

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

South Trafford College

August 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-96

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 114/97

SOUTH TRAFFORD COLLEGE

NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected September 1996-May 1997

Summary

South Trafford College is highly responsive to the needs of its local community. Governors and managers have guided the college successfully through a period of rapid change. Divisional teams have considerable scope to manage their provision albeit within tight budgets. Communications throughout the college are good. Staff are well qualified, enthusiastic and work well together to promote students' learning. Marketing and promotional activities are effective. The college has increased significantly the participation of local people in further education. The enrolment of students is well planned and well managed. Students generally work hard and, in some areas, attain high standards. Assignments are well designed, relate to employment and identify key skills. There has been good progress in developing a college-wide concern for continuous quality improvement. The college has a rigorous internal inspection process. Its self-assessment report closely matches the judgements of inspectors. The college's estate is well managed. Specialist equipment and information technology are well provided. To raise further the quality of provision the college should: involve governors more in monitoring the achievement of performance targets; ensure greater consistency in the management of divisions and course teams; improve students' attendance, retention rates and achievements; overcome weaknesses in induction, tutorial and counselling activities; and improve the use of library facilities and information technology resources.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision	Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision	1
Governance and management	2
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	2
Resources: staffing	1
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and information technology	2	Visual and performing arts, including textiles	2
Business, management and secretarial	2	English and languages	2
Hospitality and catering	1	Humanities and social sciences	2
Leisure, tourism and sport	2	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and basic education	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2		
Health and social care	2		

INTRODUCTION

1 South Trafford College was inspected in three stages between September 1996 and May 1997. Inspectors spent 78 days in the college. They observed the college's enrolment and induction processes, visited 220 teaching sessions and inspected students' work. Inspectors met students, parents, employers, college governors, managers and staff, representatives of the Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), and a range of other people who have an interest in the college.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 South Trafford College is a medium-sized general further education college serving the borough of Trafford in Greater Manchester and surrounding areas. It was founded in 1951 in Sale and moved to its current main site in West Timperley, Altrincham in 1966. In 1991, the college opened another site in a former secondary school in Sale. Additional teaching accommodation is currently under construction at the main site. There are eight community outreach centres, at Partington, Sale, Culcheth Hall, Green Lane, Sale Moor, Lostock, Trafford Park and Old Trafford. The latest of these, Old Trafford, was opened in May 1997.

3 Trafford has a population of 213,000. It is divided, north and south, by the old Cheshire and Lancashire border separated by the River Mersey. The south of the borough, excluding Partington and part of Sale, is relatively affluent. Unemployment is low and the proportion of 16 year olds staying on in full-time education or training is high. In the north of the borough the opposite is generally the case. According to college figures, the average level of unemployed adults in the south of the borough in 1996 was 5 per cent, compared with 13 per cent in the north. The average for the United Kingdom was 6.9 per cent. Minority ethnic groups make up 5.3 per cent of the population and are concentrated mainly in the north of the borough. Overall, the proportion of young people staying on in education after the age of 16 is 64 per cent compared with the TEC area average of 55 per cent and a national average of 67 per cent.

4 Other providers of education in Greater Manchester within a 10-mile radius include five grammar schools, one grant-maintained school with a developing sixth form, two sixth form colleges and four general further education colleges. There are 79 private training organisations in Greater Manchester, 11 of which are in Trafford. Since 1993, the college has increased its enrolment of full-time equivalent students by over 40 per cent and has exceeded its funding unit targets each year. On 1 November 1996, there were 8,206 enrolments, of which 2,344 were full-time students and 5,862 part-time students. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3.

5 The college is a significant provider of education and training in the community as well as an important employer. Recent data from the

Careers Partnership show that the college is the largest recruiter of school-leavers among the general further education colleges in the TEC's area. The college employs 363 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 65 per cent are teachers. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

6 The curriculum rationalisation undertaken by the local authority before incorporation resulted in the college concentrating on service industries, although it has subsequently taken opportunities to develop its curriculum in other areas. The college now offers provision in all the FEFC programme areas except agriculture and engineering. However, a higher education course in engineering is run in conjunction with the Bolton Institute of Higher Education. The range of courses includes general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and approximately 150 other vocational qualifications. At the time of the inspection, the college had 17 divisions, the majority of which are teaching divisions.

7 The college's mission states that it 'exists to respond to community needs by providing effective, efficient and enjoyable education and training, enabling all to achieve their personal, educational and vocational potential'.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 Since incorporation, the college has grown significantly. It has broadened its provision by establishing eight outreach centres as well as by working on employers' premises. College staff are informed about national developments in further education through a fortnightly 'College News' bulletin and internal staff-development events. Strategic planning takes into account the national targets for education and training as well as important initiatives such as inclusive learning. The college offers a wide range of courses at many levels and through flexible modes of study. Some provision offered by the college is unusual. It includes: a pre-foundation art therapy programme; a diploma in variety entertainment; and specially-designed courses for airport ground staff and air cabin crew. There are few gaps in provision. Courses available include:

- 25 GCE A level subjects, including seven available at GCE advanced supplementary (AS)
- 30 GCSE subjects
- 17 GNVQs, including five at foundation level, six at intermediate level and six at advanced level
- NVQs in six areas at level 1; 25 at level 2; 19 at level 3 and six at level 4
- four access to higher education courses

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- a range of non-accredited courses
 - three higher education courses.

9 Marketing of college provision is well managed and effective. A comprehensive marketing plan is closely linked to the college's strategic plan. Progress towards the achievement of marketing targets is closely monitored. Good use is made of labour market information at all levels in the college. Market research is also used to ensure that provision continues to meet the needs of students. Publicity materials are professionally produced and of a high standard. Information on courses is provided in a variety of ways: a college course directory; a well-designed and accessible prospectus; course leaflets; and an informative Internet website detailing the courses on offer. Information is not yet available on tape or in Braille. The college theme 'unlock your potential' is given prominence in all promotional activities. Students consider that the college offers a positive image to applicants.

10 The college has worked hard to attract students from groups which have not usually entered further education. Community outreach provision is provided in adult education centres, community premises and schools, family literacy and numeracy projects at primary schools and family centres, and on courses run jointly with the Workers' Educational Association for those wishing to return to study. The college is involved in three TEC-funded projects to train unemployed people and prepare them for work.

