

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**The Sixth Form
College,
Farnborough**

April 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	2
Responsiveness and range of provision	6
Governance and management	14
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	22
Teaching and the promotion of learning	29
Students' achievements	39
Quality assurance	51
Resources	59
Conclusions and issues	70
Figures	

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-96

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 55/97

THE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE, FARNBOROUGH

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected March 1996-January 1997

Summary

The Sixth Form College, Farnborough, provides teaching of outstanding quality and has a strong commitment to raising individual students' achievements. Examination results are well above the national average in most subjects. Good governance, strong leadership and open management have created a shared vision and sense of purpose. Students are mostly school-leavers studying GCE A level subjects, although increasing numbers are taking GNVQ programmes. Liaison with schools and parents is particularly effective, and there are appropriate links with higher education. The pastoral arrangements provide consistent guidance and support for students throughout their college careers. The college's concern to improve the quality of its provision is evident in the design and conduct of its quality assurance system and its self-assessment report which is comprehensive and analyses strengths and weaknesses rigorously. Staff are well qualified and committed to their work with students. Students contribute to several aspects of college management. There is a wide range of appropriate computers and software. The new resource centre is a particular strength. Recent improvements to the college's accommodation have been imaginative and cost effective. The college should improve its underdeveloped adult education provision; the lack of co-ordination of its contacts with industry and commerce; and poor student retention in a few subjects.

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	1
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	1
Quality assurance	1
Resources: staffing	1
equipment/learning resources	1
accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics	2	Media, performance arts and physical education	1
Science	1	English	1
Business studies	1	History and sociology	2
Art and design	2	Geography, law and politics	1
		Modern foreign languages	2

INTRODUCTION

1 The Sixth Form College, Farnborough, was inspected between March 1996 and January 1997. During the weeks beginning 25 March 1996 and 2 December 1996, 11 inspectors spent 31 days assessing curriculum areas. Inspectors visited 131 classes, involving 1,713 students, and examined students' work and extensive documentation relating to the college and its courses. In the week beginning 27 January 1997 and during June and September 1996, when enrolment and induction procedures were inspected, six inspectors spent 17 days assessing aspects of cross-college provision. During the period of the inspection, there were meetings with members of the corporation, college managers and staff, students, parents, head teachers of local schools, and with representatives of the Hampshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and of local industry and commerce.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 The Sixth Form College, Farnborough, was opened as a co-educational sixth form college in 1974, having been a boys' grammar school since 1936. The college is located on a single site of some 10 hectares, on the outskirts of Farnborough in north Hampshire. Buildings date from the grammar school to the mathematics and technology block which was completed in 1984. Many new projects including the library, information technology resource centre and the pastoral suite, have been undertaken in recent years to accommodate additional students. The majority of students come from the college's eight partner schools in the districts of Rushmoor and Hart. Students come from over 60 schools in all, with an increasing number from neighbouring Berkshire and Surrey. Almost 20 per cent of students come from independent schools.

3 Farnborough is a medium-sized town whose development owes much to the Royal Aircraft Establishment and the Army. Nearly three-quarters of the working population are employed in the service sector, particularly at professional and managerial levels in high technology industries, and in finance. The region, whose unemployment levels are low, attracts graduates. There are good communications by road, rail and air. The population is predominantly white but there are significant Indian, Pakistani, Afro-Caribbean, Chinese and Vietnamese communities, and the college's student profile reflects this ethnic mix. More than three-quarters of young people in the area continue their education after the age of 16 and, of these, the majority progress to higher education.

4 There are five faculties: sciences; business, economics and languages; leisure, media and performance; humanities and social sciences; and design and creative technologies. Adult and continuing education are offered at the college and in close partnership with four school centres nearby. The college has grown rapidly since incorporation, with the number of 16 to 19 year olds increasing by nearly one-third. At the time

of inspection the college had 2,182 students. Of these, 1,516 were full time and aged between 16 and 19, and most were following general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) or general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs). Most of the remaining students were on part-time courses in the adult education programme. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

5 The Sixth Form College, Farnborough aims to equip its students with the skills and qualities required to meet the demands of a fast-changing world. The college is committed to enriching the lives of its students, and supporting them to achieve good academic and vocational qualifications within a caring environment. Whilst specialising in provision for the 16 to 19 age group, the college seeks to respond flexibly to meet the education and training needs of business and the wider community.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

6 The organisation of the curriculum is flexible and responsive to the needs of full-time students. It includes the provision of alternative syllabuses in the same subject and an opportunity to study some GCE A levels in one year. Programmes which show that they no longer meet a need through weak recruitment, low retention or poor achievements are replaced. For example, a change of syllabus in the recently-introduced GCE A level in psychology has led to increased numbers of students, better retention and improved examination results.

7 The college offers a wide range of GCE A level and GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects and a growing number of GNVQs. Forty-five subjects are offered at GCE A level, seven of them on a one-year basis; there are 19 GCE AS subjects, five of which are offered on a one-year basis; and there are nine courses at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) level, four of which follow different syllabuses in mathematics. There is a GNVQ foundation level programme and GNVQ intermediate programmes in business, health and social care, leisure and tourism, and media and communication. All of these, apart from media and communication, are also available at GNVQ advanced level. Art and design is also offered as a GNVQ advanced subject. GNVQ enrolments are 20 per cent of the college's student numbers. A range of other single qualification courses is available in information technology, sport, music, and foreign languages at work in French, German and Spanish. Ninety-seven per cent of full-time students are between 16 and 18 years old and most of the full-time adult students are 19 years old.

8 The development of the curriculum in all areas is informed by a knowledge of the national targets for education and training. The college takes seriously its mission to enrich the lives of students and to equip them with the skills to meet the demands of a changing world. All students

taking two or more GCE A level subjects are required also to study GCE A level general studies. The college emphasises the importance of acquiring information technology skills, and all students who have previously achieved a grade below C in GCSE mathematics are encouraged to retake it. A wide range of sporting, dramatic, musical and other cultural opportunities is available, including extensive contacts with continental Europe. Work experience is a part of the GNVQ programmes. GCE A level students are also encouraged to undertake work experience, but few do so. Teachers in most curriculum areas have established links with industry which enhance the curriculum. Some have led to local companies providing sponsorships and mentoring schemes for students.

9 The college has strong links with its eight partner schools which enable pupils to gain detailed information about the college and its courses. College staff attend a range of events at the schools. Pupils are invited to the college to sample the subjects they might study. College and school teachers meet regularly at area curriculum panels, and there have also been staff exchanges. The college keeps schools informed of the progress and destinations of former pupils. Pupils from a special school also have the opportunity to taste life at the college, although many of them plan to go elsewhere. The college has worked hard to meet the needs of hearing-impaired students. Parents are encouraged to take part in their children's induction and enrolment, and the principal uses this opportunity to inform them about the aims and ethos of the college.

