

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Royal Forest of Dean College

June 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-96

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 69/97

ROYAL FOREST OF DEAN COLLEGE

SOUTH WEST REGION

Inspected March 1996-February 1997

Summary

Royal Forest of Dean College plays an important part in the life of the community it serves. It has strong links with local schools and provides a wide range of courses, particularly for adult learners. Examination results are generally good, particularly at GCE A level. The quality of teaching is generally good. Students receive high-quality guidance and support. The senior management team works well together and there are well-organised arrangements for staff induction, appraisal and development. Effective action has been taken to provide access to the college buildings for people with restricted mobility. The college should: resolve membership, procedural and attendance issues relating to the governing body; raise the quality of some teaching, particularly on GNVQ courses, care courses and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; improve retention rates; ensure more consistent application of its quality assurance procedures; develop procedures for more rigorous self-assessment; improve the monitoring of its equal opportunities policy; strengthen marketing and links with industry; and improve the quality of some of its accommodation.

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	2
	accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics, and computing	2	Health and community care	3
Engineering	3	Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Business	2	Art and design	2
Hotel and catering	3	Humanities	2
		Basic education	3

INTRODUCTION

1 Royal Forest of Dean College was inspected between March 1996 and February 1997. A team of 18 inspectors spent a total of 60 days in the college. Art and design provision was inspected in March 1996. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected in September 1996. The remaining curriculum areas and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in January and February 1997. Inspectors observed 187 classes, analysed examination results and completion rates, examined students' work and studied a wide range of documentation supplied by the college. They met governors, teachers, support and administrative staff, students, employers, parents, members of the local community, teachers from local schools, careers service staff and representatives of the Gloucestershire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Royal Forest of Dean College was established as a tertiary college in 1985 following the merger of the sixth form of the Royal Forest of Dean Grammar School and the West Gloucestershire College of Further Education. The college occupies two main sites. The majority of students are based at the Five Acres campus at Berry Hill near Coleford. Engineering, business administration and access to higher education students are based at the Cinderford campus.

3 The college has four grant-maintained partner schools for pupils aged 11 to 16: Lakers School which is situated next to the college and with which the college shares some facilities; Heywood School which is at Cinderford; Dene Magna School at Mitcheldean; and Whitecross School at Lydney. Dean Hall special school at Speech House is the college's fifth partner school. Students also progress to the college from Wydean School at Sedbury near Chepstow, Newent Community School and other schools in Monmouth, Chepstow and Ross-on-Wye. All these schools are for pupils aged 11 to 18. The nearest colleges are Hartpury College (an agricultural college 22 miles to the north); Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology (with sites at Gloucester and Cheltenham, 20 and 29 miles to the north west, respectively); Stroud College of Further Education (30 miles to the west); and Hereford Sixth Form College, Herefordshire College of Art and Design, Herefordshire College of Technology and Holme Lacy College (25 miles to the north).

4 Students are recruited primarily from the West Gloucestershire area, which has a population of approximately 75,000. Most of the district is designated a Rural Development Area. Gloucestershire has a population of around 544,000 of which 5.1 per cent are aged 16 to 19 and 21 per cent are aged 60 or over. Unemployment in the Forest of Dean is 5.3 per cent compared with 6.6 per cent nationally and 4.5 per cent in Gloucestershire. Seventy-three per cent of local school-leavers progress to further education and a further 5 per cent join training schemes. At the time of the inspection

there were 952 full-time and 2,573 part-time students enrolled at the college. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3.

5 In the Forest of Dean area there has been a considerable decline in what were once the major local industries: coal and iron ore mining, and manufacturing. The coal industry has virtually disappeared. In the early 1980s, half the workforce was employed in manufacturing. By 1987 this had fallen to one-third and it remains at around this level. There has also been a reduction in the numbers of jobs in agriculture and forestry. These now account for only around 3 per cent of employment in the Forest of Dean. Most local businesses employ less than 10 people. The college itself is one of the 10 largest employers in the area. The service sector now employs over 60 per cent of the local workforce, many of whom travel to work in Gloucester, Cheltenham and Bristol.

6 The principal, vice-principal, associate principal (enterprise), finance manager and the personnel manager operate as the college's executive team. The college management team comprises the executive together with the five heads of faculty, student services manager, learning resources manager and the marketing manager. At the time of the inspection, there were 66 full-time teachers. The equivalent of a further 20 full-time staff are employed as part-time teachers. The equivalent of a further 84 staff directly support learning and provide technical and administrative support. A staff profile, with staff numbers expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7 The college's mission statement expresses the belief that everyone in the area served by the college is entitled to education, training and support which meets their individual needs.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 There is an appropriate range of academic and vocational courses for school-leavers. The college offers 22 general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects on a two-year, full-time basis. In recent years the number of full-time students taking GCE A level courses has declined. Ten GCE A levels are available in a modular format and eight are offered on a one-year basis. In 1996, students studied for GCE advanced supplementary (AS) examinations in 14 subjects. Thirteen subjects are offered on the full-time general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) programme. All first-year 16 to 19 year old students are given the opportunity to achieve at least level 2 qualifications, or their equivalent, in the key skills of information technology, numeracy and communications. In addition, a carefully-structured timetable allows students to mix vocational and academic study.

9 The college offers courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at advanced level in business studies, leisure and tourism, art and design, information technology and engineering. There

are Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diplomas in health studies and ceramics. The ceramics course attracts students from other European countries. There are five intermediate GNVQ courses. National vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes are offered at levels 1 to 3 but mainly at levels 2 and 3 in business administration, catering, hairdressing and engineering. In some vocational areas the range is good, for example in beauty therapy, art and design, counselling and hairdressing. However, there are few professional business and management courses and a narrow range of part-time courses in catering, and leisure and tourism. There is no GNVQ advanced course in health and community care. As a result some well-qualified students are inappropriately enrolled at intermediate level. Some NVQ provision is delivered away from the college, for example, NVQs in care and childcare are taught and assessed on employers' premises. At foundation level the GNVQ range is limited to one course in health and community care. The college intends to develop its foundation level provision by providing opportunities for school pupils to take college courses. For example, from Easter 1997 about ten 15 year olds from local schools will come to the college for one day a week to take an NVQ level 1 in catering.

10 About 100 students each year participate in visits, exchanges and overseas work experience in one of the seven countries where the college has partner colleges. Many students prepare for these visits by studying GNVQ or NVQ language units in French, German, Spanish or Italian. The college offers an enrichment programme to its full-time students. This includes sports, music and other performing arts, and the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Many of the students who take part in the programme participate in team sports.

11 The college has good links with its five partner schools. They are given information on the destinations of their former pupils when they leave the college. The college and the adjoining school share geography and music teachers. Senior staff, including the principal, represent the college on two planning groups, the West Gloucestershire Heads Group and the Forest Academic Board. The college has some links with other colleges. For example, it supplies a counselling service to a local agricultural college and it co-operates with the same college to provide a course that combines an NVQ in childcare with equine studies.