11 The college has successfully introduced more flexible study arrangements to enable students to learn in ways and at times of their own choosing. Students can select from 41 subjects to study at home with support from the college. College timetables have been revised to help students who have domestic responsibilities to attend courses at convenient times. Some courses are offered on Saturdays. A course in English for speakers of other languages was combined with information technology for members of the Asian community in the north of the borough. It recruited well and there were clear opportunities for progression to other courses in the college.

12 The college works in partnership with a variety of organisations and community groups to increase the number of local people participating in education. It is represented on several local bodies. It works productively with other colleges in the area and on specific projects with the TEC. Good links with local schools include curricular links and activities designed to ease pupils' transition from school to college. A partnership arrangement with one school, to enhance its curriculum, has involved exchanges of staff between the two establishments and the development of an adult education and training centre at the school. The college runs joint courses with higher education establishments, has links with others through its access courses and uses these links to promote the transition of students from further to higher education. Teachers on courses for students with learning

difficulties and/or disabilities liaise effectively with staff from specialist external agencies.

13 The college works well with employers to meet their specific training needs. Employers for their part provide good work experience opportunities to encourage the progression to employment of some students who might find this difficult to achieve without such help. There are opportunities to expand this good practice, particularly in sports courses. An innovative pilot project enables catering employees to study and be assessed for NVQ qualifications at home or in the workplace, using the Internet. An advice and guidance centre established by the college in a local business park has supplied training to over 35 companies in this academic year. The college, in partnership with the development company and the TEC, is planning to meet the training needs of businesses starting up in the Trafford Centre, the largest retail and leisure complex under construction in the United Kingdom. Many employers have their employees' training needs assessed by the college in the workplace. The college also provides courses and training packages to meet specific needs. Income from consultancy services and courses provided at full cost remains relatively low but it is increasing.

14 The college's commitment to equality of opportunity is made clear in a policy which has ambitious aims. The college efficiently collects data on the racial background, gender and disability of its students and staff, and compares these with the profile of its community. It is active in recruiting and supporting students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, some of whom study on specifically designed courses and some who study alongside other students on a range of the college's courses. Over two-thirds of students on general courses are female and some curriculum areas have yet to examine how they might attract more male students to courses traditionally associated with females. Some courses highlight equal opportunities issues through teaching, and assignments on many vocational courses take account of these issues. A few teaching divisions prepare their students well to work in a multicultural society.

15 Some students are offered opportunities to enrich their studies and to gain qualifications additional to those associated with their main area of study. Visits, designed to encourage students' personal development, are arranged to other parts of the country and abroad. Students on leisure courses benefit from a wide variety of visits to leisure facilities. Performing arts students participate in many productions for the public. Outside speakers are invited to the college to contribute to classes and other events. For example, a well-known author visited the college to give a reading of his work and this was followed by a session in which students had the opportunity to pose questions and discuss the matters which had been raised. The range of enrichment activities is wide. However, most activities tend to be dominated by students belonging to the associated curriculum area. Sports activities, for example, mainly attract physical education students.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

16 The college has changed its management structures three times since incorporation and there has been significant movement of management personnel. The support from staff and governors has been key to the substantial progress made by the college during this period. Most operational matters are delegated to 17 heads of division, who have considerable autonomy over curriculum, services, finance and staffing matters, operating within a strict system of budgetary control. The existing management structure is clear, as are the roles and responsibilities of managers. The principal is supported by three vice-principals, who have responsibility for physical resources, human resources and innovation, respectively. Each vice-principal supports the activities of a group of divisional heads, acting as a mentor rather than a line manager. Divisional managers have been in post only since September 1996, following the most recent restructuring. They vary in their experience and skills, but speak warmly of the support they receive from senior managers.

17 Governors are well informed about the college's business and the social environment in which the college operates. Several have used their professional expertise and contacts in the community to open up business opportunities for the college. There are 18 governors: the principal, two members of staff, one student, 12 independent governors, one nominee from the TEC, and one co-opted member. At the time of the inspection there was one vacancy. The board has an appropriate range of committees with established terms of reference. In the current academic year, governors' attendance at the audit committee, the second major committee of the board, has been good at 92 per cent. In contrast, attendance at board meetings (72 per cent) and at the resources and general purposes committee (66 per cent) is relatively low. Governors have attended training events in the college and elsewhere, and have an annual weekend conference to discuss key issues facing the college. They steer clear of operational matters, and most of them have little direct involvement with the work of the divisions. They have seriously reviewed their own role and progress, both collectively, and in individual interviews with the chairman.

18 Governors consider that the quality of information they receive from college managers has improved significantly in recent years. Board minutes are brief, mainly recording the reports received and the actions agreed. Clerking is efficiently provided by a vice-principal. Governors are satisfied that the clerks' management responsibilities are clearly separated from his role as clerk. The board has a code of conduct, a register of interests, and a register of the training events which governors have attended. Governors are not sufficiently active in monitoring the college's key performance targets. The governors should consider in more detail the college's performance in respect of the quality of its provision and students' achievements, and their effect on the potential business of the college.

19 Managers have agreed a statement of values which act as guiding principles for the management of the college. These values include collective responsibility, openness, participation, the establishment of trust, and clear communication. Some key management posts are currently vacant. There is no personnel manager or finance manager, and the chair of governors is temporarily out of action through illness. Nevertheless, affairs have been dealt with smoothly in the interim.

20 Management meetings are brisk and supported by brief, informative papers. Minutes are clear and record agreed decisions and action points. The academic board has spent much of its time recently considering the outcomes of the college's own internal inspection, but it mainly receives reports for discussion and information. The college management team of over 20 people is large. To ensure that progress is made on important issues, working groups take forward specific projects and make recommendations on their findings. College management team decisions are summarised in the regularly published 'College News' which is distributed to all staff, students and governors. There are many opportunities for staff to meet within divisions and programme areas. The strong divisional structures, however, occasionally prevent effective implementation of cross-college initiatives. Staff from different divisions have sometimes been engaged simultaneously on parallel college developments, without the opportunity to share their experience.

21 Divisions prioritise their own action plans in response to the strategic plan and course reviews. As a result, some strategic objectives, for example, that of improving students' retention rates, are not being given sufficient emphasis in some divisions or course teams. Divisions vary in the rigour they apply to setting objectives and targets within their operational plans. This is an aspect of activity in which the mentoring role of the vice-principals could operate more evenly and effectively. There is also some variation in the skill with which divisions and course teams are managed, particularly in the use of information obtained through monitoring and quality assurance.

