

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Soundwell College

August 1996

**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 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-95

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 99/96

SOUNDWELL COLLEGE

SOUTH WEST REGION

Inspected April 1995-April 1996

Summary

Soundwell College is a general further education college on the eastern outskirts of Bristol. It offers a range of courses for a diversity of students. The college is a regional centre for road transport courses and facilities for these are of high quality. In this area of work there are strong links with employers. The college is developing collaborative work with local schools. Governors are supportive of the college and work hard on its behalf. Teaching and support staff are well qualified. Some teaching is good. Students benefit from a well-equipped learning centre. The college has invested in information technology of a high standard to support both learning and administration. There are effective admission and induction systems for students. Some areas of the college's work are well managed, including good management of accommodation. The college should improve: the quality of teaching and the standards of learning in some areas; the attendance and retention rates of students; some examination results; its charter; the reliability of data on students; the implementation of quality assurance procedures; the level of technical and administrative support; and poor accommodation at the Soundwell site. In addition, the college needs to provide governors with sufficient information for them better to fulfil their role; ensure curriculum development reflects the needs of students and employers; and implement and monitor the equal opportunities policy.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Art and design	3
Engineering	2	Humanities	3
Business	2	Adult education	2
Hotel/leisure and tourism	3	Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
Health and community care	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection of Soundwell College took place between April 1995 and April 1996. Inspectors spent 65 days in the college. They inspected teaching and learning and observed 177 classes. Inspectors analysed examination results, looked at students' work, and studied a wide range of documentation supplied by the college about its provision and operation. They also inspected the guidance, induction and enrolment procedures for students. Inspectors met governors, teaching, administrative and support staff, students, employers, parents, members of the local community, teachers from local schools, careers service staff and a representative of the Western Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Soundwell College traces its origins back to the Kingswood College of Boot and Shoe which was formed in the late 1940s to cater for the training needs of the large footwear industry in the area. In 1959, new premises were built near to the original site to accommodate the new Soundwell Technical College. Following local government reorganisation in 1974, the college became the responsibility of Avon Local Education Authority (LEA). Further reorganisation in April 1996 has led to the creation of the South Gloucestershire authority. The college is located on the eastern perimeter of Bristol and has major sites in Soundwell and Stoke Gifford (known as the Parkway site) and smaller sites at Kingswood and Downend.

3 The majority of the college's full-time 16 to 19 year old students are recruited from the seven local 11 to 18 secondary schools. Sixty-eight per cent of 16 year olds in the area remain in school or transfer to further education. Twelve per cent move into youth training. Nine per cent find employment. There are four other general further education colleges, and one sixth form college in Bristol.

4 The population of Bristol is 376,146, of whom 4.8 per cent are aged 16 to 19 years. Seventeen per cent of the population are aged 65 years or over. Approximately 5.1 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups. The local economy is heavily dependent on expanding service industries. Several major firms have moved to the Bristol area over the last few years. Unemployment in the greater Bristol area stands at 6.9 per cent in March 1996, compared with a figure of 7.4 per cent for the south-west region.

5 On 1 November 1995, the college had enrolled 5,191 students, of whom 1,386 were full time and 3,805 were part time. Twenty-nine and 24 per cent of all students were enrolled on business programme area courses and humanities courses, respectively. Eighty per cent of students are over 19. Sixty per cent are over 25. 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.

6 There are 222 full-time equivalent posts. One hundred and four are teaching posts, 32 directly support learning, and 86 provide other support. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7 The college's mission is to create partnerships with business and industry, to provide quality training and educational programmes and services which are cost effective and support students in meeting their personal goals and job, career and academic aspirations.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 Most of the college's work is at intermediate and advanced level. Students can progress from intermediate to advanced level General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses in business, leisure and tourism, health and social care and art and design. They can also progress from intermediate GNVQ information technology to a Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma course in computer studies. There are also BTEC national diploma courses in nursery nursing and media studies. The only GNVQ foundation course offered is in health and social care. The college's restricted provision at foundation level limits opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to progress to other courses.

9 The college has a limited range of courses leading to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). There are full-time NVQ courses in information technology, business administration and accountancy. Part-time NVQ programmes include those for various aspects of road transport studies, business administration, management and accountancy.

10 The college offers 20 subjects for the General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) which may be studied, full time, over two years. Seventeen GCE A level subjects are available on one-year programmes, primarily for students over the age of 18. Seventy-five students are enrolled on the two-year GCE A level programme. The college recognises that it cannot extend the range of its GCE A level programme until it has attracted more GCE A level students. Seventeen subjects in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) are available to students as part of their courses. Eleven GCSE subjects are offered in the evenings.

11 The college does not have clear mechanisms to ensure that strategic development of its programmes matches the identified needs of its students. For example, there are no clear strategies for action on courses which recruit low numbers or those which do not recruit at all. There is no system for ascertaining that new courses will meet local needs. While the college plans to offer its provision through more varied and flexible modes of study and attendance, the accommodation and resources to support these plans are inadequate. The introduction of some courses, such as GNVQ foundation and advanced level art and design, has not been successful. There is no overall strategy for the planning and development of GNVQ programmes.

12 There are strong and productive working relationships with the University of the West of England. The college offers eight access to higher education courses and a student who successfully completes one of these is guaranteed a place on a higher education course at the University of the West of England. Higher education opportunities offered by the college include higher national certificate programmes in housing studies and motor vehicle management, a level 4 NVQ in accountancy, a higher diploma course in secretarial and administration work, some management studies programmes and the first year of a computing degree programme, in partnership with the University of the West of England.

13 There is a small range of separate specialist provision for students with moderate learning difficulties. Thirteen students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are receiving support on other programmes in the college. In its marketing and publicity the college does not specifically encourage applications from people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

14 The college has worked hard to maintain good relationships with local schools. Competition between post-16 providers for school leavers in the area is intense. The principal chairs a consortium of six schools and the college. Through the consortium arrangements, school pupils are offered the opportunity to study a GCE A level subject or units of a GNVQ at the college, as part of their sixth form studies. Sixty-two students are taking this opportunity in 1995-96. The college's schools liaison co-ordinator attends school careers evenings. There are also links with some primary schools. With funds obtained through a successful bid to the TEC competitiveness fund, the college has bought a bus equipped with computers and electrical modelling equipment which it takes to local primary and secondary schools to help them to deliver some of the technology elements of the national curriculum. The college has franchise arrangements with a local school for the provision of short courses in 21 subjects. Over 500 students are enrolled on these franchised courses.