12 The college has a good range of courses for adults. A group of over 80 adults take programmes organised to suit their individual needs. They take a core programme which includes study skills, personal effectiveness and tutorial support, and add GCE A levels, GCSEs, or vocational units as appropriate. There are two access to higher education courses. Part-time higher education courses, involving 56 students, were offered for the first time in September 1996. The college runs a teacher training course, linked to the University of Wales. It also teaches several first-year degree modules, the most popular subjects being business management, information technology, psychology and English. The college has a contract with the

local education authority (LEA) to provide adult community education. Each year there are about 6,000 enrolments on a wide range of courses taught at over 40 centres. Some courses, mainly GCE A levels and GCSE subjects, are available for students to study on their own using materials prepared for that purpose. Accreditation of prior learning is offered in appropriate cases, but very few students have taken this route to qualification.

13 There is a wide range of part-time courses for adults with learning difficulties. These include general education courses aimed at improving basic skills, building confidence or preparing people for independence; and vocational courses, for example in art and design, catering and information technology. Courses are run at the college and at six other centres. The college organises a liaison group consisting of representatives from many agencies that work with adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This wide range of support for adults contrasts with the provision for school-leavers which consists of one full-time course for students with moderate learning difficulties. The college has not fully analysed the demand for students at foundation level or for school-leavers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These two groups are under represented in the college.

14 Community representatives spoke highly of the college's contribution to the life of the community. Strong links have enabled the college to be influential in a wide range of community projects. For example, a family literacy project at a local primary school gives parents help with basic skills. Under a joint venture with a centre in Coleford for people with disabilities, the college trains centre staff to support students with disabilities in their homes. Membership of the West Gloucester Adult Consortium has led to a number of initiatives, for example to provide women with painting and decorating skills to use in their own homes; to increase library use among young men; to improve the skills of unemployed adults; and to encourage residents of a local estate to become more involved in their community through photography.

15 The college has substantial contracts with Gloucestershire TEC to train young people and adults. This year the number of adult trainees has increased. 'First base', a preparatory programme for disaffected young people, has been particularly successful. The college has met its targets on all its contracts with the TEC. In the past two years the college business unit has developed a strong relationship with several local companies. It responds promptly and effectively to their requests for training and, in 1995-96, it generated over £200,000 by running engineering, information technology, computer-aided design and language courses. However, the unit does not have a business plan or detailed information on its potential market.

16 Links with industry vary between curriculum areas and depend mainly on the initiative of individual teachers. There is no central co-ordination of industrial liaison or work experience. The teaching

faculties do not run full-cost courses for industry and often make only a small contribution to teaching on courses run by the business unit. There is little use of the central database of employers. There has been little systematic research into employers' training needs. The useful information gained through visits to TEC-funded trainees at their work placements is not collated and used across the college.

17 Some aspects of marketing are effective. The strategic plan contains a good analysis of the challenges and opportunities facing the college. In particular, the college understands and meets the needs of the adult and community education market. Co-ordination and management of the marketing function is weak. There is no specific forum to discuss marketing issues and there is no routine liaison between the faculties and the marketing officer. Faculties carry out some marketing activities, for example market research, without central co-ordination. A draft marketing plan has been produced, but it has not been approved by the governors. The college secures good coverage in the local press and it has produced an attractive full-time prospectus.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

18 The governing body has not been able to maintain full membership or good attendance at its meetings since incorporation. This has hampered its effective operation. Many meetings have been postponed in anticipation of poor attendance or have been inquorate. The average attendance in 1995-96 was 68 per cent. Subcommittees of the board suffer from the same poor attendance rates as full governing body meetings. The board has agreed a total membership of 15, but at the time of the inspection there were only 12 members. The size of the board is currently being reviewed. Independent members have experience of industry, personnel matters, and the legal and health professions. Other members are from Gloucestershire TEC, West Gloucestershire Heads Group, the district council and higher education. The principal and two members of staff are members of the board. There is no student governor but the students' union sabbatical officer is invited to attend meetings. Members have strong local connections and are committed to the promotion of further education opportunities. They have identified gaps in their expertise and are seeking new members with experience in finance and estates management. A useful resource file of key information is given to all governors when they join the board, and training events have been organised.

19 Minutes of governors' meetings do not always provide a clear record of discussions, although the quality of minutes and the information provided for members have recently improved. The board has begun to assess its own performance, but this is at an early stage of development. A report by the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) audit service highlighted issues relating to the composition and operation of the audit committee which the college has been slow to address.

20 The college has achieved its growth targets for the past three years and expects to do so in 1996-97. The three-year strategic plan for 1994-95 to 1996-97 identifies objectives and targets related to the college's mission. It includes detailed enrolment and environmental audits and a risk analysis. The plan is supported by a three-year financial forecast and by annual operating plans prepared by faculty heads and cross-college service managers. The operating plans vary in detail and quality, and the link between college and faculty objectives is not always apparent. Consultation on the strategic plan involves governors, the executive team, the college management group and faculty and academic board members. Outside bodies, such as the district council and the TEC, are consulted. Support staff and teachers feel that they have not been involved in the planning process. Some are unsure of their role in the process.

21 The implementation and monitoring of policies for health and safety and equality of opportunity present contrasting pictures. The health and safety policy is comprehensive. It is supported by a detailed procedures manual which includes clearly-allocated responsibilities. Implementation of the policy is monitored and the governors receive an annual report. The college's mission refers to equality of opportunity. There is a short policy statement and a more detailed policy on harassment. There are no codes of conduct or standards to guide practice. There is no person or group with a clear remit to implement and monitor the policy.

22 Responsibilities are clearly allocated among the executive team, whose members meet weekly and work well together. The college management group meets fortnightly to discuss key issues and take decisions. The combination of academic, financial and strategic discussion within the college management team is effectively fostering a shared understanding of issues which are important to the college. In each faculty there are both curriculum and course co-ordinators. Reporting relationships and the division of responsibilities between the heads of faculty and the curriculum and course co-ordinators are clear and understood by staff. The role of the curriculum co-ordinators in relation to the course co-ordinators is less clearly defined and the quality of management at this level is variable. The college is aware of these deficiencies and plans to review this area of management in the near future.

23 Senior managers ensure that the reasons for key decisions are made known. A weekly newsletter to all staff contains information about the college and developments in further education. There are regular meetings for all full-time staff and two timetabled meeting periods each week for team meetings. These are generally well attended but the extent to which discussions and decisions are recorded varies. Not all middle managers communicate information effectively to their teams. Part-time teachers are not always able to attend team meetings and some are insufficiently informed.

24 Procedures for budget allocation are clear and understood. Budgets for part-time teachers' salaries and consumable items are delegated to heads of faculty. Budget allocations are made on the basis of enrolments. Budget holders feel well informed through a system of monthly financial reports. Work on unit costing is at an early stage.