22 Financial controls throughout the college are tight. This has enabled it to grow, invest in new developments, and maintain a balanced budget despite a relatively low level of funding. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 was £16.06 per unit rising to £16.15 per unit in 1996-97. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges in 1996-97 is £17.97 per unit. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college currently receives around 85 per cent of its funding from the FEFC, and needs to diversify and extend its sources of funding. The allocation of budgets for consumable items and pay to cost centres is well organised. The analysis of costs could be taken further as the expertise of divisional heads grows. At present, staff have difficulty in determining the true costs of provision, so decisions about programme development and change are not always well informed. Efficiency savings have been made through

more flexible use of staff. The college is monitoring its performance against similar colleges in the sector through a benchmarking exercise using data provided by external consultants.

23 The development of a computerised management information and communication system has progressed well, using mainly college expertise. The system is networked across the two main sites and offers useful information on student enrolments and finances. Some managers make good use of it, easily obtaining reports to suit requirements; some, however, have yet to develop fully their expertise. The system cannot adequately update data on students enrolling throughout the year, and staff cannot obtain reliable reports on students' achievements. There has been consultation with college users to determine further requirements. The college recognises the need for an information and learning technology policy which could encourage the sharing of good practice on curriculum and teaching development. A great deal of informal training takes place between colleagues to improve the operation of the information system.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

24 The division of student services provides a well-publicised and effective range of support services for students of all ages. Prospective students can seek advice prior to enrolling on courses and throughout the year, particularly in the summer. There are opportunities for students to enrol on Wednesdays during July and August but the main enrolment period is in September. Staff respond promptly to applications for courses and to requests for information. They also record enquiries for courses which the college does not currently offer so that teaching divisions can assess the level of interest and respond appropriately. Once enrolled, students become the responsibility of staff in the teaching divisions. Teachers can call upon student services staff to help them in this work, though not all take advantage of the option. Students and staff throughout the college speak highly of the support they receive from members of the division.

25 The quality of pre-course guidance is good and most students enrol on suitable courses. Students are able to have interviews with different staff, to enable them to make informed decisions about the courses they wish to study. Good records are kept of these interviews. In the first term of this academic year, fewer than 60 full-time students transferred from one course to another as a result of inappropriate choices of course. Clear performance targets and performance indicators, which are linked to college charter commitments, encourage staff to measure their performance and to provide higher levels of service.

26 In most respects, college enrolment is well organised and well managed. Staff are carefully prepared for the tasks they have to undertake and they try to ensure that the systems work smoothly. All interviewers are offered training and are provided with a useful handbook which

includes clear guidelines for conducting and recording interviews. During enrolment, staff make good use of interview records, updating them where necessary. Most students found the enrolment process helpful and reassuring although some were confused about how to find their way to the rooms where enrolment was taking place and wasted time unnecessarily. Staff from the guidance and counselling team are readily accessible to students who are unsure about the courses they should follow. They also play a key role in explaining to students how they might gain credit for their prior learning or achievements. Although the college has effective procedures for accrediting prior learning, few students are involved in these.

27 The guidance and counselling team provides useful, comprehensive checklists to help staff in the teaching divisions provide effective induction programmes. The programmes are intended to meet the needs of full-time and part-time students. Most include a mix of activities aimed at introducing students to each other, the college, and the requirements of their course. Some of the induction sessions observed by inspectors, however, were dull. Students were not given enough opportunity to ask questions or to discuss matters of interest to them. Occasionally, teachers did not take account of the differing needs of students in their groups. Some groups, for example, contained students who were already familiar with the college's facilities as well as those who were new to the college.

28 Students say that they are well supported by their personal tutors and that they find them friendly and approachable. Each student who is studying at the college for at least 15 hours a week is allocated a personal tutor who is expected to meet the student regularly, to discuss academic progress and to give any guidance and help that is required. Most other students do not have personal tutors. The exceptions include students whose programmes of study are made up of subjects which are offered by more than one division. There is no college-wide framework defining the essential ingredients of, or setting standards for, tutorial work. Tutorials vary in their effectiveness. Some group tutorials are no more than extensions of teaching time. Alternatively, the time is used for students' private study. Some of the personal action plans stemming from individual tutorials are too vague to be helpful to students and few students update their records of achievement while at college.

29 The extent to which students receive careers education and guidance as a structured part of their programme of study varies from course to course. In the best examples, personal tutors work closely with guidance and counselling staff to plan a programme of events which takes careful account of the needs of their students. Other divisions seldom call on the specialist advice available. Students are entitled to, and can request, a careers guidance interview with one of the specialist staff and in 1995-96, about 2,000 students took advantage of this opportunity. Guidance for students who plan to progress to higher education is thorough. Students

can attend workshops to clarify their choices of courses and institutions and prepare their applications. They can get further guidance after their examination results are published. Students speak highly of the quality of support they receive. About 500 students have applied for higher education courses this year. Guidance and counselling staff offer similar support to students seeking employment after completing their studies. For example, students receive help in searching for jobs and in preparing their applications for employment. Some job vacancies are advertised in the college.

30 The college provides good advice and support on welfare and benefits issues. This year it has supported about 450 students through its access fund. The college contributes four times as much money as it received for this purpose from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). An occupational health adviser helps students with health problems, and works with teaching and tutorial groups, on request, to raise the awareness of staff and students about important health issues. For example, to coincide with national no-smoking day, special events warning of the dangers of smoking resulted in 25 students seeking help from the occupational health adviser. Twenty students successfully gave up the habit. A full-time qualified counsellor provides a confidential counselling service, and, this year, two visiting chaplains have spent two half-days a week in the college offering further support to students. There are well-established links with a range of external agencies which enable the college to broaden the range of support it can offer its students.

31 The division of learner support co-ordinates the assistance provided to students to help them with their courses. Procedures for identifying and responding to students' needs are carefully developed and personal tutors are encouraged to implement them. During induction, full-time students beginning foundation and intermediate level courses take the Basic Skills Agency test to assess levels of literacy and numeracy. Other full-time and part-time students may take the test if they wish. Students who need to improve their literacy and numeracy are offered additional learning support. Not all students who need support, however, choose to accept it. This year, less than 50 per cent of students identified as requiring support in numeracy have taken up the option. Additional learning support is designed to meet individual needs and is provided outside normal timetables. Students have separate learning agreements for these additional classes and regularly review their progress with their learning support tutors as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of the support provided. Personal tutors are invited to these reviews, though not all choose to attend. Students who receive additional support speak highly of its quality.