15 The college markets its provision by publicising it in various ways. However, well-structured market research has not been carried out. The college's publicity material is generally well received by prospective students. The college intends to supplement central marketing activity with marketing by each of the faculties.

16 The college has a more structured approach to finding out the needs of the local adult community. Local community workers value the way in which the college works with them. However, they would welcome a clearer identification of the college's priorities for adult and community education. Initiatives which have stemmed from the joint working of college staff and community workers are the technology bus, which brings information technology 'tasters' to villages and supermarkets, and the work with an Asian women's group carried out to develop a playgroup for children with learning needs and/or disabilities.

17 Many adults enrol on the college's recently established, and successful, Saturday and summer programmes. The summer programme for 1995, comprising mainly office skills and computing short courses, attracted 1,180 students, of whom 352 continued with a longer college programme in the following September across a wide range of subject areas. Between 1993 and 1995, the college increased the number of adult enrolments on recreational and vocational programmes from 3,870 to 6,721. Adult enrolments represented 80 per cent of total enrolments last year, compared with a figure of 65 per cent in 1993-94.

18 The college is the regional centre for education in road transport and for programmes for the British Display Society. It has a good reputation for its work in these areas. There are particularly strong and productive links with employers in the road transport industry. The college has been contracted to provide modern apprenticeships for major motor manufacturing companies. Employers are members of an advisory committee for business studies. There are plans to create similar committees for health and social care and nursery nursing. An industrial liaison group, set up in the college during 1994-95, failed to improve links with employers. Employers told inspectors they saw the college as responsive. Some, however, expressed the view that it could improve the marketing of its provision.

19 Relationships with the TEC are generally good. The TEC supports the college's approach to working with local schools. However, the TEC has had some concern about the standards of work and achievement by students on youth and adult training programmes. Some contracts between the college and the TEC have not been renewed. The college is providing for the unemployed through its work in the employment services division. It offers a range of opportunities through such initiatives as jobplan, restart and workwise programmes. Seven hundred and eight people took part in these programmes in the last year.

20 The college has recently redrafted its equal opportunities policy. The college does not collect data on individual students to use in its monitoring of equal opportunities. The college encourages participation from groups which have not usually entered further education through initiatives such as its 'return to learn' programme for adults, and a project for those at risk from drug abuse in the inner city.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

21 Governors are supportive of the college and work hard on its behalf. They bring a range of experience and expertise relevant to the college's needs. At incorporation, the governing body agreed to have a membership of 20. Since that time it has been reduced to 15 with 10 independent members, one member nominated by the TEC, two staff members, one student member and the principal. At the time of the inspection there were only 12 governors, of whom 10 were male and two female. There

was no student member and there were two vacancies for independent members. Maintaining full membership has been a problem since incorporation. Of the 12 independent governors who were in post, or being sought, at incorporation, only five have continually served since that time. The governing body has not set up a search committee to recruit new members.

22 The governors have not been kept fully informed of matters which fall outside the areas of finance, staffing and accommodation. For example, they have limited knowledge of performance measures such as students' examination achievements, retention rates and destinations. They have recently approved a new academic board and have received presentations on the college's new quality assurance arrangements.

23 The work of the governing body is supported by the corporation secretary, who is also the personal assistant to the principal. The board has four committees: audit, finance and general purposes, remuneration and personnel. The three latter committees all have the same seven governors as members, although each has a different chairman.

24 The governors' attendance record at meetings is satisfactory. Some governors have taken up an offer to spend half a day in the college each year to learn more about its work. Governors also attend a range of college events such as awards ceremonies. Some governors have spent a significant amount of time meeting staff and students.

25 The recently reorganised college executive committee consists of the principal, deputy principal and the director of finance and resources. The corporation secretary also attends meetings of the executive in her role as principal's assistant. Three faculty heads responsible for technology, business, and general and continuing education, respectively, report to the principal. There is a director of studies and a director of community for the whole college. Together with the three faculty heads, the directors join the executive team in making up the college's management team. Within faculties, middle managers are responsible for broad groupings of courses. Course managers are responsible for individual courses. Other middle managers are responsible for cross-college functions such as support for learning and management information systems.

26 The management structure has been subject to change for some time. Uncertainty about the structure has had an adverse impact on communication within the college, and on communication between the college and the local community. There are now proposals to restructure middle management. Many areas of the college's work are managed effectively. Particularly good examples include the management of accommodation, central admissions and the faculty operations.

27 The college's planning process effectively involves all staff and governors. Each faculty produces a handbook which contains targets for staff related to elements of the strategic plan. The handbooks are intended to communicate the college's aims to staff and clarify the responsibilities

of faculties and course teams. However, not all staff consider that communication in the college is always effective.

28 The college sets and monitors enrolment targets. It did not achieve its targets in 1994-95, but it is confident that it will achieve them in 1995-96. Staff are required to set targets for students' retention and examination success in the classes they teach. The acceptance and understanding of the use of targets by course teams is variable. Some targets are insufficiently challenging or inappropriate. For example, in GCSE and GCE A level programmes, although an overall target for all subjects has been set, there are no targets for individual subjects. Some retention targets are below 70 per cent. There is limited monitoring of progress towards, or achievement of, targets.

29 The college has policies for both equal opportunities and health and safety. The health and safety committee takes a detailed and thorough approach to its work. It presents an annual report to the governors. There is no effective monitoring or reporting on the implementation of the current equal opportunities policy. A revised policy is to be presented to governors shortly.

30 A new academic board has recently been set up with a revised membership and terms of reference. The previous academic board had not been effective and had not met at all in the academic year 1994-95.

31 The information published by the college on students' achievements is inaccurate. Inspectors identified a number of instances where the published data did not coincide with data presented by college managers. In most cases, the published data were wrong and presented a less favourable account of results than was the case. Through the college's management information systems, information is collected on applications, enrolments, and students' withdrawal from, and transfer between, courses. The reliability of data on students provided by the management information system is, however, questioned by managers. They find it necessary to maintain their own separate records. Budgetary responsibility for staffing and consumables is delegated to faculty directors. In some cases, this responsibility is delegated further to programme team leaders. Budgets are amended to reflect changes in the numbers of students. Financial control systems are subject to close scrutiny by senior managers and supported by clear reports to budget holders.

32 The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 was £14.31 per unit. For 1995-96 it is £14.58 per unit. The median for general further education colleges is £17.84.