25 The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £18.89 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £17.97 per unit.

26 The college has experienced considerable difficulty in the use of computerised management information systems. It has overcome some of these problems but the production of accurate data is still sometimes time consuming. There is no computerised system for handling course enquiries so there is no easy means of comparing enquiries with enrolments. The college has recognised the need to improve the speed at which accurate data can be produced and is planning to upgrade its management information system.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

27 Students at the college are generally well supported by their personal tutors and the student services team. Student services comprise the staff dealing with schools liaison, admissions, adult guidance, counselling, attendance, learning support, health education, careers, 'campus watch', the students' union and its liaison officer, and the volunteer chaplaincy. At the main college site at Coleford these services are based in welcoming and accessible accommodation close to the main student social area. They are well managed. At the Cinderford site there is a more limited, but appropriate, level of student services including clear referral systems, a private and pleasant interview room, well-publicised weekly times when student services staff are available and frequent meetings between tutors and the student services manager.

28 School-leavers are offered effective advice and guidance. A schools' liaison manager arranges visits and 'taster' days for pupils from partner schools. Pupils from other schools are offered the same opportunities and these are widely advertised. There are also advice days for adult students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified by the schools' liaison manager or the college's disabilities co-ordinator and appropriate support is arranged. The college currently provides support for 10 students with restricted mobility and 28 with sight, hearing or speech difficulties.

29 There is a well-organised central admissions system which monitors applications and arranges interviews. Enquiries are logged and response times are monitored. A common interview record reminds interviewers to cover all relevant points, and to ask for any careers service action plan or record of achievement which applicants may have. Applicants receive

a copy of their interview record. The college uses interview records to monitor the quality of interviews, which, it feels, have sometimes lacked rigour.

30 Induction for full-time students follows clear guidelines and is well managed. The first four weeks of full-time courses are viewed as an induction period. For part-time students, induction is included in the first session of their course and they are given a copy of the students' handbook. Monitoring of induction for full-time students is undertaken annually but is at an early stage for part-time students. There are clear procedures for course transfer which are outlined in the students' handbook.

31 Arrangements for learning support are generally thorough. All full-time 16 to 18 year old students are assessed during the first few weeks of their course to identify any needs for support in literacy, numeracy or information technology. Those needing help with information technology can attend a six-week course to improve their skills. Of those identified as needing support with literacy and numeracy, 70 per cent have received help either through the college's learning support unit or through additional support provided in class. It is not currently possible to compare the success rates of students who accept support with those who do not, but procedures to evaluate this are being developed. Part-time students are made aware of their entitlement to learning support, but few have taken advantage of it. There are few course-specific learning support materials.

32 Most students receive effective tutorial support. There is a clear tutorial framework, a tutors' handbook, and a detailed job description for tutors of both full-time and part-time students. The students' handbook and the parents' handbook both stress the importance of the role of the tutor and encourage students to record contact with tutors in a 'tutorial log'. Adult full-time students, and younger students and their parents value the support provided. The tutorial system is monitored in several ways, including regular reviews by the student services team. A minority of tutors do not follow the recommended procedures. Some tutorial records are minimal and not all courses have clear tutorial programmes.

33 There is a clear framework for monitoring the progress of full-time students under the age of 19. At least twice a year, subject teachers, tutors and students contribute to a review of progress. This leads to action plans with targets which are agreed by students and their tutors. Students and their parents receive a copy. Most action plans are concise and clear. In a minority of cases, students do not review their progress and set targets as outlined in the students' handbook. The college encourages students to update their records of achievement, which are generally used during the initial guidance process. Students can purchase a disk with appropriate software, and many students begin the process of updating their record. However, so far only a small number have completed this process and have left the college with a fully updated record of achievement.

34 There are clear and well-understood methods for monitoring students' attendance in lessons, at tutorials and at learning support sessions. Tutors receive weekly printouts for their group, and can obtain details of an individual's attendance from student services. Tutors generally take effective action when there is cause for concern. Students take attendance seriously. Adult students comment on the tutors' helpful approach to any difficulties with attendance. Attendance data are used to prepare reports for senior managers on completion rates.

35 A wide range of welfare and guidance services is offered to students. Staff work to clear guidelines and report to the student services manager on the use made by tutors and individual students of their services. There is a well-resourced counselling service which meets students' needs. The college has two full-time adult guidance specialists, who offer eight appointments a day. The nurse offers individual appointments and sessions for tutors. Two hundred and eighty students received at least one health education session between September and December 1996. The campus watch officer, who has a youth work background and is also a special constable, provides general campus security and offers some advice and support to students.

36 Students receive well-planned careers education through the tutorial programme and the college's full-time careers adviser. Sessions are offered to tutor groups and these are followed by appointments for individual students which result in formal action plans. All groups with students who might progress to higher education receive a specific programme of group sessions. Adult students have access to appropriate vocational guidance from the careers adviser or the adult guidance workers.

37 Students' rights and responsibilities are set out in the students' handbook which is available to all students. There is a student council. The college funds a full-time sabbatical students' union officer and a student liaison officer. The college playgroup offers 20 places daily to pre-school children of students. If places are not available, student services staff provide information on other local provision. Most full-time students come to the college on buses provided by the LEA. If two children from one family come to the college, the college pays for the second child. Some students find the transport arrangements unsatisfactory. This is a long-standing problem for which the college has yet to find an effective solution.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

38 In 65 per cent of the teaching sessions observed by inspectors, strengths outweighed weaknesses; in 11 per cent of sessions, weaknesses outweighed the strengths. These percentages compare with 63 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all college inspections in 1995-96 according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. The following table summarises the grades given to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	9	19	10	3	0	41
GCSE	3	10	4	0	0	17
GNVQ	7	15	13	4	2	41
NVQ	12	14	8	4	0	38
Other*	12	20	10	7	1	50
Total	43	78	45	18	3	187

**includes access to higher education, other vocational, and basic education.*

39 There are some significant differences in the quality of teaching. Teaching on GCSE, and BTEC national diploma and certificate programmes was particularly strong, with strengths outweighing weaknesses in 76 per cent of sessions inspected. The quality of teaching on GNVQ programmes was much weaker; only 54 per cent of sessions had strengths which outweighed weaknesses (46 per cent on advanced programmes). The college needs to improve the quality of teaching on GNVQ programmes.

40 In science, mathematics and information technology, courses are well planned. Most of the teaching is effective. A mathematics lesson for a group of access to higher education students showed adult learning at its best. In a supportive atmosphere, students were encouraged to develop skills in transposing formulae and interpreting graphs. The teacher managed the lesson well, achieving a good balance between explanations to the whole group and help for individual students. Generally, few teachers make good use of visual aids. There were several lessons where overhead projector transparencies would have aided explanation. Some teaching was uninspiring; students spent too long copying notes from the board or taking notes from the teacher when they could have been involved in more interesting tasks. Practical lessons in science and information technology are well planned. Students on courses in computer-aided design undertake projects for local employers. One student's work will be used in a company's next brochure and for their Internet site. In most cases, students' work is thoroughly marked.