32 Procedures to monitor attendance and seek reasons for absence or poor punctuality vary from one division to another. The college should develop a college-wide strategy for tackling poor attendance, particularly for students who are persistently absent.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

33 Inspectors observed 220 teaching sessions involving 2,090 students. Sixty-nine per cent of the teaching sessions had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. This compares with the average in 1995-96 of 63 per cent for all colleges in the further education sector which is recorded in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. Only 5 per cent of the sessions had weaknesses that outweighed the strengths. Attendance rates in the classes inspected averaged 59 per cent compared with the national average for general further education colleges of 73 per cent, according to the same report. The best rate of attendance was on leisure and tourism courses. The lowest was on visual and performing arts courses. The average number of students present in the sessions inspected was nine. The following table shows the grades awarded to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	9	22	15	3	0	49
GCSE	4	5	7	1	0	17
GNVQ	6	16	7	0	0	29
NVQ	12	9	4	0	0	25
Access to higher education	1	3	2	1	0	7
Basic education	3	10	8	2	0	23
Other*	14	37	15	4	0	70
Total	49	102	58	11	0	220

* includes a range of tutorials and BTEC national certificates and diplomas.

34 In science, mathematics and information technology, the teaching was generally effective. Teachers were caring and tried hard to meet the diverse needs of students. For example, in the well-organised mathematics and information technology workshops, the comprehensive range of learning materials enabled students to work at their own speed and in their own time. Students' assessments were set at an appropriate standard. However, teachers often failed to mark students' assignments or to provide them with sufficiently useful comments which would enable them to improve their work. Deadlines for the return of assignments were not set. In some areas, teachers did not vary their teaching sufficiently, or failed to make effective use of visual aids.

35 Teachers in business, management and secretarial studies varied their teaching methods to suit the needs of students and the level of study undertaken. They had good working relationships with students. Materials provided for personal study were accompanied by clear guidelines.

Assignments were well designed and related to employment. On secretarial programmes, all evidence for NVQ competences was gathered in the workplace. Teachers encouraged students to develop communication and information technology skills by presenting their research findings to the rest of the class. Business studies lessons, especially those on intermediate GNVQ and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national courses were less successful than most. For example, the pace and level of the work was not always appropriate to students' needs.

36 In hospitality and catering, the standard of teaching was excellent. Schemes of work related clearly to the industry's occupational standards. Teachers often referred to their own industrial experience as a means of helping students to understand important topics. Practical work was varied, related to industrial practice and effective in developing students' practical skills and job knowledge. Assessments were well organised, consistently applied and fair. Key skills were clearly identified and developed as an integral part of students' research activities. Teachers encouraged students to develop good-quality portfolios of work and to provide their own evidence of the competences they had achieved. They encouraged them to enter industry-led competitions as a way of promoting excellence and acquiring new skills.

37 Teachers of leisure, tourism and sport provided good introductions and concluding summaries to their lessons. They used a range of visual and practical aids to help students learn. In practical sports sessions, teachers developed students' skills by encouraging various individuals, in turn, to lead warm-up and cool-down activities. Relationships between teachers and students were harmonious. Course documentation, including information on assignments, was clear and the criteria for grading work were listed. Teachers arranged productive visits and used their industrial contacts to enrich students' experience, especially in the uniformed services' residential programme. The pace of work was sometimes slow or it failed to take into account the range of students' abilities. Key skills, particularly information technology, were not effectively integrated with other aspects of the work on sports courses.

38 In hairdressing and beauty therapy, lessons were well organised. Teachers ensured that students recorded their achievements and were aware of their progress. Teaching in the salon and salon management were effective. There was an appropriate emphasis on health and safety issues. In practical sessions, teachers set a good example to students by demonstrating the professional skills and attitudes expected in the workplace. Customer care was given a high priority. For example, a client attending for a first beauty therapy treatment was greeted courteously by the teacher and introduced to the student dealing with her. The student carried out a thorough consultation to determine the client's needs, during which she explained fully the details of the treatment. The client was pleased with the results of the treatment and booked to come again.

In some lessons, teachers failed to share learning objectives with students or to make regular checks on their knowledge and understanding. In theory lessons there was too much class teaching when some students would clearly have benefited from working on their own or discussing matters in a smaller group.

39 In health and social care, there were good schemes of work and lesson plans for all programmes. Teachers kept comprehensive records of students' progress and achievement. They were up to date in their knowledge and often adapted lessons to take account of the differing abilities of students. Many important elements of the curriculum were linked to the workplace and students were suitably prepared for work experience. Teachers encouraged students to work on their own and to identify any key skills developed during their studies. Assignments were of variable quality; briefs sometimes failed to state clearly what students were expected to achieve. Written feedback on students' work was sometimes too brief to be helpful.

40 In visual and performing arts, most lessons were well planned and effectively managed. Teachers used a range of teaching methods and were skilful at dealing with differing groups of students undertaking joint activities. Most of the assignments set were imaginative and students produced well-written responses. In most lessons, there was a suitable range of activities to keep students alert and interested. For example, in a combined session involving students on the foundation and intermediate GNVQ in art and design, the tutor continued to hold students' attention after more than four hours of study. Some schemes of work and lesson plans lacked sufficient detail to enable teachers to measure whether aims and objectives had been achieved. Teachers in art and design lessons sometimes placed too much emphasis on visual studies at the expense of drawing and painting skills.

41 Teachers in English and modern languages used detailed lesson plans and there were clear timescales to ensure that the syllabus was covered. Teachers set high standards for students. They varied their teaching methods to encourage learning, provided clear and lucid explanations of the topics under discussion, and produced helpful, well-designed handouts. Teachers managed group and whole-class activity effectively and made good use of the college's language laboratories. In one lesson for part-time mature GCSE students, the teacher skilfully prompted students to discuss the topic, ensuring that the debate was sound and balanced. Most teachers returned work promptly to students. The marking of work was thorough and there were detailed written comments on how students might improve their performance. Occasionally, teachers talked for too much of the lesson, leaving insufficient time for analysis and debate of the topics covered.

42 In social sciences, particularly in geography and teacher training, teachers shared the aims of the lesson with students. Past work was

consolidated and examination techniques were emphasised. Students were given regular additional work to do in their own time and this was returned promptly. They had opportunity to work together as a whole class, in groups and in pairs. Teachers enlivened their teaching with touches of humour and made effective use of visual aids. There were some examples of good use of educational technology: the memory cards used in psychology; the topic booklets produced in history; and the use of the Internet in social studies. Teachers' marking of students' work was weak in some important aspects: a failure to correct English errors; unclear criteria for awarding grades; and overgenerous grading of work. In some lessons, teachers talked for too long a period and, in some, activities were dominated by a few students at the expense of the many.