33 The college collects data on the intended destinations of its students. However, there is no system to check whether students reach these destinations. Course tutors are given inadequate guidance on how to complete the returns to the management information system unit. The

data provide little useful information to inform planning or curriculum development.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

34 There is an efficient and effective central admissions system. Applicants are given many opportunities to obtain advice and information on the programmes offered by the college. Careers and advice sessions at outreach centres, such as village halls and libraries, are attracting significant numbers of clients. The technology bus is used as a mobile advice and guidance centre and visits shopping centres and other venues. In July, school pupils visit the college for a day and sample courses. Applicants for full-time courses are interviewed by a qualified guidance worker and an appropriate specialist member of staff, if necessary. The enrolment process is well structured and imaginatively organised. For example, a traffic signal system helps applicants find their way through the various stages of enrolment and points them to additional guidance should they require it. Applications to courses are monitored centrally.

35 Induction procedures are also effective. Guidelines outline clearly for both students and tutors what students should know after completing their induction programme. The length of the programme varies from a few days to three weeks. Although some students found the induction process too long, all believed that it made them well informed about the college's facilities and support systems.

36 Students are generally well provided with guidance on careers. They can also receive advice on financial matters and help in finding accommodation. These counselling and guidance services are well publicised. There are several specific places in the college where appointments can be made to see staff or counsellors. The student services unit has set operational targets and is monitoring progress towards the achievement of these. As a result of this monitoring, the student services unit has identified that the level of personal counselling service provided is inadequate to meet current demands. Students are sometimes having to wait up to three weeks for an appointment with a counsellor.

37 Careers advice is also available from two careers officers from Careers Service West, the local careers service, who work as a team with the college's guidance officer. The team provides careers education sessions as part of induction programmes. They also provide careers guidance interviews. The college offers a range of opportunities for students and their parents to obtain advice about higher education, and guidance on its application procedures. However, the number of students who enter higher education from the college is low. For example, of the 81 students, aged 16 to 18, who successfully completed their GNVQ advanced courses in 1994-95 only 14 progressed to higher education. Of the 32 GCE A level students, aged 16 to 18, 25 progressed to higher education. Only five of the 22 GCE A level students over the age of 19 went on to higher education.

38 There is a well-established tutorial system to support all full-time students and part-time students who attend college for a substantial period. Tutorial work is supported by high-quality materials. These include the tutorial handbook which includes documentation for recording students' progress, and the student handbook which includes the college charter. Reports on the progress of individual students are sent regularly to employers or the parents of 16 to 18 year olds. Parents spoken to during the inspection appreciate the information they receive from the college. Senior staff in each faculty have recently started to monitor the effectiveness of tutorial work.

39 At the beginning of the year, tutors carry out an initial assessment of students' basic skills to identify those individuals who may require additional support for their learning. Tutors have not received appropriate training to help them carry out this assessment. The college has a well-resourced learning centre where students can obtain additional support. Students may be referred by their tutor, or refer themselves, to this centre. A recently-appointed worker provides additional support during lessons to students with physical disabilities.

40 The college has clear procedures for tutors to follow if students are absent from their classes, but they are not used effectively in all parts of the college. There was an average of 70 per cent attendance in the classes inspected. In many instances, attendance was poor. The average number of students in classes was eight. The college attempted to monitor students' attendance through its management information systems. It lacked sufficient resources to maintain these records on attendance and these have been discontinued.

41 Approximately 600 students on management, accounting, office administration and motor vehicle programmes take part in an assessment of the knowledge, skills and understanding which they have acquired before coming to college. Students who perform successfully in this assessment are given some credit towards their final qualification. Insufficient numbers of college staff have been fully trained in this process of assessment.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

42 Of the 177 classes observed, 51 per cent had strengths which outweighed the weaknesses. The weaknesses outweighed the strengths in 9 per cent of classes. The grades awarded to the classes inspected are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		3	9	15	4	1	32
GCSE		1	7	7	0	0	15
GNVQ		4	8	20	4	0	36
NVQ		2	4	1	0	0	7
Other vocational		13	18	13	4	1	49
Access to higher education		1	5	4	0	0	10
Basic education		3	5	7	0	1	16
Other		3	4	4	0	1	12
Total		30	60	71	12	4	177

43 Much of the teaching was carefully planned. In most areas, there were appropriate schemes of work. In humanities, however, lesson plans were not well structured and, in health and social care, they lacked clear aims and objectives. In many areas of the college's work, students were given handbooks which specify the aims and content of their courses. For example, handbooks on GCE A level courses and the access to higher education course in humanities, provide students with relevant information on their course content, methods of study and assessment, and some aspects of study skills.

44 Relationships between teachers and students were generally good. In mathematics and computing, lessons were conducted in a structured but relaxed and friendly way. Students were able to turn for help to staff and other students with confidence. In motor vehicle engineering, teachers as part of the process of assessment, conducted interviews with students on completion of their tasks. These interviews were penetrating and helped students to identify their strengths and weaknesses. They were carried out in a sympathetic and encouraging manner. Teachers had high expectations of mature behaviour from their students. In turn, the students responded positively and furthered their own personal development.

45 In general, students were set an appropriate amount of work. However, in some instances, students were not briefed sufficiently on the work expected of them. The quality of the marking and correction of students' work was variable. For example in business studies, the staff had set themselves targets for the marking and return of students' work and they were generally meeting these. They marked their students' work carefully and provided them with helpful comments. Engineering teachers scheduled students' assignments carefully so that excessive peaks in their workload were avoided. However, the briefings which students on GNVQ art and design courses received before they commenced assignments were inadequate. Leisure and tourism students had to wait too long for work to

be returned and, as a result, found it difficult to keep track of their own progress.

46 Science lessons were well prepared and had clear aims. Teachers checked carefully to ensure that students understood one topic before moving on to the next. In their lessons teachers gave clear explanations of scientific principles and their applications. Students were extensively challenged in both theoretical and practical work. They responded well and asked pertinent questions. In some cases, students fell behind because they had not completed all the work they had been set. In a small number of cases, the marking and correction of students' work was less than thorough. It was sometimes difficult for teachers to maintain students' interest throughout some of the lessons which were timetabled for three hours continuously.

47 In mathematics and computing teachers used an appropriate range of teaching and learning activities. These included practical assignments in workshops, teaching in small groups for some aspects of theory, and lectures when there was a large number of students. Lessons were well structured. Teachers displayed expertise in their subjects. In a GCE A level evening class in mathematics, the attention and full involvement of the students was sustained through practical work involving the measuring and recording of the foot sizes and height of each member of the group. The lesson also entailed effective revision of earlier work. GCSE mathematics teaching was well supported by a set of high-quality study materials developed by the college. Teachers kept detailed records of students' progress and made good use of these when giving students encouragement or advising them on how to improve their work. Little use was made of information technology in mathematics teaching.