41 Engineering students receive effective tuition and support from teachers and supervisors in practical sessions. Welding students gain valuable experience from undertaking fabrication projects for external customers. Working to professional requirements increases their interest and motivation. The teaching is generally less effective in theory lessons. Insufficient use is made of demonstrations. In a few sessions the blackboard was poorly used. In some sessions there is insufficient questioning to check students' learning. Most engineering courses, especially those leading to NVQs, are well planned and supported by

workbooks and assessment books. These aspects are less well developed on automobile engineering courses. Most students' work is fairly marked with sufficient written feedback and correction of errors. On some courses however, teachers only give a grade and do not correct spelling or other errors. Some projects for students on the GNVQ advanced engineering course lack industrial relevance.

42 On business programmes most of the teaching is effective. The best sessions have clearly-stated aims, links to previous learning and varied teaching methods. Teachers skilfully use group work, discussions and written work to meet the needs of students with different abilities. In an accounting technicians lesson at foundation level, straightforward explanations, clear use of the whiteboard and good use of questions ensured that all members of the group understood the principles of simple accounts and were able to work through exercises on their own. Activities were generally completed on time and tutors summed up and checked that the aims of the lesson had been achieved. Teachers use their professional experience to relate their teaching to commercial practice. In a minority of sessions, the work was pitched at too high a level for the students, or the students were not encouraged sufficiently to work on their own. Comments on students' written work are generally supportive and detailed. There were a few examples of a cursory approach to marking.

43 The quality of teaching on leisure and catering courses varies. In some lessons, staff rely too heavily on giving notes and students do not use their time productively. Most teaching on leisure courses is well prepared. This is less so on some catering courses. In several practical catering lessons, students of different ability were inappropriately doing the same work at the same pace. Students are given opportunities to involve themselves in projects relevant to their studies. For example, a sports and fun afternoon for 24 primary school children in the college sports hall was effectively used to teach leisure students how to promote and organise events. All students participated enthusiastically and showed a good understanding of the needs of the children. Catering students are involved in successful competition work and there are European visits which increase students' motivation. In general, assignments and essays are clearly set and carefully marked.

44 Teaching on counselling courses is generally of a high quality. Programmes are well structured; sessions are carefully planned and enable students to share their experiences and receive guidance from experienced counsellors. On some care courses the teaching is weak. The aims of some sessions are unclear and there are insufficient references to professional care practices. Some teaching is inappropriate, for example a group of adults were told to trace pictures of babies and colour them in. They were understandably dissatisfied. In another session, intended to help students to understand what it feels like to have a physical disability, students were asked to peel apples while wearing a sling. This was inappropriate and hazardous, and the session did not achieve its aims.

45 Hairdressing and beauty therapy courses are well organised. Teachers have clear schemes of work and lesson plans which link theory and practical work. Students have copies of these documents and understand them. At the start of their courses, students are given a file containing all the learning material they will need. If they miss a session or arrive late they are able to catch up. Teachers regularly check students' learning and encourage them to evaluate their work as a group. High standards are demanded from students in practical sessions. There are generally sufficient clients to create a commercial atmosphere in the salons. When students do not have clients they use task sheets and practice their techniques. The tasks form an integral part of the practical programme and are assessed by staff during the session. Students benefit from well-planned and well-monitored work experience. There is a good range of visiting speakers from the industry, and students visit hair and beauty shows at Brighton and London.

46 There is a good balance between teacher direction and student creativity and independence in art and design and performing arts. Learning is enriched by a wide range of exchanges, external contacts, trips and visiting speakers and performers. There are opportunities for students to learn on their own or in small groups. Experienced staff give vocational relevance to art and design courses and support the development of theatre craft skills in GCE A level theatre studies. Most students are required to complete individual research using original material. Progress is recorded by photographing their work as it proceeds and when it is complete. This enables students to share each others' creative processes. Work is fairly and thoroughly marked, but art and design teachers give little written feedback on practical assignments. Students would manage their time more effectively if assessments contained clearer deadlines.

47 The standard of teaching and learning in humanities is generally good. There is systematic course planning. Teachers are capable and enthusiastic and teaching sessions contain a variety of relevant and interesting activities. For example, a teacher of Spanish runs a competition between class teams and keeps a score of correct answers to competition questions. Activities are also enlivened with articles from newspapers and magazines. Learning is promoted by skilful questioning and thorough checking. For example, a GCE A level geography lesson began with a video to check previous learning. Three brief clips were shown. Individuals were questioned to test both knowledge and understanding. The pace was brisk and students' concentration was excellent. Assignments clearly show what is expected of students. Students receive constructive and extensive feedback on their written work. Their progress is well monitored by teachers.

48 The teaching of basic skills and the teaching of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is of variable quality. Effective teaching in both areas is balanced by some poor teaching. The lesson planning on

courses for adults is generally sound but on the vocational access programme for younger students, planning is poor. The programme does not meet the needs of many of its students and fails to provide appropriate vocational experience. The objectives of most lessons are not related to an overall scheme of work. For example, in a vocational access music session, students had a very wide range of musical abilities. The tutor did not allow for this and some students did not take part.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

49 The majority of students enjoy their studies, talk confidently about their work, enjoy good relationships with their teachers, and work effectively in groups. Hairdressing, beauty therapy and catering students have good relationships with their clients. Students' work is generally of an appropriate standard and shows their ability to apply knowledge and skills to problems. Written work generally demonstrates good use of English; work with numbers is of variable quality. In some subjects, there is insufficient use of computers to improve the presentation of work. Where computers are used, high levels of skills are often displayed. The average attendance at classes observed during the inspection was 81 per cent.

50 Some students enjoy success outside the classroom. Hairdressing students perform well in competitions. In the last two years, they have gained two first places in the National Hairdressing Federation junior championships and several other placings. They qualified for the national championships in 1996 by winning the south-west area heats for free-style hairdressing. Students also contribute to the cultural life of the community. The college theatre stages large-scale productions; this year it staged *Guys and Dolls*. Each summer students tour local schools and arts festivals at Chepstow, St Briavels and Grosmont castles, performing a Shakespeare play.

51 GCE A level results have shown a marked improvement in 1996 compared with 1994 and 1995 which is shown in the following table.

Students' performance at GCE A level from 1994 to 1996

Year	Total number of entries¹	Pass rate	Points per entry for students aged 16 to 18²
1994	461	82%	4.2
1995	338	85%	4.6
1996	368	92%	5.5

¹for students of all ages.

²where grade A=10 points, E=2.