10 Marketing is a particular strength. The college collects and compares data about its students with broader demographic trends. As a result it has extended the number of schools to which it publicises its courses during the past two years, choosing them carefully and with realistic consideration of the transport routes involved. Two-thirds of college students come from the two local districts. Publicity materials are informative and well presented. The college has productive relationships with the press and other media and articles about the college appear regularly. The prospectus includes photographs of students from minority ethnic groups and the proportion of such students at the college regularly exceeds that in the local population.

11 Regular contacts are maintained with other further education colleges, particularly with sixth form colleges. Teachers in most curriculum areas have contacts in higher education in relation to their subjects, and the careers department has a network of links with higher education institutions which it uses when organising such events as the higher education fair and higher education seminar day. The college has arrangements with the University of Surrey, Southampton Institute and with Surrey Institute of Art and Design which enable students to progress to higher education without the usual selection processes.

12 Relationships with the TEC are effective and the college has been successful with its bids to the development fund. One of these has enabled the college to employ a consultant to identify the training needs of small to

medium-sized companies and to alert local industry to the range of provision at the college. Some local companies have commissioned training for their employees, especially in information technology. The college is represented on the north-east Hampshire education and business partnership and the north-east Hampshire chamber of commerce and links with employers are growing rapidly. The college is only now taking steps to co-ordinate these contacts and to establish a central database. It recognises that the potential of its open learning centre to offer facilities for students to undertake industrial training at times of their own choosing has yet to be developed fully.

13 The college franchises adult education to four local schools. This activity amounts to about 5 per cent of the college's work. Each centre concentrates on different types of courses, although the distribution is largely historical rather than being planned. Some centres primarily offer GCE A level and GCSE courses; others concentrate on information technology; and one has strong provision in languages and crafts. Although there has been some rationalisation of courses over the past four years, membership of the partnership has not been constant and this has hampered the development of a logical pattern of provision. Improving relations with Farnborough College of Technology and the application of better market research should help the development of comprehensive provision for the neighbourhood.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

14 The corporation board has 20 members, 11 of whom are independent. At the time of the inspection there was one vacancy for an independent member which was shortly to be filled by a person employed in the media. The principal is a member. There are two co-opted members and six nominees. Of the latter, two are staff, two are parents and there is one student and one representative of the TEC. The board has seven women members, one of whom is from a minority ethnic group. The board has recently commissioned an external consultant to chair a small group of members to identify the range of skills and experience that the board will need to fulfil its duties in the future. As a result some members have retired, five new members have been appointed and staggered terms of office have been introduced to provide continuity. The board now has a membership with a broad range of skills appropriate to the college's needs.

15 The corporation's business is discharged effectively. There are four committees: audit; policy and resources; estates; and remuneration. The committees have clear terms of reference and members receive good documentation to help them in their work. Full board meetings have clear agendas and minutes. The management of some agenda items might be improved by introducing summaries to the often weighty reports that governors have to absorb. Attendance at corporation meetings averages 77 per cent.

16 The college is well governed. Members of the board have a good grasp of their responsibilities and take a keen interest in determining the direction of the college. They understand and observe the distinction between governance and operational matters, properly leaving the latter to senior managers. Members understand that it is important that they monitor, review and evaluate the work of the college. They achieve this oversight through involvement in the planning processes, during which they examine targets and supporting data and consider information about the college's performance. Members support the principal well, but not uncritically. There are many examples on record in minutes of intelligent questioning by governors to refine proposals. Training for members is provided through external courses and by the chairman, the principal and staff. A more coherent college-based training scheme would be useful. The principal is appraised by the chief executive of another college and a local education authority (LEA) officer. Although their findings are passed to the chairman of the board, his direct involvement would improve the process.

17 Strategic planning is comprehensive. There is a college-wide framework for planning and staff are invited to contribute. Staff develop their views in small teams and then discuss them at faculty meetings. The faculties produce a plan which is considered by the directors of faculty and senior managers, and eventually by the corporation board. Once the board has adopted the plan, staff are informed about it in its final form. This thorough process forges a clear relationship between the plans produced at all levels in the college, and an obvious sense of common purpose.

18 The principal and senior managers give strong leadership. The management structure is generally understood and widely supported. The senior management team comprises the principal, the vice-principal, the assistant principal, the registrar and the business manager. Faculties are responsible for quality assurance, communications, budgets and co-ordination between curriculum teams. Directors responsible for the curriculum and for pastoral care meet senior managers to discuss significant matters. Scheduled college meetings ensure that important issues are addressed promptly and passed quickly onto the senior management team which meets at least once a week.

19 The college has policies for health and safety and equal opportunities but, as yet, they are not fully effective. There is no policy for environmental matters. The health and safety committee is chaired by the health and safety adviser. Terms of reference for this committee should be sharper and should show more clearly to whom it is responsible. The dual responsibilities of the safety adviser, as adviser and committee member, should be reconsidered to avoid conflict of interests. The equal opportunities policy which was produced well before incorporation, deals with staff and student issues briefly but adequately. However, mechanisms for its implementation and review do not yet exist and the original intention that the corporation board should manage equal opportunities issues

should be reconsidered. An equal opportunities co-ordinator is now leading a task group to produce a revised policy. The college makes provision for religious education and for a collective act of worship and satisfies the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*.

20 The college has good management information systems. The system which generates student data has been developed by the systems manager. It provides reliable information on students, from their initial applications through to their eventual destinations and it will be improved further when examination statistics are integrated later this year. The data are widely used at all levels in the college. Financial data are processed separately through a commercial system run by the business manager. This system provides reliable monthly statements to all budget holders and to key members of the corporation, as well as furnishing the data for more substantial summary reports. Unit costs have been calculated and they are used to guide decisions about the curriculum and other developments. Although the two information systems are separate, their two managers work closely together to use all the available data.

21 The college exceeded its enrolment targets by 3 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively, in each of the last two years, and it is likely to reach its target in the current year. The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £18.20 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.36 per unit. Seven per cent of the college budget is distributed to between 40 and 50 budget holders. Despite these large numbers the system works well. Budget holders are well trained and there are effective central controls. Budgets are allocated according to a formula based upon weighted curriculum areas. There is also provision to support new projects through bidding. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

22 Policies and procedures for all aspects of students' recruitment, guidance and support are clear and coherent. The college introduced a new structure for pastoral care at the beginning of the 1996-97 academic year after extensive consultation with staff and students. Care was taken to preserve those features of the previous system that were valued most highly. Each stage of implementing the new scheme was backed up by training and good communication. The results are regarded as effective by students and staff. A group of 15 pastoral tutors provides guidance for all full-time students. Tutors are paired to support each other, to provide training for the less experienced and to ensure that, for example, the service is not interrupted by illness. Tutors form a dynamic team and are strongly led by a pastoral director. Tutors are accommodated in a suite of offices designed for their work. In order to provide continuity and security for students the membership of tutorial groups remains constant throughout a student's time in the college.