48 Lessons in the motor vehicle workshops were well prepared. Students worked with confidence on demanding tasks under friendly and knowledgeable supervision. Carefully designed NVQ programmes in motor vehicle engineering demand high standards from the students. The progress of students on NVQ courses was recorded and monitored with exemplary thoroughness. The assessment and recording sheets, including job cards, had been thoughtfully designed and allowed a single teacher to supervise and assess up to six students. In some lessons on theory, visual aids of poor quality were used. In some cases, the diagrams displayed to students contained too much information. Electronics classes did not make sufficient demands on the students and were sometimes poorly prepared.

49 Students in business studies worked with enthusiasm and purpose to complete appropriate tasks. Lessons were well prepared and lesson plans related to the relevant scheme of work. Teachers used an appropriate variety of teaching and learning activities, including use of video equipment, practical demonstrations and small group work. For example, in a lesson on using the facsimile machine, students spent some time discussing how it worked. The teacher then demonstrated how different

materials lend themselves to effective transmission. Students then sent their own transmissions through the machine with help from the teacher as required. The students enjoyed the session and developed confidence from the practical experience. Students on evening management programmes received useful packs of material issued at the start of their course. These contained items such as relevant articles from newspapers and suggested reading lists. By using the packs students prepared themselves for each lesson. Teachers displayed mastery of their subjects and illustrated points by drawing on relevant industrial and commercial examples.

50 In leisure and tourism classes, the quality of teaching and the standards of learning were variable. In some lessons, students were absorbed in their work using well-structured work sheets or undertaking relevant activities in small groups. In other lessons the teacher failed to excite the interest of students who worked with little enthusiasm and, in some instances, did not understand the purpose of the session. In one lesson, the teacher finished the class 55 minutes early and merely left the students to their own devices in the sports hall. Although there was a schedule of assignments, this was not adhered to and students had an uneven workload. Some students expressed dissatisfaction with the structure and organisation of their course and the assessment procedures.

51 The quality of teaching and standards of learning in health and social care were generally satisfactory but varied widely. Schemes of work were comprehensive but were not always supported by clear lesson plans. The better lessons were well structured, ensured the full involvement of the students and were relevant to the care profession. Staff used appropriate examples drawn from professional practices to illustrate points to students. Weaker lessons were poorly planned and had unclear aims. In these lessons, students were often repeating work they had covered previously and, consequently, they were insufficiently challenged and the work did not extend their learning. There was little use of any visual aids beyond the whiteboard and even this was sometimes poorly used by teachers.

52 Students on the British Display Society courses were encouraged to think creatively and to explore the use of a wide range of materials. The projects that they undertook related directly to industrial practices and involved the students in costing and purchasing decisions as well as developing their construction skills. For example, in one project they were required to select a well-known artist and design a window display, using fabric and other materials, that would be immediately recognisable as a tribute to their chosen artist. They produced high-quality designs which included sculptures, mobiles, panels, hangings and cutouts. In contrast, GNVQ intermediate and advanced students received inadequate teaching in professional design practice. Teachers had little understanding of the standards of work that GNVQ students should be attaining.

53 The quality of teaching and standards of learning in humanities subjects varied widely. Teachers had a secure command of their subjects, but some lessons were poorly planned. Teachers' expectations of their students were low. In general, the teaching of adults on access to higher education courses, and the teaching of modern languages and psychology for GCE A level was of a high standard. For example, lessons in French and German for adult students at foundation level were taught entirely in the language being studied. Teachers made effective use of questions to ensure that all students developed confidence in the use of the language. However, in several other humanities lessons, students were not given enough opportunity to participate. Sometimes, the teacher discouraged them by asking questions that they could not answer because of their lack of knowledge. The small size of some groups limited the opportunities for generating wide-ranging discussion.

54 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities each had an individual programme of study which was based on an initial assessment of their needs and their aspirations. They were set learning targets and given appropriate tasks. Most lessons involved students in an appropriate variety of tasks which they completed at a pace they could sustain, with encouragement and support from their teacher. However, there was a lack of resources, for example, appropriate reading materials, to support this work. Staff made up for these shortcomings by using materials which they provided themselves. In most lessons, teachers skilfully used a question and answer approach and attempted to make the students relate the work to their own experiences. In one lesson, a group was discussing appropriate dress for their work experience placements. They had come to the session dressed for their work experience and they came to a clear understanding of why their dress was appropriate, or not, for their particular work.

55 Adult students on evening courses benefited from some inspiring teaching. This met the students' needs and developed skills they could use outside the classroom. For example, 14 students on an interior design course embarked enthusiastically on practical projects using the techniques they were learning on their course. Students were generally highly motivated and appreciated the support they received from their teacher.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

56 In 1995, there were 540 entries for GCSE subjects. Two hundred and thirty of these were for students aged 16 to 18. Results for GCSE English for the 16 to 18 cohort were slightly above the national average, with 46 per cent achieving A* to C grades compared with the national average for general further education colleges of 44 per cent. These students performed poorly in mathematics, where 16 per cent achieved a grade A* to C compared with the national average of 26 per cent. Students over the age of 19 years performed generally better than the younger

entrants. Their results for English and mathematics were slightly above national averages in both subjects; 69 per cent gained A* to C in English and 47 per cent gained A* to C in mathematics. Pass rates for older students in other subjects included 80 per cent in history; 86 per cent in psychology; 92 per cent in French; 85 per cent in child development; and 77 per cent in computer studies.

57 There were 477 entries for GCE A levels in 1995 covering 18 subjects. Of the entries from students aged 16 to 18, each scored on average, 3.2 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). These results place the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1995 tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. The pass rates of students aged 16 to 18 were good in several subjects including psychology at 84 per cent, art at 92 per cent, English literature at 82 per cent and media studies at 86 per cent. There were poor pass rates in accounting, 17 per cent; economics, 22 per cent; sociology, 37 per cent; human biology, 25 per cent; and computing, 20 per cent. Students over the age of 19 years, achieved high pass rates in film studies, 100 per cent; English language, 97 per cent; English literature, 92 per cent; art, 100 per cent; and psychology, 87 per cent. There were poor pass rates in accounts, 55 per cent; economics, 41 per cent; business studies, 52 per cent; and history, 35 per cent. There were only three entries for GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects and one pass was achieved.

