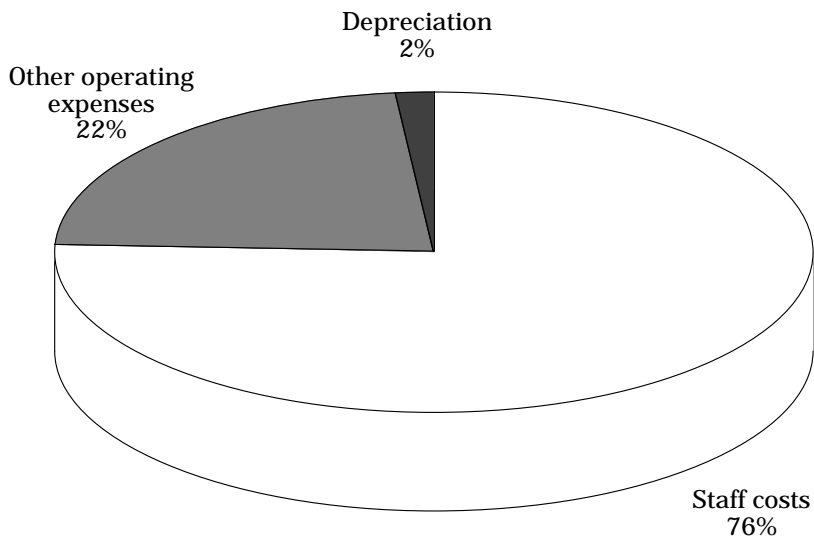
Rowley Regis College: income (for 12 months to July 1994)



Income: £2,851,500

Figure 6

Rowley Regis College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £2,882,250

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