23 New full-time students attend a pre-enrolment briefing in July. They are given an information pack which includes the college charter, enrolment details and notice of a further advice day in August. Enrolment procedures are reviewed regularly. A revised procedure was introduced for this academic year. On starting college, students are allocated to tutor groups to help them to get to know their tutor and other students early on. At enrolment interviews, tutors guide students towards appropriate programmes in the light of their examination results and career aspirations. Teachers and careers advisers are on hand to give advice. Procedures for adult part-time students concentrate on explaining the nature of their courses, and advice and learning support are offered to those who want them.

24 The induction programme is carefully planned. Each curriculum area designs a programme to familiarise students with the demands of their courses, while the pastoral teams provide an introduction to the tutorial and support services. Tutors emphasise the college charter and its delineation of students' rights and responsibilities. Group tutorial sessions follow a common programme which introduces students to college systems and to the location of the various services, explains action planning and begins the development of students' study skills. Each student receives several handbooks, including one for each subject, a tutorial handbook and a college diary. Their contents are clear and easy to read.

25 There is a course tutor for each subject. Teachers and tutors work closely together to help students to do well in their examinations. Students appreciate the help they receive and understand why the college demands regular attendance and high standards of work. A calendar of progress reviews is published in the tutorial handbook, a copy of which is sent to parents. Procedures for students who wish to change courses follow a clear sequence of personal guidance interviews. Weekly group tutorials use good learning materials to introduce a programme of general education and life skills. Attendance rates for tutorial sessions are high. One tutor acts as a support for part-time students.

26 Learning support in the college is effective and it is recognised as such by students. Learning support is offered in the curriculum areas and in a central unit located in the learning resource centre. Curriculum centres offer additional tuition which some students are instructed to take and others attend voluntarily. The central unit provides help with literacy and numeracy, information technology and organisational skills. Only students on GNVQ and GCSE courses are automatically assessed for their ability in literacy and numeracy when they join the college, but all students are asked to describe their capability in using information technology. The tutorial system is effective in ensuring that students' difficulties are quickly identified. The college has assessed some GCE A level students and this survey has underlined the value of testing all students, according to the requirements of their particular courses.

27 Students value the services of the nurse and counsellor. A teacher who is a qualified educational psychologist, brings specialist expertise to the support services. Chaplains from neighbouring churches visit the college regularly. There is an agreement with the local careers service, which defines the level of service which is to be expected and there is a permanent careers office in the learning resource centre. The careers library is spacious and well stocked. The tutorial programme is effective in helping students to apply for higher education or employment, but many students would like more opportunities to practise their interview skills. After examination results have been published, tutors are available to help those who have to change their plans. The college keeps a detailed record of the whereabouts of its former students and invites them back to share their experience with the new intake of students.

28 Many students are involved in activities in the local community such as art, music and sport. The majority of them work part time and they include relevant parts of their experience in their personal statements. The pastoral team is exploring ways in which experience of work can be accredited. All students keep college statements of progress rather than the national records of achievement they brought from school. Students contribute to running the college. For example, the student association played a significant part in the recent appointment of an activities organiser. This appointment has revitalised the recreational programme and offers many students the chance to develop their social and organisational skills through running clubs and societies. Students also contribute to the appointment of staff by commenting on the performance in lessons of applicants for teaching posts.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

29 Of the 131 classes inspected, 83 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. This is 20 per cent above the national average for all colleges inspected during 1995-96, according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. Less than 1 per cent had weaknesses which outweighed strengths. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 87 per cent. The lowest attendances were in history and sociology at 78 per cent, and the highest in performing arts and physical education at 94 per cent. The average number of students in each of the classes inspected was 13. The following table summarises the grades given to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programmes of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	35	50	14	1	0	100
GCSE	2	6	3	0	0	11
GNVQ	3	4	3	0	0	10
Other vocational	3	1	1	0	0	5
Other	4	1	0	0	0	5
Total	47	62	21	1	0	131

30 All the courses are well planned and have coherent schemes of work which include clear objectives. Some schemes are very detailed. They contain the key concepts and topics to be covered, planned activities and the teaching and assessment methods to be used. In mathematics, schemes of work are prominently displayed in the classrooms and are often referred to by teachers. They are constantly updated in the light of experience. Course handbooks reflect this high standard of planning and are a mine of information for students. The quality of teaching in all subjects is based on sound professional relationships between teachers and students. Most lessons are carefully prepared, in line with the schemes of work.

31 In the sciences, including psychology, teachers use a range of methods and a variety of resources to stimulate learning. They are aware of and make reference to the industrial applications of science. In most lessons teachers provided clear introductions and made regular checks that students were learning. Students' interest was aroused and held, although in a few lessons the work did not cater for the differing abilities of students. Lively group work was a feature of psychology classes and students responded perceptively to the tasks they were given, although the more able were sometimes given less to do in the time than they could have achieved. In mathematics, the standard of teaching and learning was uneven. In some lessons the teaching was lively and challenging, with teachers setting new material in context by making links with other topics and questioning students individually to make sure that they understood. For example, in a GCE AS class which had three groups of students each of which was following a different route to the qualification, the teacher maintained the work at a brisk pace and ensured that everybody made progress. Students' responses to questions were amplified by the teacher and used well to raise new issues. In other lessons, a lack of any clear purpose, too big a jump from one activity to another, and little encouragement for students to contribute made the time unproductive.

32 The quality of teaching and learning in business studies and economics was usually good, with teachers demanding high standards. In the better lessons there was an effective mix of class, small group and individual teaching, the activities were varied, and students were involved in the work. In GCE A level sessions in particular, topics were presented

in a lively and interesting manner. GNVQ students organise their own industrial visits. They hold meetings to organise the trip and send out questionnaires beforehand to the company. After the visit they evaluate their own role, their contribution to the team and the visit itself.

33 In art and design, students understand the requirements of their courses and work enthusiastically. Most teachers use a variety of methods to inform and guide students and to hold their interest. They invite responses from students to test their understanding. In a GCE A level class the technique of embossing was demonstrated. This was done well and students were attentive. Examples of publicity material helped students to see the range of possibilities which they could use in their own design work. In a minority of lessons, the work was either not at a high enough level to extend the students, or their superficial knowledge of the subject and its history prevented them from contributing easily to debate and discussion. Students have insufficient practice in observed drawing to underpin the range of work which they are required to do. Some work could have been taken forward further and faster by using computers.