58 The college submitted incomplete data to the Department for Education and Employment for entry in the 1995 performance tables. Consequently, only 53 per cent of students aged 16 to 18 are shown as having achieved their full vocational qualification and the college is placed in the bottom 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. A detailed analysis of the results in 1995 provided by the college shows that there were some good achievements in vocational courses. For example, good pass rates were attained in GNVQ advanced and intermediate programmes in business (71 per cent and 72 per cent, respectively); GNVQ foundation and advanced in health and social care (70 per cent and 65 per cent, respectively) and national diploma in leisure (89 per cent). Achievements in other BTEC national courses were more mixed with a pass rate of 87 per cent in information technology but pass rates of 63 per cent in media studies, 46 per cent in travel and tourism and 54 per cent in engineering. Pass rates on GNVQ intermediate courses were approximately 50 per cent. Students aged over 19 performed better on GNVQ intermediate courses, achieving pass rates of 80 per cent and 67 per cent in business and health and social care, respectively.

59 Pass rates for NVQ programmes in motor vehicle engineering were high. For example, at NVQ level 2, in 1995, 97 per cent of 16 to 18 year old students and 94 per cent of students over the age of 19 achieved the qualification. Students achieved high pass rates in many secretarial and wordprocessing qualifications.

60 Adults on access to higher education courses achieved good results generally and most progressed to higher education. For example, 79 per cent of students completing the access course in health achieved their qualification and progressed to an appropriate range of higher studies. However, only 45 per cent of students completing the access course in computing went on to higher education.

61 The number of students failing to complete their course was high in a significant number of areas. The data on retention rates presented to inspectors were often difficult to interpret. Sometimes data differed depending on its source within the college. Retention rates were satisfactory in technology and only occasionally fell below 70 per cent. Several full-time courses in the business faculty had retention rates below 70 per cent. In the faculty of general and continuing education, a number of GCSE and GCE A level courses had low retention rates; for example, 66 per cent in GCSE mathematics and 69 per cent and 37 per cent in some GCE A level groups studying sociology and psychology, respectively.

62 Students' written work was generally of a satisfactory standard. In computing and business studies, the standards of work in students' portfolios were high. Other than in these two areas, students made little use of information technology in their work. Students on display courses were developing high levels of practical and design skills and they presented their work well. The quality of work produced by students on GNVQ art and design courses was generally weak. Students were not developing skills appropriate to the level of the course. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were confident in displaying their achievements and these were well recorded. The achievements of students on some leisure and tourism courses were below standard. Motor vehicle students frequently demonstrated high levels of skill in their practical work and a sound understanding of theory.

63 The college has limited data on the destinations and progress of students after they leave college. In 1995, the destinations of approximately 45 per cent of students aged 16 to 18 and 40 per cent of students over 19 were unknown. The destinations of 38 per cent of GNVQ advanced students were unknown. The number of students aged 16 to 18 who, after completing an advanced GNVQ or BTEC diploma course, progressed to higher education was low at 17 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

64 The college has tried several quality assurance systems over a number of years. The new system, introduced in April 1995, is designed to link quality assurance activities with strategic planning at college and programme level. It offers a strong framework for future development and includes course, programme and faculty reviews, the setting and auditing of quality standards and the setting of operational objectives.

The personal objectives set for staff match the college's strategic objectives. The intention is that strategic planning will derive from quality assurance activities and inform curriculum development and other planning. The new policy is clear, describes the elements of the system and how they will be implemented. This new development has raised staff's awareness of quality assurance. However, the system is not yet fully understood by all staff.

65 The new academic board is increasingly concerned with quality assurance and quality standards. Some standards have been developed for teaching and the promotion of learning and for some college functions such as central admissions, counselling, student guidance and marketing. Standards for other areas are still to be developed. The new policy also requires the setting of targets, at course team level, for the retention rates and achievements of students.

66 A system for auditing the quality of the college's provision is now managed by the academic board. A timetable of audit activities has been agreed and is being implemented. Audit teams comprise three members of the academic board. Some audits have been undertaken and reports have been considered by the board. Managers have been asked to prepare action plans showing how identified defects will be remedied. The system is still developing. Some standards require refinement so that they can be measured more easily. Directors of faculty have now been asked to observe teaching.

67 A new system of course, programme and faculty reviews was introduced at the end of the academic year 1994-95. Documentation is designed to collect information on the enrolment and retention of students. The reviews follow the structure used in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Staff grade each area of provision using Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) grading criteria. Each section of the review contains an appropriate action plan. Faculty reports build on the action plans at programme and course level. Action plans are considered by the senior management team. This system of reviews is not well developed and has a number of weaknesses: critical assessment of students' achievement is poor and insufficiently related to agreed targets; there is no analysis of the value added to students' achievements at GCSE level by their achievements in GCE A level programmes; strengths and weaknesses are not clearly identified and action plans are not sufficiently detailed to show how they will lead to improvements. There was little staff development to support the introduction of this system. Reviews show little planned action where retention rates are low. Feedback from senior management to course teams is not consistent in its extent and quality.

68 Questionnaires are completed by all new full-time students, all full-time students in their final year and a sample of part-time students. Responses are analysed in detail. Data from collated responses are sent to faculty managers and course teams. Responses to questionnaires are not

always discussed with students. Staff cannot readily identify improvements which have resulted from the questionnaire process. There are no arrangements for monitoring the views of employers on the college's provision.

69 A system for internal verification of GNVQ and NVQ programmes has been established by the college. Policies and procedures for GNVQ internal verification are published in a handbook. Internal verifiers meet occasionally to share their experience and review and develop their procedures. The GNVQ co-ordinator is the only qualified internal verifier. None of those who teach on GNVQ courses has qualified counsellor status for the accreditation of prior learning.

70 An appraisal scheme for both full-time teaching and support staff has effective links with staff development. Part-time staff are not appraised. Appraisers and appraisees have received training. The system is viewed positively by the majority of staff. The scheme does not include observation of staff discharging their duties. A review of the system has been undertaken and the conclusions and recommendations have been presented to senior management.

71 Staff-development plans are based upon appraisal, the college's strategic plan and individual needs of staff identified by faculty directors. The plans are supported by a staff-development budget of approximately 1.4 per cent of the college's income. There is no system for staff to disseminate skills and knowledge they have gained through staff development to their colleagues. The impact of staff development and training is not evaluated. The college's induction programme for new staff is valued by them and is well organised. Induction of new teaching staff at faculty level, however, is less well structured. There are no procedures which ensure that new teachers are provided with training to develop essential skills which they may not have.

72 The college has committed itself to achieving the Investors in People award. Following a pre-assessment audit in November 1995, the accreditation assessment has been delayed.