43 On courses for students with learning difficulties/and or disabilities, many teachers provided a suitable variety of learning activities. They skilfully questioned students, encouraging them to ask their own questions and to take part in lesson activities. They arranged outside visits, work experience and college-based activities aimed at extending students' learning and personal development. When providing additional learning support on general programmes, teachers related well to the students and made sure that relevant information on their progress was exchanged with their regular teachers. Sometimes too much time was spent working as a whole class. As a result, not enough time was given to setting individual learning goals. Action plans failed to identify short-term learning goals.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

44 Students' examination performance has generally improved over the past three years. In 1996, 87 per cent of the 145 students, aged 16 to 18, in their final year of study on the advanced vocational courses included in the DfEE's 1996 performance tables were successful. This places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Seventy-one per cent of the 45 students, aged 16 to 18, on intermediate vocational courses were also successful according to the DfEE's tables. This also places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Seventy-four per cent of students at the college are over 19 and do not feature in the tables published by the DfEE.

45 The 328 students, aged 16 to 18, entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1996 scored, on average, 2.9 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This places the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1996 performance tables published by the DfEE. Overall, GCE A level pass rates improved slightly from 63 per cent in 1995, to 64 per cent in 1996. Students' attendance, punctuality and retention rates, though improving, are poor in many areas of provision. The destinations of full-time students are recorded by the college.

According to these data, 81 per cent of last year's GCE A level students entered higher education.

46 Students in science, mathematics and computing who completed their course generally achieved their primary learning goal. Students on intermediate courses such as the BTEC first diploma in information technology progress to higher levels in many areas. In general, students' assignments were poorly researched and written, and there was little use of information technology in their presentation. Examination pass rates were good on some courses but poor on many. GCSE science pass rates were at or above national averages as were those in 'flexible learning' mathematics. However, some results in GCE A level science and mathematics subjects were below national averages.

47 On business, management and secretarial studies courses, students were making good progress in numeracy, literacy and information technology. On higher level courses, such as personnel practice and marketing, students significantly improved their professional expertise and specialist knowledge. Many students progressed to higher levels of study. Students who completed their programme generally achieved well. However, the proportion of students on GNVQ business programmes achieving a full award compared with those initially enrolled was low. Pass rates on the Association of Accounting Technicians courses were generally good but there were unsatisfactory results on cost accounting courses at intermediate and technician level. Examination pass rates were below national averages for single subject secretarial and administration examinations.

48 Students attained high standards in hospitality and catering. They demonstrated good levels of motivation, attended classes regularly and were punctual. Many gained more than their primary learning goal. For example, students on NVQ programmes achieved a food hygiene certificate in addition to their main qualification. Students on the NVQ programmes, many of whom had begun college with few academic qualifications, developed high-quality portfolios of work. Most students worked well as team members and developed good leadership skills in the college's own catering and training restaurants.

49 In leisure, tourism and sport, students were highly motivated, and developed good levels of knowledge and understanding related to their studies. Several individuals and teams have achieved national recognition in a variety of sports over a number of years. Practical activities were carried out with due regard to health and safety and concern for the environment. The pass rate for GCE A level physical education students, for the last three years, is excellent. The proportions of students in the non-uniformed services programme achieving grade C or above was more than twice the national averages at GCSE and GCE A level. By contrast, in 1995-96 only one in three students on the full-time airport operation course and the part-time Association of British Travel Agents certificate course successfully achieved their primary learning goal.

50 Hairdressing and beauty therapy students worked safely in practical sessions. The standard of dress and appearance in salons was high. They developed good attitudes to work and communicated well with clients. They developed effective communication skills in dealing with, and relating to, clients. All students learned to measure materials as part of their dispensary duties and to deal with invoices and money as part of their reception duties. Students' pass rates in examinations were generally above national averages. A few pieces of written work contained basic spelling errors, and some practical creations showed little originality. Most students on the one-year, full-time and part-time courses successfully completed their course. Those on two-year, full-time and part-time courses were less successful. Students on the two-year, full-time courses at NVQ level 2 in hairdressing and beauty therapy had poor results.

51 Most health and social care students were aware of practical health and safety issues. Students on the BTEC national diploma nursery nursing course expressed themselves well and presented summaries of their research clearly. Many students progressed to higher levels of study. On some courses, for example the BTEC national diploma in nursery nursing, pass rates in examinations are high and improving. The pass rates on the foundation GNVQ in health and social care were high (67 per cent) compared with the national average of 34 per cent. Unusually, in 1996, although the retention rate on the intermediate GNVQ was good (73 per cent), only 37 per cent of students gained the qualification. There were similar problems on the BTEC first certificate courses in childcare and caring for the elderly.

52 Performing arts students spoke about their work confidently and understood what they had learnt. Students on the BTEC first diploma in performing arts were able to take acting roles at short notice and improvised well, though some students did not always appear to be at the expected level of development for the stage they had reached in the programme. With one or two exceptions, pass rates in external examinations were good. Standards of practical art and design work and creative studies were high. Pass rates on vocational programmes for those who completed their studies were above national averages.

53 In English and modern languages, the majority of students were reaching appropriate standards. Modern language students were developing an appropriate command of the language they were learning. Information technology skills were underdeveloped. In English as a foreign language (EFL) courses, students had gained sufficient confidence to be able to correct each other's work. Examination results were generally good in French, German, Italian and Spanish. Pass rates and the proportion of students gaining grade C or above on one-year GCE A level courses have improved significantly over recent years, and are now higher than national averages. GCSE English pass rates are poor but improving.

54 Social science students were developing effective key skills and were able to make good use of their own experiences and research in presenting their arguments. Students of politics and sociology showed good presentational skills and used information technology well. Psychology students demonstrated appropriate numeracy skills. The proportions achieving grade C or above in GCSE subjects were generally higher than national averages. Pass rates for a few GCE A level courses are good. These include sociology for 16 to 19 year olds in 1996, philosophy for 16 to 19 year olds for the past three years, and history, and politics and government for older students. Achievements for other courses are below national norms, including two-year courses in economics, geography, history and psychology and one-year courses in government and politics, philosophy, psychology and sociology.