34 In the performing arts, music, media and physical education, teachers give challenging lessons, which cover the syllabus and maintain a high level of interest. The work is well paced and teachers use a variety of methods to ensure that learning takes place. Students work purposefully with the minimum of time wasted. The practical and theoretical aspects of these courses are well integrated and teachers succeed in conveying clearly difficult or more complex ideas. Work is carefully structured to take account of the differing abilities of students. For example, in a lesson on baroque music, students worked in groups, pairs and individually. Listening to recordings and using varying vocal and keyboard skills each student was able to develop an understanding of baroque musical structures. Every student was able to participate fully and many demonstrated a high level of skill in describing difficult technical ideas.

35 In English, teachers use a variety of teaching methods and place significant emphasis upon work in small groups or pairs. Teachers always set the context for the work and relate it to what has gone before. Students work conscientiously, and teachers regularly make thorough checks on their learning. Teachers use well-prepared handouts and make reference to recent events and research. In a few lessons, the pace of work was too slow. In modern foreign languages, the standard of teaching is generally effective, with the best in German and Spanish. Teachers have high expectations of their students and use the foreign language most of the time, though they need to pay more attention to ensuring that students fully understand. In an outstanding first-year GCE A level German lesson the teacher used the language to give a short talk on vegetarianism. Students worked well in small groups, using a dictionary and written text to construct questions for use in a questionnaire. They were then able to practise their questions on each other. Teaching in French is more variable, and students have fewer opportunities to participate in the work

with the result that in some lessons they became bored. More needs to be done to ensure that students learn to speak the foreign languages with confidence and fluency. All work is topic based and the materials are well chosen, but the emphasis on the use of monolingual dictionaries sometimes wastes time on definition at the expense of time for speaking.

36 Clear instructions and well-produced handouts are given to students in history and sociology lessons. In history, college-developed computer software is used to good effect. Teachers use question and answer sessions particularly well. They are careful to check that students understand the current topic before moving on to a new one, especially in sociology. Most teachers give a summary at the end of the lesson. Some weaker aspects of teaching included poor management of time so that students were rushed and did not complete their work; inappropriate use of overhead projectors; and use of class time for activities that should have been completed before the lesson. The sociology industrial links programme introduces a wide range of outside speakers and helps students to understand the applications of the subject.

37 Geography, politics and law is a lively area of the curriculum. Teachers show a genuine interest and enjoyment in their subjects, and are committed to helping students achieve their full potential. They pay particular attention to pitching opportunities for learning at the right levels to meet the differing abilities of students, using extension reading, annotated booklists, individual studies and seminars led by students themselves. In one GCE A level government and politics class, the teacher expertly drew upon recent political events to illustrate the changing role of the civil service and the nature of accountability. Students eagerly participated in discussions about the Parkhurst Prison escapees and the resignation of the prison governor, which was used to show the difference between policy formulation, policy implementation and the extent of ministerial responsibility.

38 The key skills of literacy and numeracy are generally well integrated with lessons and assignments. In business studies, their development is particularly well planned to ensure good coverage. Information technology skills are fostered as part of science and GNVQ courses and many business students wordprocess their work. The use of information technology is limited in English, geography, law, and government and politics. Very few mathematics students use computing in their coursework.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

39 Most students develop a thorough understanding of their work and they speak confidently about it. In written and practical work they achieve appropriate standards. Students are capable in the practical work involved in the study of music and the performing arts. Students speak out confidently in class discussions; they work well together and are articulate about their future plans. Practical work in workshops and laboratories is competently and safely carried out.

40 Six hundred and ten students took GCE A level examinations in 1996, across a range of 37 subjects. Of these, 576 students who were aged 16 to 18 scored, on average, 5.4 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This places the college in the top 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). The following table shows the number of entries by students, aged 16 and over, for GCE A level examinations each year between 1994 and 1996, together with their pass rates at grades A to E compared with the national averages for sixth form colleges. Students achieve results below the national average in few subjects.

College pass rates compared with national averages for sixth form colleges between 1994 and 1996 for students aged 16 and over in GCE A level examinations

	1994	1995	1996
Number of student entries	1,359	1,317	1,539
Number of subjects in which students were entered	29	32	37
Average pass rate (%), national average in brackets	89 (83)	86 (84)	90 (85)
Number of subjects with pass rates above national averages	22	20	28
Number of subjects with pass rates at national averages	2	5	2
Number of subjects with pass rates below national averages	5	7	7

41 The college subscribes to an independent, external service which enables it to calculate the extent of students' achievements on GCE A level courses by comparing their performance in GCE A level examinations with that predicted on the basis of their GCSE grades. By this measure, on an analysis over the last three years, students at The Sixth Form College, Farnborough achieved significantly above the average expectation in mathematics, English literature, general studies, physics, government and politics, art, chemistry, and graphical communication. Over the same period, they did not achieve the expected grades in history and psychology. In 1996, they did not achieve the expected grades in media studies, physical education, English language and human biology.

42 In 1996, students achieved 100 per cent pass rates at grades A to E in seven GCE A level subjects, including performing arts, music, further mathematics and German. Over the last three years, students have consistently achieved above the national average for sixth form colleges in 12 subjects.

College pass rates (as a percentage) for GCE A level examinations which were above the national average for sixth form colleges, 1994-96, for students aged 16 to 18

	1994	1995	1996
Accounting	82 (72)	87 (65)	69 (66)
Art and design	99 (93)	99 (94)	99 (95)
Business studies	87 (83)	84 (83)	88 (84)
Chemistry	96 (82)	85 (84)	96 (87)
Further mathematics	100 (82)	96 (95)	100 (95)
General studies	100 (77)	90 (78)	92 (79)
Government and politics	96 (80)	97 (87)	92 (89)
Graphical communication	100 (81)	100 (87)	100 (88)
Home economics	100 (83)	100 (92)	100 (95)
Mathematics	94 (83)	91 (88)	95 (87)
Music	93 (91)	95 (92)	100 (92)
Sociology	84 (79)	84 (77)	81 (78)

Note: in some cases, the national average pass rate, shown in brackets, is for an aggregated group of subjects in which the individual subject is included.

43 At GCE A level, pass rates in English literature have been at or above national averages over the last three years. Over the same period, only electronics has had pass rates consistently below national averages. In 1996, only in economics was the pass rate significantly below the national average. In biology and human biology pass rates were well below the national averages in 1995, but in 1996 they improved dramatically and were well above the national averages. The college notes when pass rates fall and takes steps to rectify any shortcomings in curriculum areas which it can identify.