73 Arrangements for assuring the quality of franchised provision are inadequate. Students on franchised courses are not aware that they are students of the college and covered by its charter.

74 The college's charter is very brief. It does not effectively inform students and other customers of their entitlements, nor does it explain the standard of service to be expected. It does not follow the model recommended in the *Charter for Further Education*, published by the Department for Education and Employment. The college's charter is published in the students' handbook. Complaints from students are logged centrally and are dealt with promptly. Not all students are aware of the procedures they can follow if the college does not deal with their complaints satisfactorily.

75 The college's self-assessment report follows the structure of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report is mainly descriptive. It contains insufficient identification and summary of key strengths and weaknesses. It provides helpful references to sources of information used as evidence for the judgements made. Each section of the report is graded using the inspectorate's grading scale. The grades awarded by the college are generally higher than those awarded by the FEFC's inspectors. There was little use of quantitative data where these would have informed judgements. Some of the judgements compare well with those of the inspectorate. Some issues noted as important by inspectors are not mentioned in the document. However, the self-assessment report was a useful source of reference to inspectors during the inspection.

RESOURCES

Staffing

76 Teachers are well qualified and, in general, are appropriately experienced for the courses that they teach. Eighty-two per cent of teachers have a first degree or equivalent professional qualification and 26 per cent have a higher degree. It is college policy to encourage and assist all teaching staff to obtain a teaching qualification. Seventy per cent of teachers are qualified. In some areas of business, art and design and leisure and tourism, teachers lack recent and relevant industrial or professional experience. The college established a programme of work placement for staff in 1994-95 in collaboration with the Western Education Business Partnership. To date, 12 members of staff have completed placements of five days duration.

77 The deployment of teaching staff is generally effective. Good use is made of the recently introduced learning adviser and technical trainer posts in extending learning opportunities for students. Part-time teachers are responsible for teaching about 35 per cent of the college's timetable. In business studies, humanities and basic education for adults, half the teaching is carried out by part-time staff. As a result, a disproportionately heavy burden of administration falls to full-time teachers. Languages are taught entirely by part-time staff.

78 Technical and administrative staff are well qualified. The provision of technical and administrative staff is insufficient for some parts of the college's work. For example, the overall level of staffing for the learning centre is inadequate. The computerised cataloguing of resources in this centre is incomplete. There is not enough technical support for the proper maintenance and development of information technology provision. The level of administrative support is insufficient to enable the college to continue recording attendance centrally. Technicians work flexibly both for, and across, different sections of the college. They provide high-quality support for subject areas. Administrative staff are deployed to faculties or have responsibilities across the college.

79 The personnel section has recently installed a computerised system of staff records but this is not yet fully operational. Little management information on staffing is currently available. There are well-developed systems for the recruitment of staff and for the organisation of staff development.

Equipment/learning resources

80 Most classrooms have overhead projectors, screens and boards. The facilities at the Parkway site for motor vehicle work are outstanding, with equipment that matches industrial standards. Provision in the new business centre, the travel shop, the technology bus, display area and the radio studio is also of a high standard. Some equipment in media and sciences and some audio-visual aids are becoming outdated and are barely adequate. In the life sciences, languages, and some aspects of the work with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, there is a lack of essential basic equipment.

81 The college has information technology equipment of good quality. There are 290 workstations of high specification. The information technology centre provides 100 workstations. This centre is a timetabled facility for specialist computing courses and may also be used at any time by students who want to work on their own with a computer. Machines are in heavy demand and some students experience difficulty in securing access to them. There is good co-ordination and management of information technology facilities. Networks within the college have been established. Problems remain over the compatibility and reliability of some machines.

82 The learning centre on the Soundwell site is of a high standard. It comprises a multi-media facility and a traditional library. The centre is centrally located. It is pleasant and spacious and has 178 study spaces. It is open to students who wish to work on their own, for 50 hours a week in term time and 39 hours a week during vacations. A wide range of materials and facilities, including books, journals, compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database and other audio-visual materials, is available. An excellent collection of subject specific study packs is being developed. These resources are well used. There is an adequate number of books. Many, however, are not up to date. The computerised cataloguing of books is not complete and a manual system is still in use.

Accommodation

83 The quality of accommodation at the Soundwell site is variable. There is some good specialist provision in the information technology centre, the learning centre and the business centre. The accommodation for some subjects such as science, art and design and work with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is not effectively grouped in suites but is dispersed around the site. Approximately 30 per cent of the general teaching accommodation on this site is provided in huts. Many of these

provide an inadequate environment for learning. Much of the accommodation on this site, including many of the corridors and communal areas, is in need of redecoration and refurbishment. There has however, been refurbishment to a high standard of some accommodation, such as the newly-opened nursery. This provides 40 places for students' children. The refectory is small. Access to the serving counter is difficult for wheelchair users. There is little recreational space. The college has negotiated special terms for students to use the facilities of the adjacent leisure centre.

84 There is outstanding specialist accommodation at the Parkway site for work in road transport engineering. The accommodation is well maintained and reflects the best commercial practice in both style and layout. A building for the new high technology training centre is near to completion on this site. Other specialist accommodation has reached capacity. Additional facilities have been leased at the Whitehall business park, but these do not match the high quality of those on the Parkway site. The library provided at the Parkway site is too small for the numbers of students there.

85 The Downend site has been refurbished internally to a high standard to provide a centre for management and professional studies. The building is in a poor state of repair externally. The Kingswood site is a small converted factory providing facilities for employment services courses. The accommodation has been well developed to provide a pleasant working environment which can be adapted for a variety of uses and activities.