55 The majority of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were making satisfactory progress. They could explain what they were doing and what they had previously learnt. Retention and attendance rates were generally high. Students on full-time courses were developing good information technology skills. Many full-time students and an increasing proportion of part-time students gained nationally-recognised qualifications during their studies. Students on adult basic education courses were less successful in achieving qualifications. Few were able to assess effectively their own performance.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

56 The college's use of a 'no blame' management strategy along with a clear quality assurance policy and framework, has encouraged staff to be self-critical. It also encourages continuous quality improvement in most areas of provision. There is a willingness across the college to identify personal and collective weaknesses in performance and to establish action plans to overcome these within measurable timescales. This approach has strengthened the framework for quality assurance used in the college. Staff involvement in, and support for, quality assurance systems are now apparent at all levels in the college.

57 The quality assurance policy applies to all college staff, facilities and cross-college services such as marketing and student services. Also included are contracted staff, for example cleaning services and those who provide courses franchised by the college. The quality assurance framework is designed to complement the work of external and internal auditors and FEFC inspectors. It includes: reviews of divisional performance; the internal inspection of curriculum delivery; surveys of students' opinions of the provision offered; and the internal audit of service functions. The divisional manager for project research and management oversees the whole process and provides good leadership and support in implementing policy. The responsibility for improving quality rests with the divisional managers whose job descriptions clearly specify their role in monitoring quality. The effectiveness of the process is reviewed annually by the academic board.

58 College staff give a high priority to the inspection of curriculum areas. The process, which includes observation of lessons, is rigorous. Inspections are conducted in accordance with FEFC inspection guidelines using a team of 18 college inspectors drawn from the college's curriculum and service areas. The inspections lead to the production of detailed reports identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the provision in question. Action plans are used constructively to set an agenda for continuous improvement and to prepare the path for self-assessment. In a relatively short period, the inspection process has raised the standard of teaching significantly. It has also provided valuable staff development to those inspecting and those being inspected.

59 Another feature of the quality assurance framework is the monitoring of divisional performance. Through this process, divisions and course teams check their progress against the objectives contained in divisional operating statements. This system was changed recently to reduce paperwork and to link it more coherently to other aspects of quality reviews. There is variability in the thoroughness with which course and divisional reviews are undertaken. Some review sheets are completed in substantial detail. Others are more superficial. Recently, greater consistency was achieved through the involvement of vice-principals acting in their capacity as mentors to support designated divisional managers and to ensure that continuous improvement is achieved.

60 Divisional reviews also take into account the views of consumers and feedback from external verifiers. Surveys of full-time students' views are undertaken at a point following their induction programme and at the end of the academic year. Results of these surveys are analysed and findings are incorporated into college and divisional action plans. Most issues are followed up promptly and thoroughly. The outcomes of these surveys could be shared more fully with students and other interested groups in the college. Some sections of the college, for example the library, are not always aware of findings in the survey which have relevance to them. There is no consistent college-wide survey of employers' views.

61 The college carries out regular internal audits of specific aspects of its work. Detailed reports are produced, for example, on enrolment procedures, induction arrangements, open days, the maintenance of documents and use of rooms. Comprehensive monitoring of the college charter has also taken place. There is a clear link between report findings, recommended actions, and subsequent improvements to the service provided. Standards against which the performance of service divisions can be monitored are not yet fully in place. However, a good start has been made in some areas including the divisions of student services, marketing and community services, and project research and management. There are isolated instances where the internal verification process lacks consistency or where there is a shortage of staff with the necessary assessor qualifications to undertake the work.

62 The monitoring of key performance indicators for enrolment, attendance, retention and achievement has, until this academic year, been impeded by weaknesses in the college's computerised management information system. Divisional managers are now well served by the college system and can readily access most relevant statistical data. Greater rigour in the monitoring of these performance indicators by governors, managers and teachers is necessary if continuous improvement is to be ensured.

63 The college's self-assessment report was based on the findings of internal inspection activity over the period 1995-97. It contained detailed evidence to support judgements. The report was well structured and followed much of the framework of the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Strengths and weaknesses of provision, background information, and points of action were clearly stated and cross-referenced to supporting evidence. The grades awarded by the internal inspection team to curriculum and cross-college areas matched the grades awarded by FEFC inspectors.

64 Staff training and development has a high priority in the college. It is well funded and relates clearly to identified needs. Many training activities, for example the development of middle management skills and information technology training, do not figure in costs because they take place within the college. Responsibility for staff development has been devolved to divisions which prepare detailed training plans linked to divisional needs and broader college objectives. Although there is a clear process for evaluating staff-development activities at individual and divisional level, there is no college-wide evaluation. The college achieved Investor in People status in July 1997. A recent survey carried out by the TEC demonstrates positively the college's commitment to training and development.

65 All salaried staff within the college participate in an individual planning and review process. It works well and staff welcome the opportunity to review their professional development against agreed objectives. At present, the classroom observations which form part of the college's internal inspection process are not linked to the planning and review process. Appraisal takes place at divisional manager level and above. Individual achievements are measured against agreed individual and corporate objectives. Vice-principals appraise divisional managers for whom they have a mentoring responsibility.

RESOURCES

Staffing

66 Teachers and support staff are equally valued by the college. They work productively together and are effectively deployed. Teachers are well qualified for the subjects they teach. Eighty-three per cent of full-time and 46 per cent of part-time teachers have degree equivalent qualifications

or higher degrees. Over 95 per cent of teachers have a teaching qualification. Most teachers are qualified to assess and verify the competence of students on NVQ programmes. Some, for example in business studies, act as external verifiers. This keeps them well informed of current developments in the sector. Forty-seven per cent of teaching support staff have higher level technical qualifications including first or higher degrees; many have teaching qualifications. The college carried out a recent curriculum audit to identify its core curriculum areas and to ensure that full-time teachers on permanent contracts were timetabled to teach these.

67 Good use is made of part-time teachers, especially in business studies, hospitality and catering, hair and beauty therapy, and visual and performing arts. They are generally well supported. The average ratio of full-time to part-time teachers is 3:1. Flexible contracts of employment for full-time and fractional full-time teachers have been introduced with terms and conditions of service related to the current and planned curriculum. Permanent part-time teachers have terms and conditions similar to full-time staff. They participate in the individual personal review process and have access to appropriate staff development.