44 There were 58 GCE AS entries in 1996 in 10 subjects, representing a small increase over the last three years. Only mathematics and government and politics were taken by more than 10 students. The best pass rates were in music and performing arts, though there were very small numbers in these subjects. In government and politics the pass rates was just below the national average and in mathematics some 12 per cent below it.

45 Entries for GCSE examinations have fallen over the last three years, from 698 in 1994 to 377 in 1996. Ten subjects are offered but over two-thirds of the entries are in English and mathematics. The proportion of students achieving grades A* to C in 1996 was 60 per cent; a small fall from the 66 per cent achieved in 1995. In English pass rates were above or well above the national averages in 1995 and 1996. In mathematics pass rates were poor in 1994 and 1995, with 34 and 21 per cent of students

achieving grades A* to C, respectively, compared with the national averages in sixth form colleges of 41 and 40 per cent, respectively. Results improved in 1996, with 52 per cent achieving passes at grades A* to C. However, only 62 per cent of students who started the course having achieved a grade D at school raised it to a grade C or above.

46 Students' achievements in vocational examinations are mixed. The first cohort of advanced GNVQ students completed their studies in 1996. Seventy per cent of the 64 students aged 16 to 18 on advanced vocational courses included in the DfEE's 1996 performance tables were successful. Sixty-one per cent of the 75 students aged 16 to 18 who were taking intermediate vocational courses were successful. This places the college on both of these performance measures in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector. The following table shows the three-year trend of students passing GNVQ intermediate subjects.

College pass rates (as a percentage of those completing) over the period 1994 to 1996, for GNVQ intermediate awards

	1994	1995	1996
Art and design	33	100	Not offered
Business	69	80	85
Health and social care	63	86	64
Leisure and tourism	38	64	68
Media and communication	Not offered	Not offered	69
Science	Not offered	100	Not offered

47 At GNVQ advanced level, results for art and design, business, and leisure and tourism are good. In business, 50 per cent of the students who passed achieved a distinction. The art and design group achieved well above the average for the sector, with 85 per cent passing. Many of the college's adult students take vocational examinations in business, particularly in wordprocessing and modern foreign languages. Results in the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) wordprocessing examination in 1995 were well above the national average, but they fell significantly to 52 per cent at elementary level and 63 per cent at intermediate level in 1996. Results in foreign languages at work courses are generally good, but there were poor results for Spanish beginners in the last two years.

48 The college measures students' retention, using the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) performance indicator for 'continuation'. The college data contributing to this performance indicator were audited by the inspectorate and found to be accurate. The retention rate among full-time students was 91 per cent in 1994-95 and 93 per cent in 1995-96. The college maintains an internal league table of subject retention rates. For most individual subjects and courses retention has been good, but there are weak areas. In GCE A level subjects between 1994 and 1996, the retention rate was below 60 per cent in accounting,

ceramics, human biology, electronics, music, media studies, French and German. At GCSE level the retention rate was below 60 per cent in only law. For the four GNVQ advanced cohorts of students who completed their courses in 1996, retention rates ranged from 77 per cent for health and social care, to 93 per cent for art and design. At intermediate level in 1996, all retention rates were above 87 per cent.

49 There are college teams in a wide range of summer and winter sports, including football, rugby, netball, basketball, badminton, cricket, athletics and tennis. Students compete at county, regional and national level. The college organises an annual overseas sports tour. Many students are also active in sport, music and drama outside the college. One student is ranked number one in England for badminton and another is a leading competitor in junior motor racing. Twenty-nine music students play in various Hampshire and Surrey bands and orchestras.

50 The college records the destinations of its leavers. The data for full-time students' destinations for the last three years are shown in the following table.

Students' destinations, for the years 1994 to 1996

	1994	1995	1996
Total number of students completing their courses	591	667	668
To higher education (%)	54	48	51
To further education (%)	22	20	16
To employment (%)	23	17	23
Other (%)	1	6	4
Unknown (%)	0	9	6

QUALITY ASSURANCE

51 The college's determination to improve continuously the quality of its provision is evident at all levels. The quality assurance policy is clear, widely understood and fully implemented. Its single objective is to improve students' achievements. The two-year cycle for quality review is integrated with that for strategic planning. It comprises student and course review against targets set for individuals and for the college, using performance indicators. It is helpfully summarised in a graphical form which sets out the stages of the quality improvement cycle, and the roles and responsibilities of individuals and committees.

52 The college sets for each GCSE or GCE A level student a target minimum grade. Parents and students are introduced to the implications of setting a target minimum grade at an open evening before the course begins. Parents participate in predicting their children's final examination grades. Most students accept that this is a useful means to help them

evaluate and improve their own performance. Progress towards the prediction is monitored at tutorials and through discussion with subject tutors. Students who fail to reach their targets in the mock examinations and in coursework are counselled so that problems can be identified and action taken to improve performance. Tutors, faculties and curriculum areas are also monitored against the extent to which students in their care achieve their targets.

53 Students taking GNVQ programmes are not allocated a minimum target grade, but their progress is monitored module by module. There is an effective quality assurance process for GNVQ programmes.

54 The commitment to improving students' achievements is reflected in the college charter. It sets out college and student responsibilities clearly. The extent to which the college fulfils its responsibilities is monitored through questionnaires to students and against college performance indicators. Students take part in course forums which allow them to comment on the effectiveness of the education they are receiving and to highlight areas for improvement. The process is an open one and teaching teams draw up plans to improve their performance as a consequence. The college collates data on attendance patterns as part of the comprehensive overview of each student's progress.

55 The staff-development policy sets clear priorities. Achievement of the college's aims is central to the staff-development plan. The staff-development budget is currently 1 per cent of the college's staffing budget; some £33,000. In addition, there is a significant amount of college-based development which is not expressed as a cost. A proportion of the staff-development budget is devolved to faculties and it is primarily used to meet requirements identified through staff appraisal. The college initiated a Hampshire middle manager training programme. Development activities are evaluated by faculties but are not analysed in sufficient detail across the college to ensure that good practice is shared or that areas of concern are identified. The staff-development newsletter has been redesigned recently to contribute to resolving this problem. The college has made a commitment to achieving Investors in People status but progress is slow. The intended assessment date of June 1995 has been postponed to June 1997.

56 Staff new to teaching take part in a detailed induction programme which takes place over two terms. The principal introduces and concludes the induction programme. Mentors provide training and meet their charges regularly. New staff are observed while teaching three times in their first year, one observation being by the vice-principal.