52 The 1996 GCE A level results place the college in the top 10 per cent of all colleges in the further education sector, according to the performance tables for students aged 16 to 18 compiled by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). The college has steadily moved up this

performance table since 1994. The college's strategy to improve its performance has included:

- increasing the entry requirement for GCE A level courses from four to five GCSE passes at grades A* to C for students commencing in September 1994
- in 1996, entering 40 per cent of all full-time GCE A level students for the GCE A level in general studies. All these students gained passes at grades A to C. These results alone add approximately 0.5 points per entry to the score for 16 to 18 year olds.

53 The college had some notable successes in GCE A level subjects in 1996. Full-time students achieved 100 per cent pass rates at grades A to E in 11 subjects: art and design, business studies, chemistry, classical civilisation, English literature, French, general studies, history, human biology, music and theatre studies. In a further four subjects, English language and literature, geography, German and sociology, the pass rate was 90 per cent or higher. Fifty-eight per cent of all entries gained A to C grades at GCE A level compared with a national average of 38 per cent for all further education colleges. In 12 subjects more than 50 per cent of students achieved grades A to C. Pass rates for students aged 19 years and over exceeded 90 per cent in English language and literature, classical civilisation and archaeology, although only four students entered for each of the last two subjects. There have been weaker results in some GCE A level subjects over the last three years, mainly in the sciences. Most of these showed an improvement in 1996. The number of entries for GCE AS examinations fell from 57 in 1994 to only 20 in 1996. Students were entered in nine subjects. In five subjects, all students passed at grades A to E. The overall pass rate was 83 per cent. Students aged 19 years and over accounted for 65 per cent of these entries.

54 Over the period 1994 to 1996, there have been some good results for students of all ages in GCSE examinations. For 10 of the 15 subjects entered in 1996, pass rates at grades A* to C exceeded 60 per cent. Of the 386 entries for GCSE subjects in 1996, 72 per cent came from students aged 16 to 18. One hundred and five of these students entered for mathematics and 33 per cent passed at grades A* to C. Of those students aged 19 and over who entered for mathematics 42 per cent passed at grades A* to C. These figures are near the national average for both age groups in this subject. They have declined since 1994, when 42 per cent of 16 to 18 year olds and 59 per cent of students aged 19 and over achieved grades A to C passes. In English, there were 74 entries from 16 to 18 year old students and 64 per cent achieved passes at grades A* to C; well above the national average. However, 54 per cent of students aged 19 and over obtained grades A* to C, which is well below the national average.

55 Students on advanced level vocational courses generally achieved better results than those at intermediate level. In 1995-96, of the 84 students aged 16 to 18 in their final year of study on advanced vocational

programmes, 88 per cent achieved their target qualification. This places the college in the top third of colleges in the tables compiled by the DfEE for this performance measure. Students taking intermediate vocational qualifications in the same period were less successful; 66 per cent of the 50 students aged 16 to 18 achieved their target qualification. This places the college in the middle third of colleges according to the DfEE tables.

56 The number of students successfully completing GNVQ courses has varied considerably since these courses were introduced in the college in 1993. None of the programmes have had a consistently strong record since their introduction. Successful completions vary from 33 per cent in GNVQ intermediate health and social care to 79 per cent for intermediate art and design in 1996. Many students on these courses fail to complete their studies. For example, of the nine students enrolled on GNVQ advanced engineering in 1995 only two students progressed to the second year.

57 The results of students completing NVQ programmes are mixed. Older students achieve better results than students aged 16 to 18 on many of these courses. Students who complete their courses achieve well in engineering and welding, information technology, business administration, hairdressing (level 3), and beauty therapy (level 2). Poorer success rates are evident in NVQ programmes in care and catering. Courses designed to enable adults to improve their teaching or counselling skills or to gain access to higher education are generally very successful. Almost all the students recruited gain their intended qualification.

58 Retention rates vary significantly between courses, although the majority are satisfactory. Some courses have had good retention rates over the last three years: for example, the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) further and adult education teaching certificate achieved over 90 per cent retention in each of the last three years. Retention rates on full-time GCE A level programmes for 1994-96 range from eight subjects with rates over 90 per cent to seven subjects with rates at 60 per cent or below. GCE A level English language and literature and geography have maintained high levels of retention over the three-year period. One-year GCE AS/A level subjects generally have better retention rates than their two-year equivalents. Six GCSE subjects taken by 16 to 18 year olds in 1995-96 had 100 per cent retention rates. In contrast, retention on GCSE psychology was poor, with retention rates less than 50 per cent in each of the last three years.

59 Most full-time students progress to further or higher education, or to employment when they complete their studies. Sixty-three per cent of 16 to 18 year old GCE A level students proceeded to higher education in 1996 compared with 52 per cent in 1995. Nearly all the students who successfully complete the access to higher education programme progress to higher education. Most full-time students who complete BTEC national diplomas and GNVQ advanced diplomas have gone on to higher education

or employment. For example, over the three-year period between 1994-96, 75 per cent of students from GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism gained employment, as did 52 per cent of BTEC national diploma business students. Over the same period, 67 per cent of BTEC national diploma engineering students and 57 per cent of BTEC national diploma science (health studies) students proceeded to higher education. Over 75 per cent of full-time students who completed NVQ business administration and hairdressing courses gained employment. Hairdressing students, however, are not all finding employment in the industry for which they have been prepared.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

60 The college has a policy and a set of procedures for quality assurance. These were approved by the academic board in 1993. The policy was developed from the college's mission statement and covers all courses and services provided by the college. Aspects of the policy relating to course evaluation are generally in operation but their effectiveness varies. Standards are being set and monitored for student services and for learning resource matters but there has been little setting of standards for the accommodation, personnel and finance functions. The role of the academic board in the quality assurance system is identified, but not that of the governing body. The quality assurance policy is supposed to be monitored by the academic quality assurance team working as a subcommittee of the academic board. However, the team has not met for some time. The policy requires employers to be involved in quality assurance procedures where appropriate; this is not happening.

61 Governors receive faculty reports and the results of student surveys. They have set a limited range of performance indicators for the college and are considering the adoption of the new national performance indicators recommended in *Measuring Achievement 1994-95*. They have also examined reports on students' attendance, retention and achievements. They have considered the results of a survey on the college charter published in January 1996, and approved expenditure to improve the library as a result.

62 The quality of each course is monitored using student questionnaires, a course review report and a separate statistical report which records the numbers of students who started and completed the course. Course reviews and associated statistics are summarised in a faculty report for senior management and the academic board. There is standard documentation to support course reviews. In some cases this has been altered by programme teams and consistency has been lost. Reviews generally include targets for enrolment and whether or not these have been met. There is little systematic use of targets and performance indicators for retention and achievement. Action plans are included in course reviews, usually including timescales and identifying staff

responsible. However, most of the actions described do not have measurable outcomes.

63 The college has three small-scale collaborative agreements with outside organisations; Newent Community School, the Red Cross Association and the Prince's Trust. These agreements follow the model recommended by the FEFC. College quality assurance procedures are used to carry out course reviews of partners' provision. Some of these reviews are thorough; some are not.