68 From 1993 to 1996, the college increased its teaching staff, both full time and part time, by about 12 per cent while increasing productivity. The college has standard recruitment and selection procedures for all staff. The personnel division implements the college's equal opportunities policy in respect of recruitment, selection, advertisements, job information and appointment panels. It also produces summary analyses of gender and minority ethnic information relating to staffing. Seventy per cent of staff are women, and 0.6 per cent are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Equipment/learning resources

69 All classrooms are equipped with a range of teaching aids, including writing boards, flip charts and overhead projectors. Students in most curriculum areas have access to appropriate books, periodicals, display materials, audio and video tapes, handouts and learning packages. Most handouts are of good quality though in a few cases, the content is inadequate and the presentation poor.

70 The college has a wide range of modern specialist equipment that meets course needs. It also has an effective rolling programme to maintain, upgrade and replace its specialist equipment. Many areas of work, for example catering, have good-quality, realistic working environments equipped to industrial standards. Travel and tourism courses benefit from an extensive range of project materials related to many countries. A well-equipped travel shop with up-to-date electronic travel booking terminals is registered by the Association of British Travel Agents. The equipment available for sports courses is good as is the range of equipment in art and design, performing arts and creative studies. The modern

language laboratories are well used. One was out of order during the inspection.

71 The library and learning centres provided on each main college site are open from 08.45 hours to 19.30 hours each week day. They are suitably equipped with networked computers, some of which enable students to have access to compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases for their research. Learning centre staff attend curriculum team meetings to help identify resource needs. The library budget was increased from £52,000 in the two previous years to £58,000 in 1996-97. In 1995-96, there was a heavy loss of books. This has been substantially reduced by the installation of security equipment. Although there has been significant investment in bookstock, the range of texts in the library is too small for some courses in science, mathematics and computing, leisure and tourism, and art and design.

72 The college has invested substantially in modern information technology to support learning. The ratio of modern computers to full-time equivalent students is 1:10. Well-equipped learning workshops are attached to each curriculum division. These are used mainly by class groups but individual students can use them for additional self-study. The multimedia suite in art and design, developed with finance from the competitiveness fund, is of high quality. College-wide surveys show that students' use of the main libraries and learning centres declined in 1995-96, as did their use of learning workshops in every curriculum division. The college does not monitor students' use of computers or software applications and has not identified why this decline has occurred.

Accommodation

73 The college's estate is efficiently managed. Accommodation is well maintained, tidy and clean. A clear strategy for improvement includes a planned building programme and the remodelling and refurbishment of older accommodation. Recent extensive improvements to security have led to reduced vandalism and the theft of student and college property. The college health and safety policy ensures that divisions carry out risk analyses at regular intervals. Recommendations for improvement are implemented effectively. The college has identified that accommodation is inefficiently used and has taken action to address this.

74 Classrooms, including temporary units, specialist areas and student communal facilities are adequately decorated and generally well furnished. They provide a pleasant learning environment. Some areas have good wall displays, much of it students' work. A number of small tutorial rooms have been created by remodelling classrooms. Some divisions lack sufficient general classrooms and this leads to use of inappropriate accommodation for teaching, such as theory classes taught in hairdressing salons and in the gymnasium. The gymnasium is not well suited to modern leisure and sports activities. Kitchens for catering students do not have

clearly-defined, separate food preparation areas. Some specialist rooms are inappropriate in size and location and some have permanent fittings which limit the flexibility with which they can be used. Some temporary units and most rooms at Culcheth Hall are inaccessible to students with restricted mobility. At both of the main centres, there is a students' union building, each with a shop. A modern, well-equipped and highly-rated creche is provided at the Sale centre with places for 40 children.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

75 The college has made significant progress towards achieving its mission. Its particular strengths include:

- effective governance and management
- strong leadership in a period of rapid change
- good internal communications
- responsiveness to the local community
- a significant increase in the participation of local people in further education
- effective marketing
- a well-planned and well-implemented enrolment process
- an enthusiastic and committed staff
- well-designed student assignments
- a well-developed self-assessment report
- the college-wide commitment to continuous improvement
- effective staff development
- good specialist equipment and information technology.

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

- involve governors more effectively in reviewing the college's performance targets
- ensure greater consistency in the management of divisions and course teams
- improve students' attendance, retention and achievement rates
- improve the quality of induction, tutorial and careers education activities
- encourage a higher proportion of students in need of additional learning support to take advantage of the support which is provided
- increase the use of the library and information technology facilities.

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)

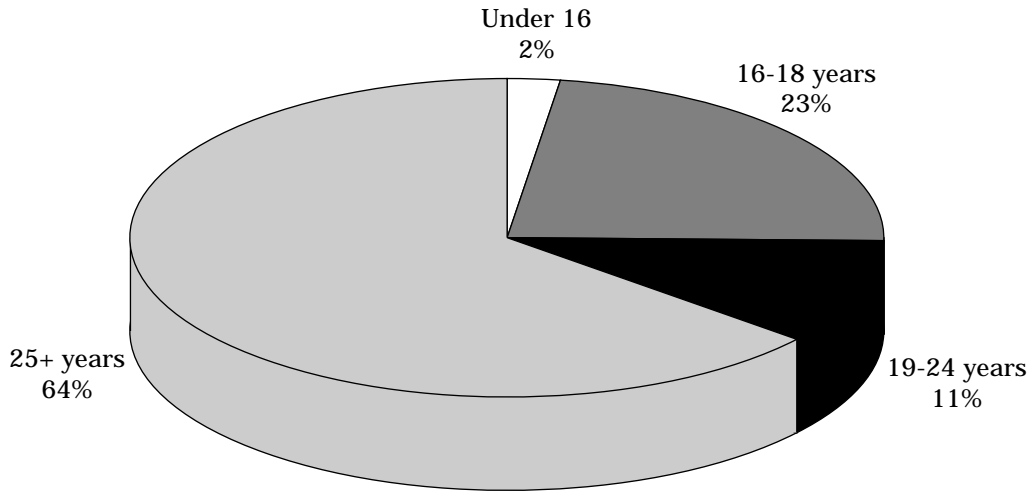
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 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