57 The college will complete its first two-year cycle of staff appraisal in June 1997. All support staff and teachers have undertaken appraisal training. The scheme is on schedule and, at the time of the inspection, 51 per cent of teachers and 82 per cent of support staff had been appraised. Appraisal includes observation of teaching or task observation. In addition,

all teachers have a peer review twice a year when they observe the teaching of others or are observed themselves. The college is also part of a consortium which undertakes inter-college reviews of quality. Teachers receive advice on their performance and verbal and written reports on the college as a whole are given to the principal. Action is taken to redress shortcomings.

58 Curriculum areas carry out self-assessments annually and are required to report on their progress against college targets for each of the areas listed in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Their reports contain action points to improve performance and staff responsibilities and target dates for completion are specified. Plans are thoroughly reviewed at faculty meetings and they are rigorously analysed by the college curriculum and pastoral committee. The outcomes inform the college's overall self-assessment. The college produced a self-assessment report in 1995, which has been reviewed and updated. Self-assessment is now firmly established as part of the college quality review cycle. The report for 1995-96 was presented to the governors in November 1996. It is comprehensive and provides a strict and realistic analysis of the college's position. Judgements are based on evidence and action to improve performance is set out in detail. The assessment is fair, self-critical and largely consistent with inspectors' findings.

RESOURCES

Staffing

59 The college has 85 full-time and 14 part-time teachers, representing just over 91 full-time equivalents. They are well qualified, hard working and committed to the college and their students. Ninety-three per cent of them have first degrees, 24 per cent have, or are working towards, higher degrees, and 88 per cent have a recognised teaching qualification. Since the introduction of GNVQs in 1993, 23 teachers have acquired training and development lead body assessor awards and seven have acquired or are working towards the verifier award. Fifty-nine per cent of teachers have been at the college for less than five years and 49 per cent are aged under 40. The large number of recent appointments, both full time and part time, has provided an invigorating injection of new ideas and energy. Nevertheless, the college recognises that many of its GNVQ teachers lack recent industrial or commercial experience and it is mounting a programme of work placements. Three teachers have undertaken these placements recently. The new tutorial system has enabled the college to make a significant saving through more efficient deployment of teachers. Staff salaries now account for 67 per cent of the college's annual expenditure. The staff to student ratio is 1:16.4, and the average size of classes is 17.33. Nine per cent of classes have fewer than 10 students.

60 There are 24 full-time and 16.32 full-time equivalent part-time support staff. Most have appropriate qualifications and experience to fulfil their roles. There is good administrative support for teachers, with a

maximum of three days set as the standard for returning text processed work and 24 hours for photocopying. Technical support to some curriculum areas, for example art and design, is inadequate. This has been recognised by the college which is undertaking an audit of the need for and the use of existing staff.

61 The college has no central personnel function, but effective policies and procedures for staff appointment, induction, discipline and grievance are in place. Advice on personnel matters is available to the college from Education Personnel Services (Hampshire). Thirty-seven per cent of staff are men and 63 per cent are women, while 64 per cent of the senior staff are men and 36 per cent women.

Equipment/learning resources

62 The college has an appropriate range of equipment and learning resources. Most classrooms have overhead projectors and whiteboards. Many also have video players and televisions. Additional equipment is available from a central unit. Many curriculum areas are very well equipped. For example, there is an 18 booth audio-visual language laboratory. The college has no formal policy for replacing equipment, although it does have an up-to-date assets register which makes adequate provision for depreciation. The college aims to complete an audit of demand and to produce a plan for upgrading and replacing equipment in the spring of 1997.

63 The college has made a significant investment in computers and software recently. There are 238 computers for students' use, most of which are of modern specification. The ratio of machines to students is 1:7. Many of the computers are freely available to students in the centrally-located resources centre and, if they are free, in adjoining classrooms as well. Nevertheless, access to computers can be difficult at peak times. Over half the computers are linked on a network. Software is up to date, and it includes a useful collection of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases. Most of the other computers for students' use are in curriculum areas which have specialist software.

64 The library, which is also located in the resource centre, contains 11,219 books, 607 video tapes and a broad selection of newspapers and magazines. It offers a range of up-to-date materials in most curriculum areas. In some cases, for example art and design and mathematics, the stock is small. The annual budget for the library in 1996-97 is £15,000, which is allocated to curriculum areas on a historical basis, and represents an expenditure of approximately £10 per full-time student. In addition, most curriculum areas have their own extensive collections of books, periodicals, and other resources. It would be beneficial if these were listed on the computerised library catalogue, making them more accessible to all. Curriculum areas also purchase all the essential textbooks which they lend to students. The library produces useful reports on the number of loans it makes each day and on the frequency of borrowing. The library

and its associated study area provide adequate space for books and seating for 134 students. The seating capacity is insufficient at peak times. The library contains a photocopier for student use and there are video playback facilities. The resource centre is open until 20.00 hours on two evenings, and until 18.00 hours on one evening each week. It offers an attractive environment and a good service.

Accommodation

65 The college is situated on a pleasant and spacious site of 10.53 hectares on the outskirts of Farnborough. It is well served by public transport. Although the college has increased the amount of car parking space for students in recent years, demand continues to rise and students complain that there are too few spaces. There are extensive playing fields on the site, and seven tennis courts.

66 There are seven permanent buildings and four temporary huts, of which two are used for teaching and two for storage. The main building is the oldest and was built in 1936 as a grammar school. The other blocks and various additions have all been built since 1950. The buildings are of brick, and most have pitched roofs and are of one or two storeys. The permanent buildings are all structurally sound, but had been neglected in the years immediately prior to incorporation. Substantial improvements to the college's accommodation in the last four years have included an extension to the main building to create the resource centre, a mezzanine floor in the main hall to increase library space, a number of alterations to improve teaching space, and widespread refurbishment and redecoration. The improvements have been imaginative and cost effective. The quality of internal decoration is mostly good. The campus is cleaned regularly both inside and out, although some busy and crowded areas, and particularly those used for eating are untidy at peak times.

67 There are two eating areas for students in the college: the servery, and the snack bar in the student common room. Together they provide seating for about 300. This is inadequate at break and lunchtimes, although the problem is alleviated during the summer when a trolley service is provided and students can sit at picnic tables in a recently-covered quadrangle.

68 Most classrooms are pleasant and well furnished. Display materials are used informatively and attractively in most rooms and communal areas. Most of the science laboratories are clean and bright and arranged appropriately for both theory and practical work. For the most part, the rooms used by each curriculum area are grouped together. Some class sizes are too big for the spaces available to them. Performing arts lacks an adequate space for public performance, although its studio is large enough for most teaching purposes. The six classrooms in the temporary huts are well decorated and in a good state of repair but, nevertheless, they give a poor impression. Access for students in wheelchairs is difficult in some

buildings and impossible above ground floor level because there are no lifts.