64 Student surveys are used to monitor certain aspects of provision. Surveys by the student services section and the library have effectively monitored college charter obligations related to these services. The college charter survey identified a number of issues of concern to students. Improvements in the quality of, and access to, college information technology facilities were introduced as a result of this survey. Progress on other weaknesses identified can not be properly assessed since the college has not produced an action plan to address them. Staff responsible for managing and teaching courses often design their own course questionnaires. These are of variable quality. Some surveys have led to improvements. For example, there have been some changes to assessment timetables, improved work placement arrangements and improvements to room heating. Students do not always receive feedback on the outcome of the surveys.

65 The college has acknowledged weaknesses in its quality assurance system and has made some improvements. A full review of policies and procedures is being carried out and a quality assurance manager was appointed in November 1996. A new co-ordinator for NVQ and GNVQ courses has developed a coherent policy and set of procedures for the internal verification of standards across the college. Reports from external moderators and verifiers are reviewed by senior managers and sent to appropriate staff with comments and requests for action. The college has compared entry qualifications of students who completed in 1996 with their GCE A level results and is currently assessing how such information about added value could be used to improve the GCE A level provision.

66 The college charter published for the 1996-97 academic year contains appropriate performance standards. Staff introduce the charter to students during their induction programme. Separate charters are published for student services and the library. The charter has yet to become an effective part of the quality assurance system. For example, some students have little awareness of the charter and there is no monitoring at course level to ensure compliance with it. The charter does not include information on who to contact should problems remain unresolved by the college. However, complaints received to date have been generally dealt with appropriately.

67 There is an effective staff-appraisal programme for all staff. It follows an annual cycle and includes observation of teaching. Part-time staff who teach more than eight hours a week must participate in the scheme. Those

teaching fewer hours can be appraised on request. The scheme is viewed positively by staff who generally welcome the opportunity to discuss their personal development in the context of the college's requirements. Staff responsible for conducting appraisals have been trained and all staff are briefed before they are appraised. Support staff are appraised through the same scheme; some of them feel that the process places too much emphasis on teaching.

68 Staff development is generally well planned and managed. Training needs are identified using the appraisal system, through discussions with staff and from the outcomes of classroom observations. Staff development for faculty heads is related to developments proposed in the strategic plan. Staff are kept informed of training events and comment favourably on the opportunities available to them. New staff benefit from an effective induction programme. Staff who are new to teaching are allocated a mentor and those who do not have a teaching qualification are allocated time to take an appropriate qualifying course. In 1995-96, approximately 1 per cent of college income was spent on staff development. The college has made a commitment to gaining the Investors in People award by May 1997. There is little evaluation of the effectiveness of staff-development activities.

69 The college produced a self-assessment report which followed the structure of the inspection framework. The report is concise and includes useful references to evidence. However, it does not identify clearly strengths and weaknesses, and the action plan is not linked to the points identified in the report. The report does not adequately reflect the college's knowledge of its own weaknesses, nor does it include some of the issues identified by inspectors.

RESOURCES

Staffing

70 Most full-time teachers have appropriate academic or vocational qualifications; 60 per cent have a degree or equivalent qualification. Teachers of vocational courses generally hold relevant specialist qualifications. Ninety-one per cent of teaching staff are qualified teachers. Staff have been encouraged to gain training and development lead body awards to support their work with students on GNVQ and NVQ programmes. They have responded well; 89 per cent of teachers hold assessor awards and 47 per cent are qualified internal verifiers. Some staff have no recent industrial experience in their area of work.

71 Part-time teachers bring recent and relevant expertise from their commercial or industrial work. Approximately 25 per cent of teaching is undertaken by part-time teachers. This is not evenly spread across the college. In engineering, a high percentage of part-time staff has resulted in full-time staff having heavy workloads. The large number of part-time staff teaching on care courses adversely affects attendance at team meetings.

72 Teachers and students receive good support from enthusiastic and generally well-qualified technicians, administrators and other support staff. Support staff are members of course teams and they contribute to the planning and development of courses. Many work directly with students to support their studies. Technical staff are contracted to work flexibly across the college. The lack of technician support for welding means that teachers have to carry out tasks normally done by technicians. Response times to computer breakdowns are slower at the Cinderford site because the technical staff responsible have their base at the main college site at Coleford.

73 The college personnel function works well. There is a code of conduct for teachers which lays down clear minimum standards to be expected in their dealings with students. Information on the age, gender, qualifications and experience of all staff are recorded on a personnel database. This is updated regularly to include details of further training undertaken and qualifications achieved.

Equipment/learning resources

74 Specialist equipment and resources to support vocational courses are generally good. Languages students are well supported with listening and viewing equipment, including a satellite link. A good range of relevant learning videos is available for health and care students. Sports students have good access to equipment for fitness testing. Beauty therapy and hairdressing students use industrial-standard equipment and performing arts students benefit from a well-equipped theatre. Some equipment for science, especially physics, is outdated. In automobile engineering, some syllabus requirements cannot be met from the college's present resources. There is no travel office to provide a realistic work environment for leisure and tourism students. Most classrooms in the college are equipped with whiteboards and overhead projectors. Staff generally have sufficient access to audio and visual aids. The college does not have a purchase and replacement policy for capital equipment.

75 Students benefit from good access to high-quality computers. The recent change to central management of these facilities has led to an improved service which is valued by staff and students. A committee has been established to advise on information technology matters. A new computer workshop has been established which has enabled more students to access computers when they need them. This provision is complemented by a novel arrangement which uses a traffic light system to indicate that there are free computers in rooms occupied by course groups. Patterns of use are now being monitored. The results show that students from most curriculum areas are using computers on a regular basis.

76 Library stock has significantly improved during the last year, although there are some areas where further improvements are still required. Staff value a new service which enables them to notify the library of assignment topics in advance so that relevant books can be made available to students

on short loan and topic packs can be prepared by library staff. The library budget has been increased by 11 per cent for 1996-97. One outcome of these initiatives has been a 25 per cent increase in loans in the current year. Despite these improvements the library still contains a number of outdated texts particularly in care, physics, mathematics, languages and sociology.

Accommodation

77 The two college sites are approximately six miles apart. They serve two of the largest population centres in the area. The Coleford site is attractively located in a woodland setting at Berry Hill on the edge of Coleford adjacent to one of the college's partner schools. It has a clean and cared-for appearance. A central modern building, which includes a working theatre, is supplemented by a number of temporary buildings. The site also houses the Five Acres leisure centre. This provides a convenient and accessible range of sports facilities for students and members of the local community, including a swimming pool, two sports halls and three squash courts. Many specialist rooms are well laid out and provide good learning environments. This is particularly true of the new science laboratories, the hairdressing salons, the theatre and the new information technology areas. There are some poor general classrooms, some cramped teaching accommodation for beauty therapy and some poorly-maintained toilets. The main training kitchen provides an unsuitable environment for professional training. There are adequate social areas for students and an attractive library. There are problems with the heating system, leading to some unacceptably cold rooms, and frequent power cuts which cause disruption to students' work.