86 The college's accommodation is well managed and most of it is well used. Access to most of its facilities for students with restricted mobility is generally good. The college has conducted space utilisation surveys for the past three years on the Soundwell and Parkway sites. These reveal increasing levels of use. Consultants are currently preparing a detailed report on the projected use of accommodation to inform the college's accommodation strategy.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

87 The strengths of the college are:

- governors who are supportive of the college and work hard on its behalf
- some well-managed areas of the college's work
- an efficient and effective central admissions and induction system for new students
- outstanding facilities for motor vehicle engineering and strong links with employers in the road transport industry
- a positive approach to working with schools
- some good community initiatives resulting in increased enrolments

-
- well-qualified teaching and support staff
 - a well-understood budgeting process
 - a well-equipped learning centre with information technology equipment of high specification
 - sound management and development of accommodation.
- 88 In order to improve its provision the college should:
- raise the overall standards of teaching and learning
 - improve the attendance levels, achievement and completion rates in several areas of the college's work
 - ensure that governing body members are informed of wider college issues
 - improve the reliability of data regarding students' performance
 - ensure that curriculum development reflects the needs of students and employers
 - effectively implement and monitor the equal opportunities policy
 - improve the college's charter
 - ensure consistent application of the new quality assurance procedures and strengthen procedures for monitoring the quality of franchised work
 - increase the levels of technical and administrative support
 - improve the overall quality of accommodation at the Soundwell site.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (1995-96)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (1995-96)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1995-96)

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

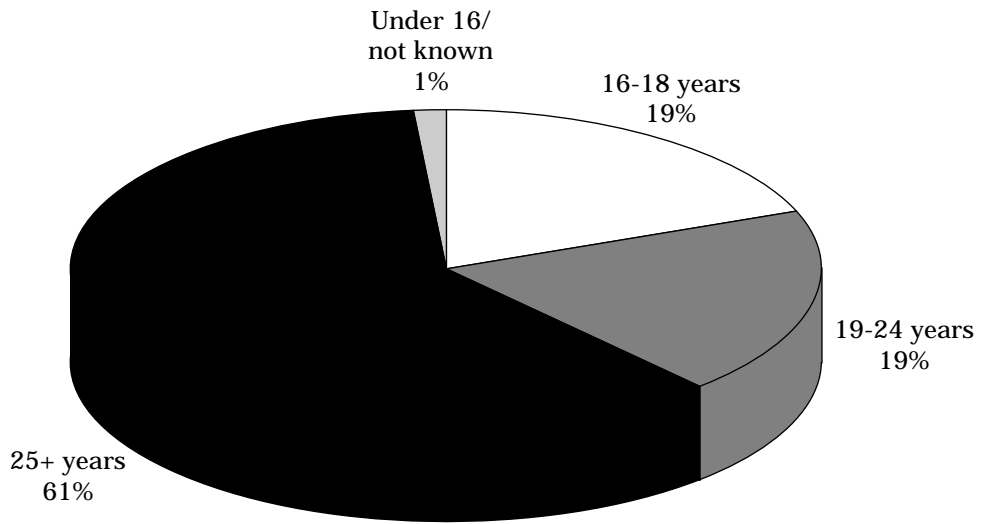
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

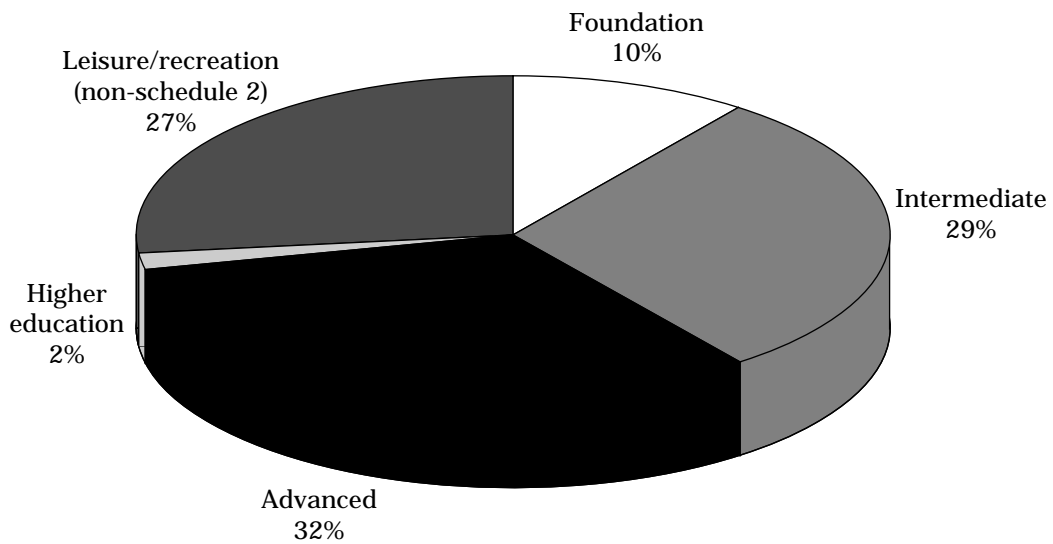
Soundwell College: percentage student numbers by age (1995-96)



Student numbers: 5,191

Figure 2

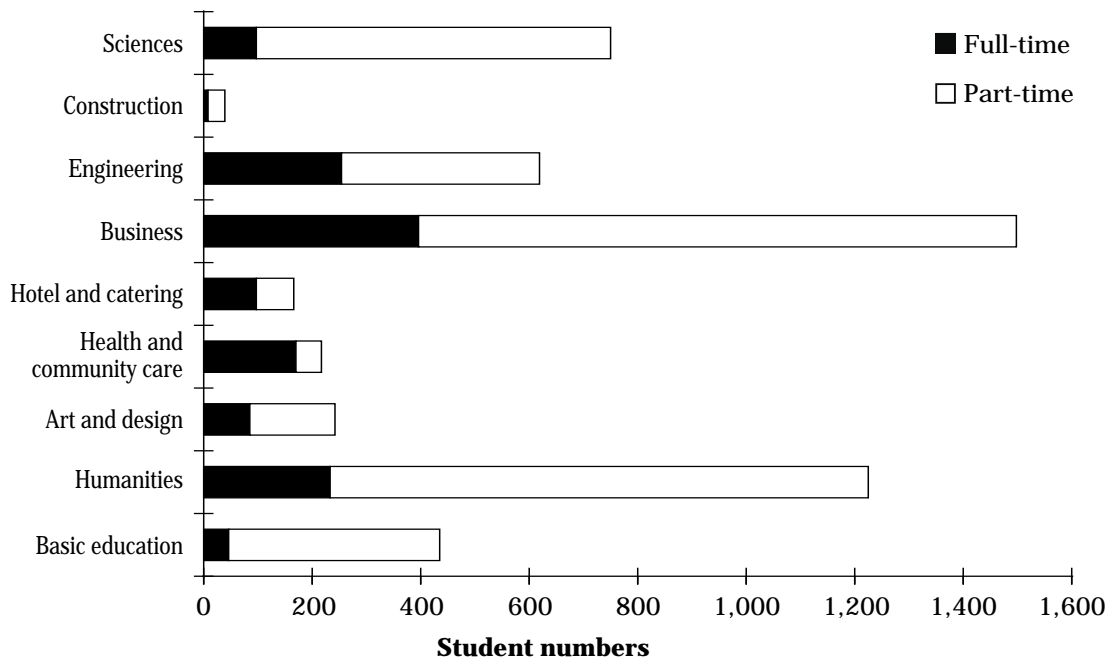
Soundwell College: percentage student numbers by level of study (1995-96)