69 The college has a detailed three-year accommodation strategy dating from 1994. It is consistent with the strategic plan. The college has not conducted detailed space utilisation surveys but has relied instead on notional calculations based on the relevant publications from the DfEE. The college's computerised timetabling system allows easy calculation of room occupancy, which for 1996-97 is 79 per cent during the college day. The college has a detailed five-year maintenance programme which was revised recently in the light of financial constraints. The business manager has overall responsibility for the management of the premises. The premises manager carries out day-to-day minor works, including redecoration.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

70 The main strengths of the college are:

- its commitment to raising individual students' achievements
- a vision shared by all staff
- an effective governing body
- strong leadership and an open style of management
- the involvement of students in aspects of college management
- management systems which are well co-ordinated
- the integration of pastoral and curriculum operations
- teaching of outstanding quality
- a self-critical commitment across the college to quality assurance
- good liaison with parents and schools
- a well-qualified and committed staff
- the imaginative development of accommodation
- the new resource centre.

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

- its underdeveloped provision for adult education
- inadequate co-ordination of industrial and commercial links
- poor student retention in a few subjects.

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 January 1997)

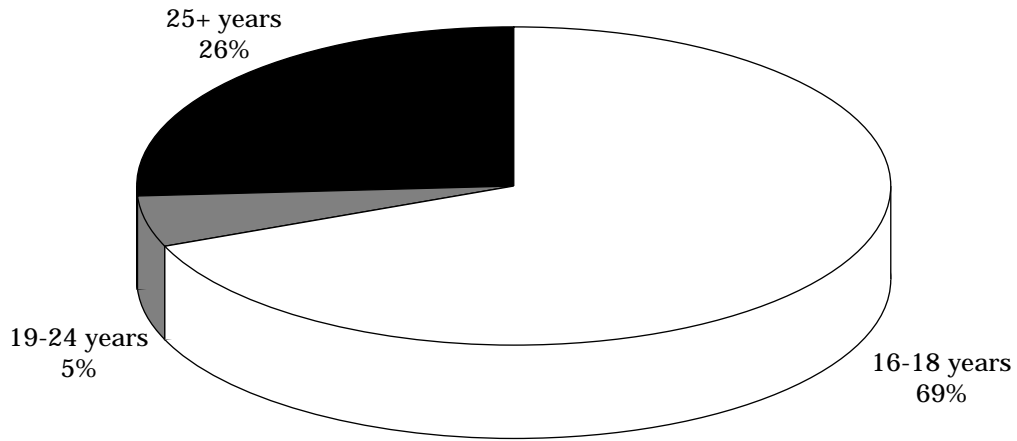
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 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

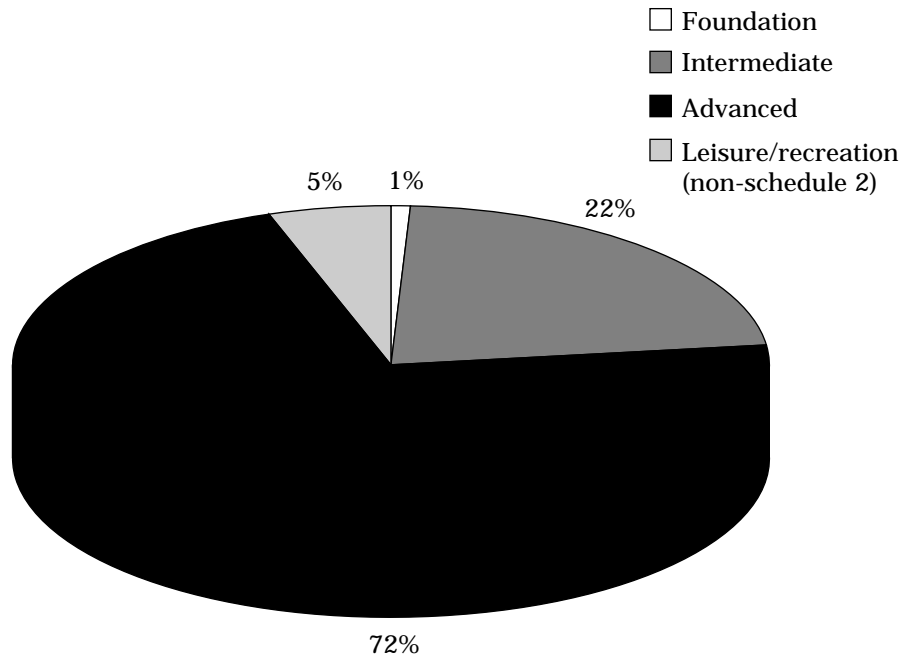
The Sixth Form College, Farnborough: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 2,182

Figure 2

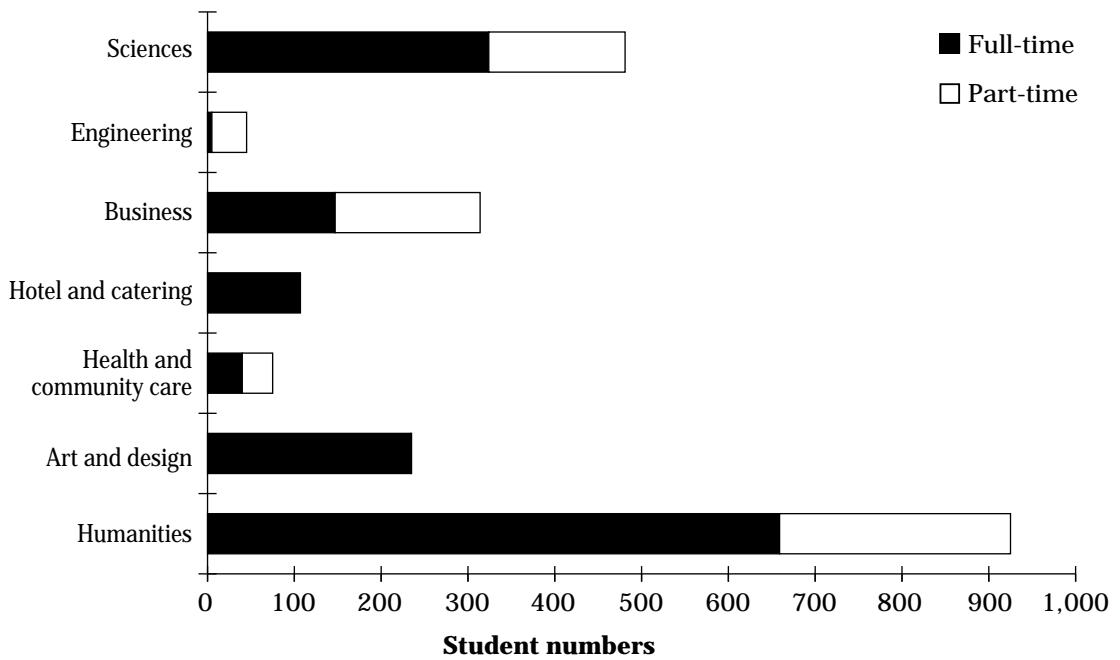
The Sixth Form College, Farnborough: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 2,182