78 The Cinderford site, which is shared with the local social services department, is based on a former mining college. The college has worked hard to provide appropriate learning environments for students and has generally succeeded. The business administration and adult training areas are light and airy. They are pleasantly decorated. Other parts of the site are less suitable and the outside areas at the back of the site are in poor condition. The welding shop is small and provides a cramped and unsuitable learning environment for current student numbers. Similarly, the accommodation for automobile maintenance and repair is too small, and students sometimes have to work outside. Some of the smaller engineering workshops provide a poor learning environment. The library, although spacious, is often cold. There are adequate social areas for students.

79 The college has generally succeeded in meeting the needs of students with restricted mobility. There is a lift to all floors at the Coleford site which, together with a stair lift, ensures access to all parts of the building. Some of the money to purchase the stair lift was raised at joint student and community charity events. At the Cinderford site only three rooms are inaccessible to wheelchair users.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

80 The college is making good progress towards achieving its overall aims. Its strengths include:

- a wide range of courses, particularly for adult learners
- close links with local schools and with the local community
- good-quality teaching on most courses
- generally good examination results, particularly at GCE A level
- high-quality guidance and support for students
- a senior management team which works well together
- well-structured programmes for staff induction, appraisal and development
- good access for people with restricted mobility.

81 In order to improve further the quality of its provision the college should:

- resolve membership, procedural and attendance issues relating to the governing body
- raise the quality of some teaching, particularly on GNVQ courses, some care courses and some courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- improve retention rates on some courses
- ensure more consistent application of its quality assurance procedures
- develop procedures for more rigorous self-assessment
- improve the monitoring of its equal opportunities policy
- strengthen marketing and links with industry
- improve the quality of some of its accommodation.

FIGURES

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

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

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

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

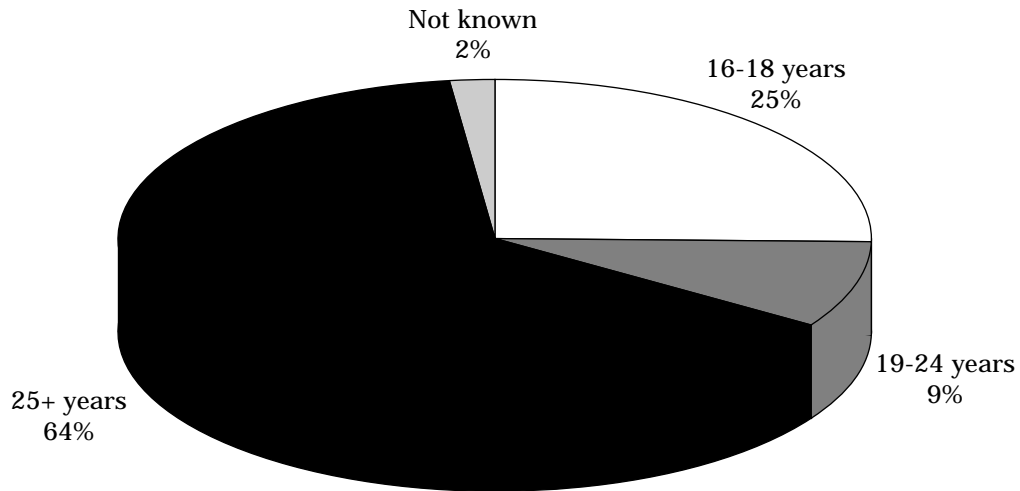
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

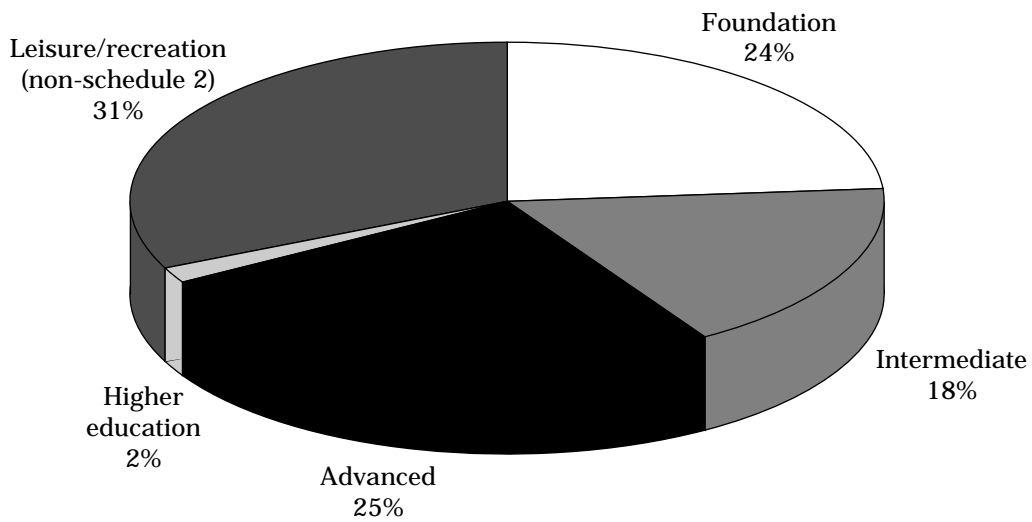
**Royal Forest of Dean College: percentage student numbers by age
(as at November 1996)**



Student numbers: 3,525

Figure 2

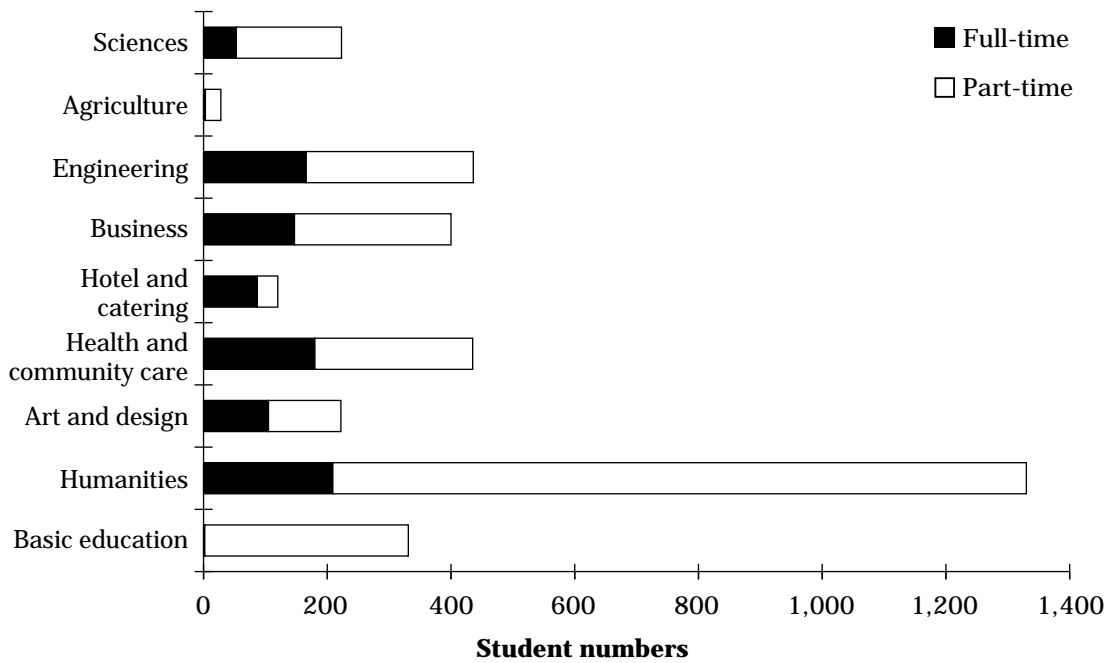
**Royal Forest of Dean College: percentage student numbers by level of study
(as at November 1996)**