Student numbers: 5,191

Figure 3

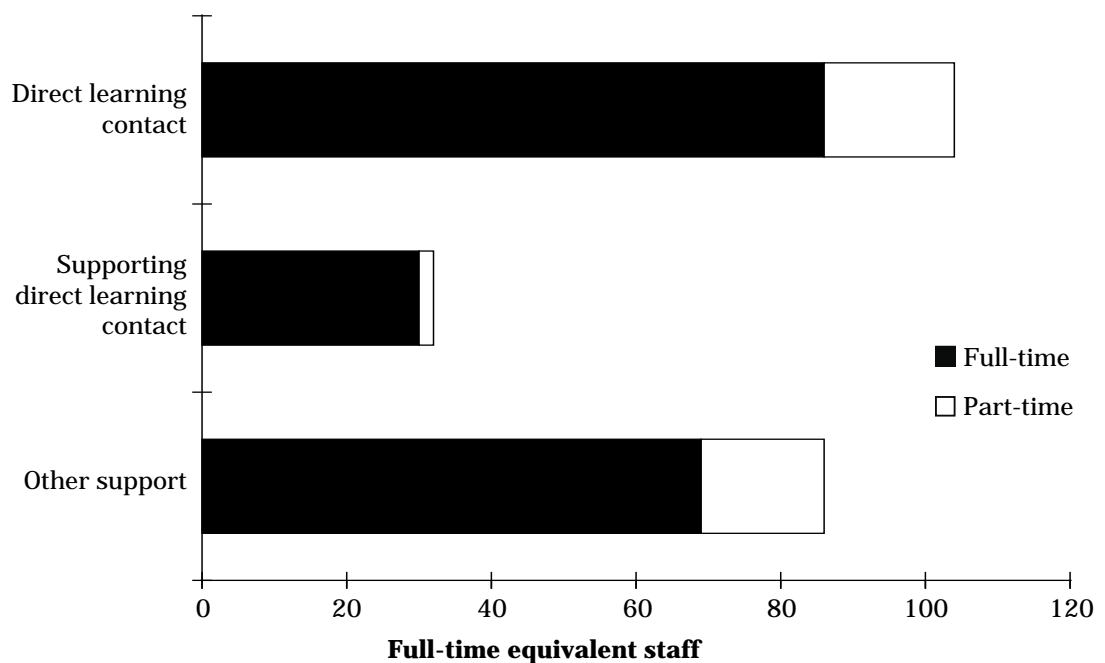
Soundwell College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1995-96)



Student numbers: 5,191

Figure 4

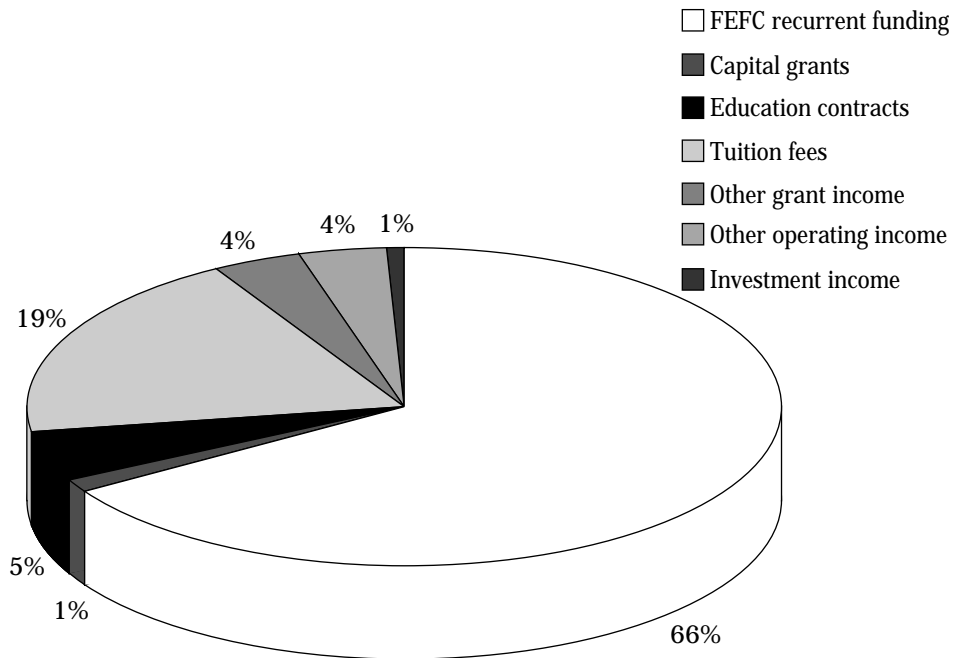
Soundwell College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 222

Figure 5

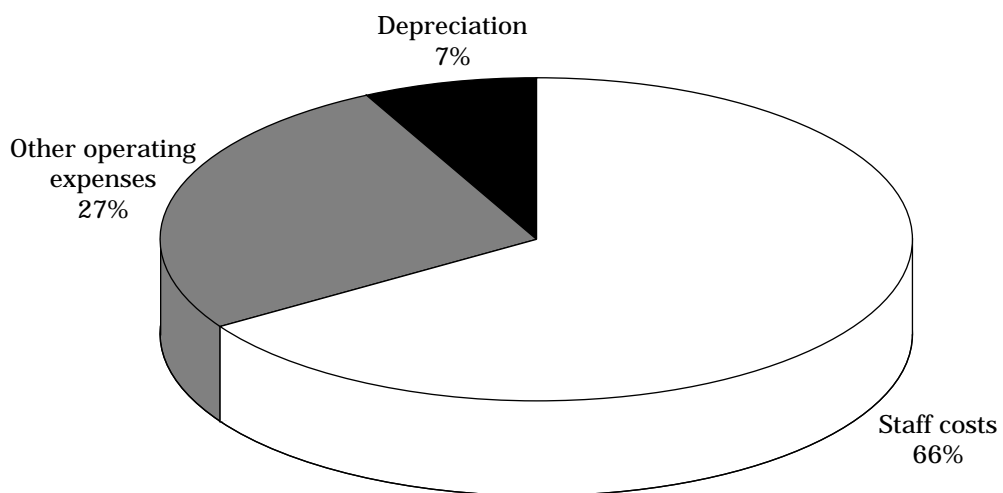
Soundwell College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £5,901,000

Figure 6

Soundwell College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £6,151,000

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