Figure 3

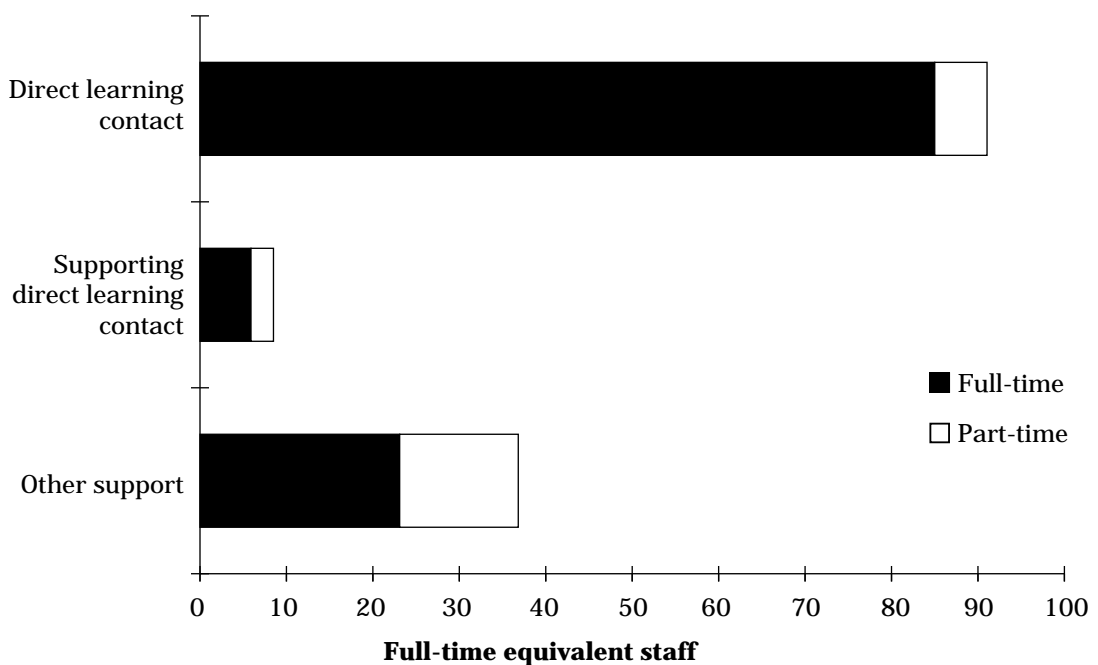
The Sixth Form College, Farnborough: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 2,182

Figure 4

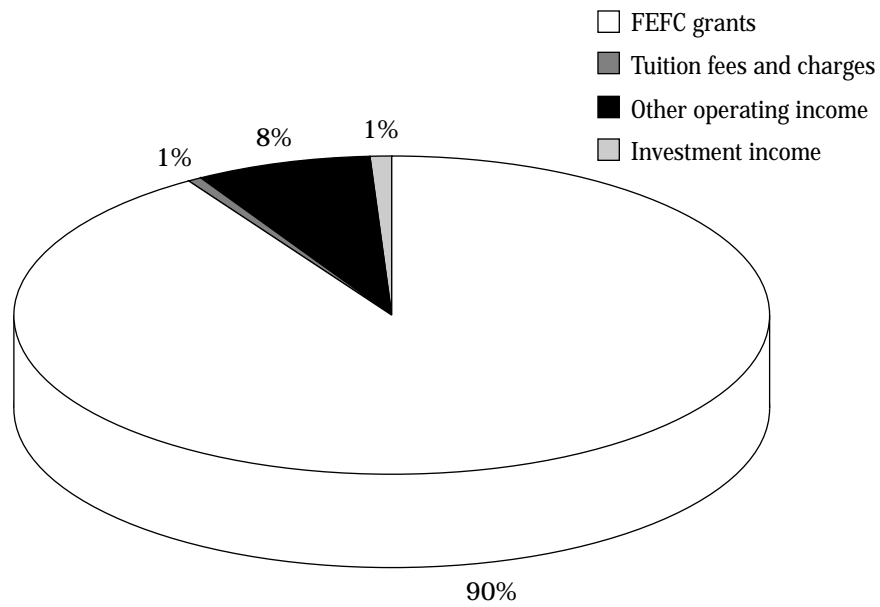
The Sixth Form College, Farnborough: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at January 1997)



Full-time equivalent staff: 136

Figure 5

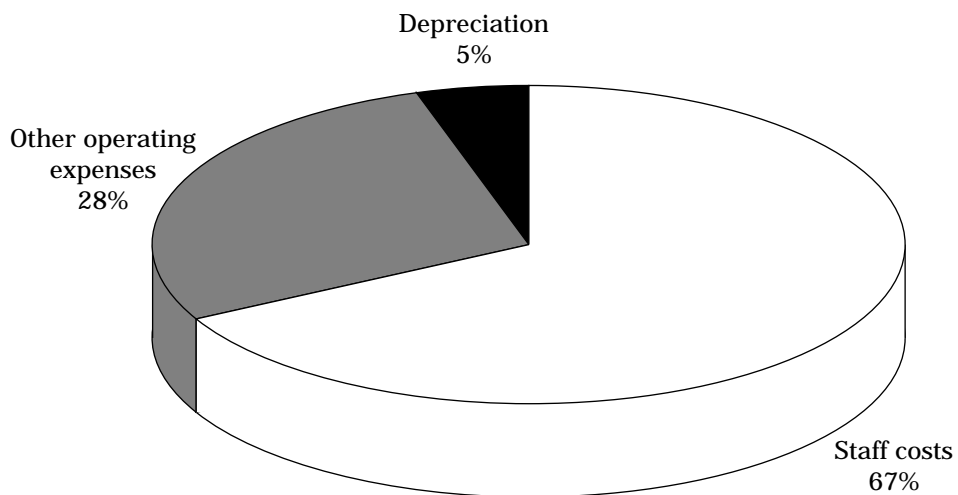
The Sixth Form College, Farnborough: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £4,571,000

Figure 6

The Sixth Form College, Farnborough: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £4,536,000

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
April 1997