Student numbers: 3,525

Figure 3

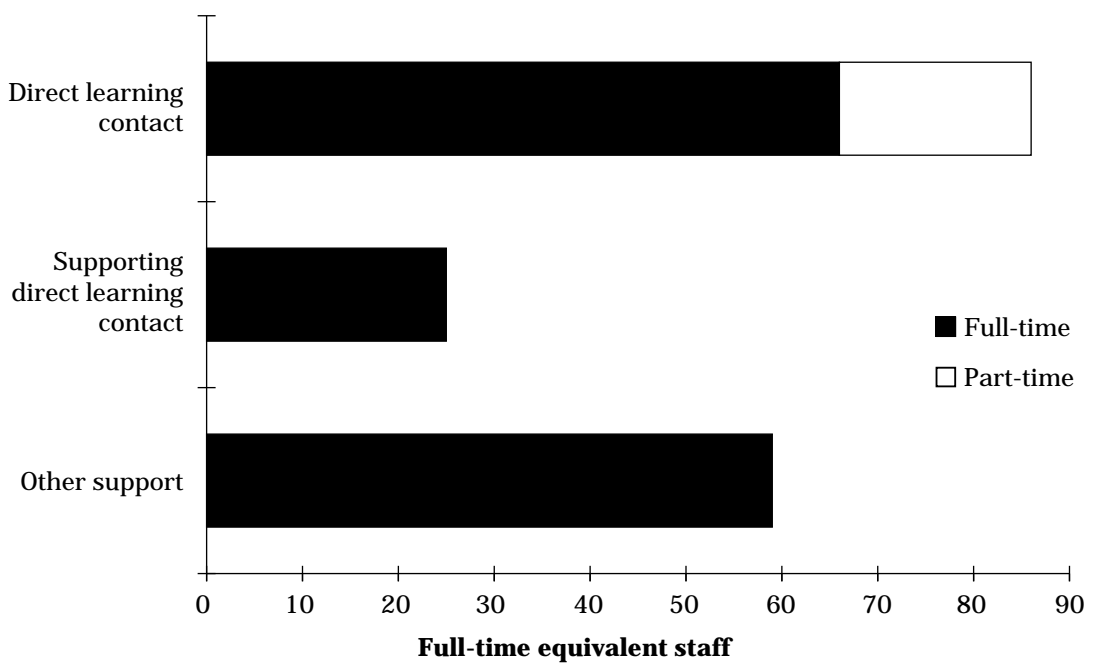
Royal Forest of Dean College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 3,525

Figure 4

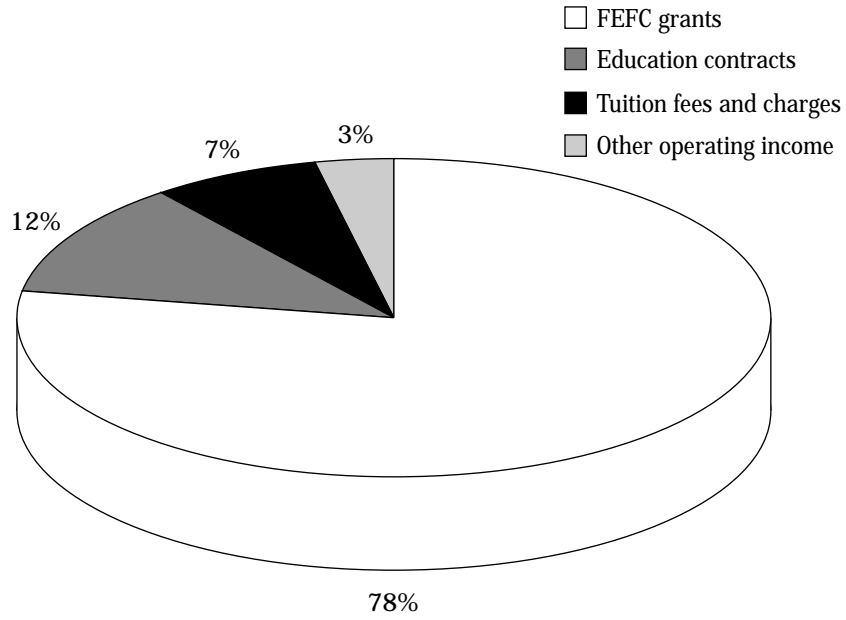
Royal Forest of Dean College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 170

Figure 5

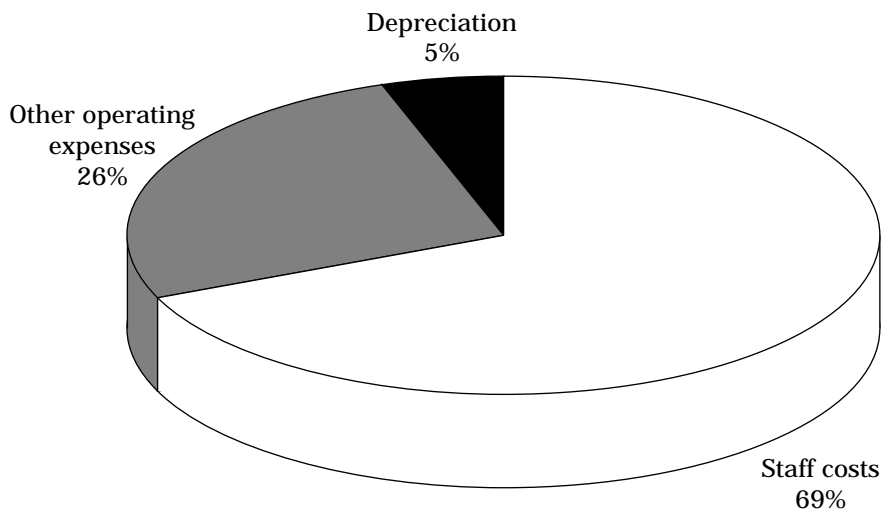
Royal Forest of Dean College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £5,469,000

Figure 6

Royal Forest of Dean College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £6,104,000

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