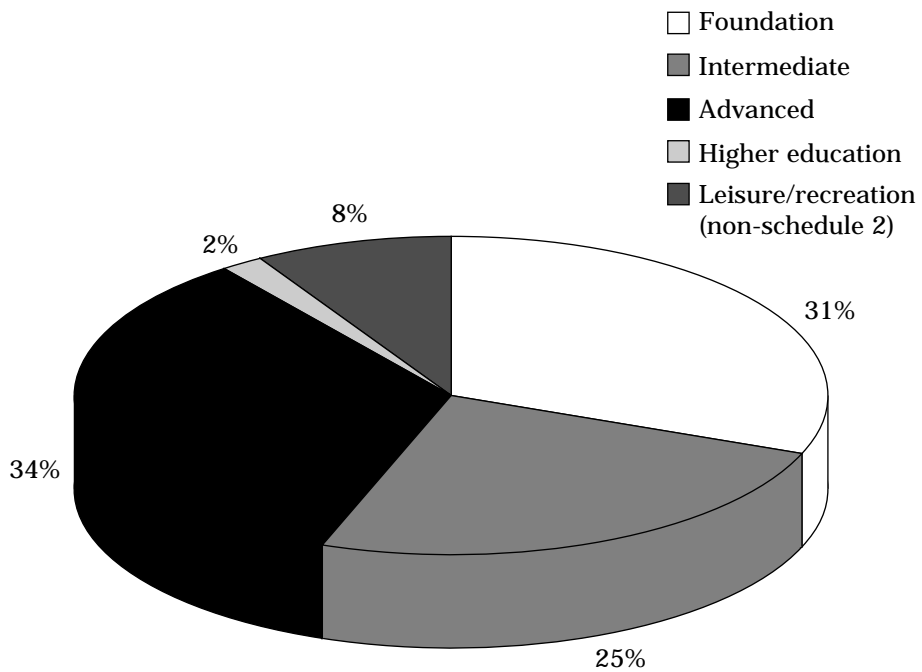
South Trafford College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 8,206

Figure 2

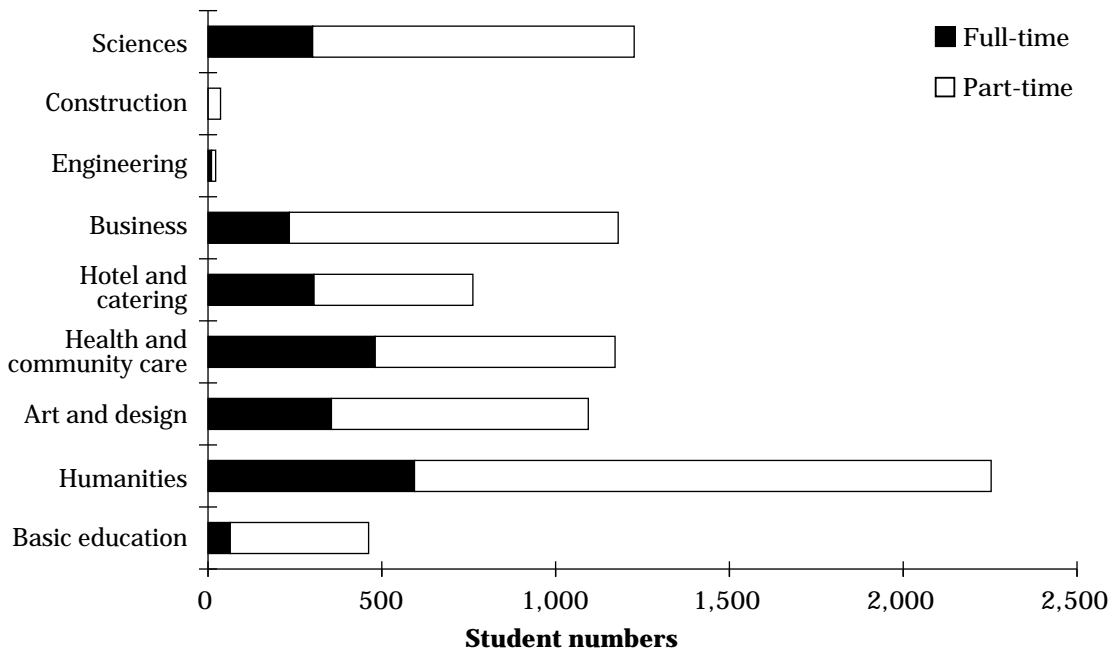
South Trafford College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 8,206

Figure 3

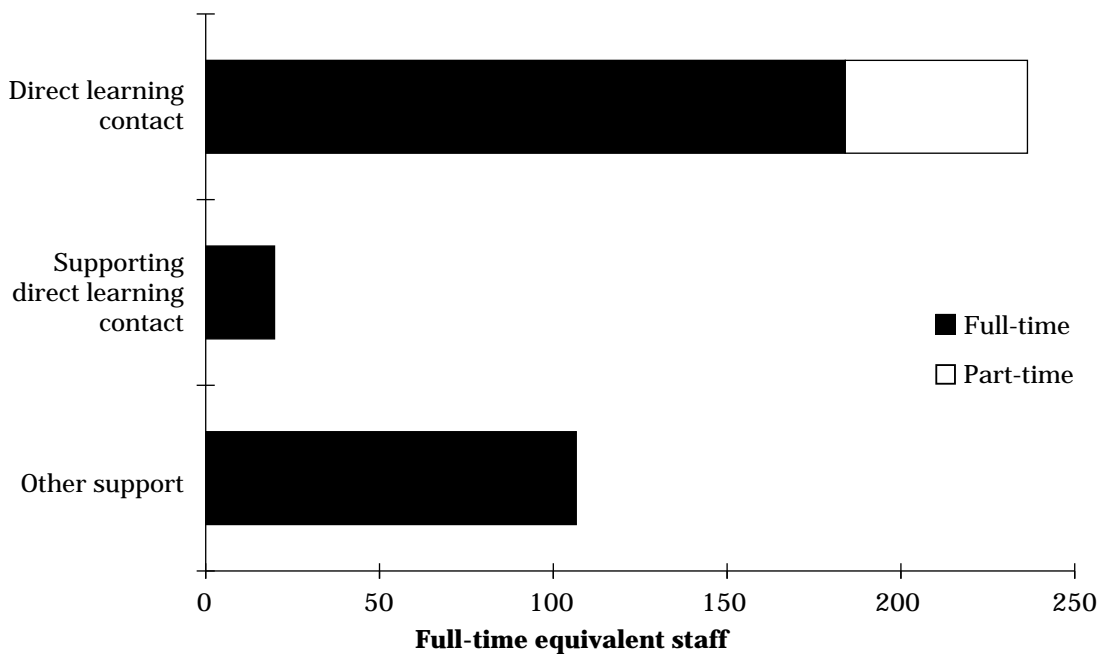
South Trafford College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 8,206

Figure 4

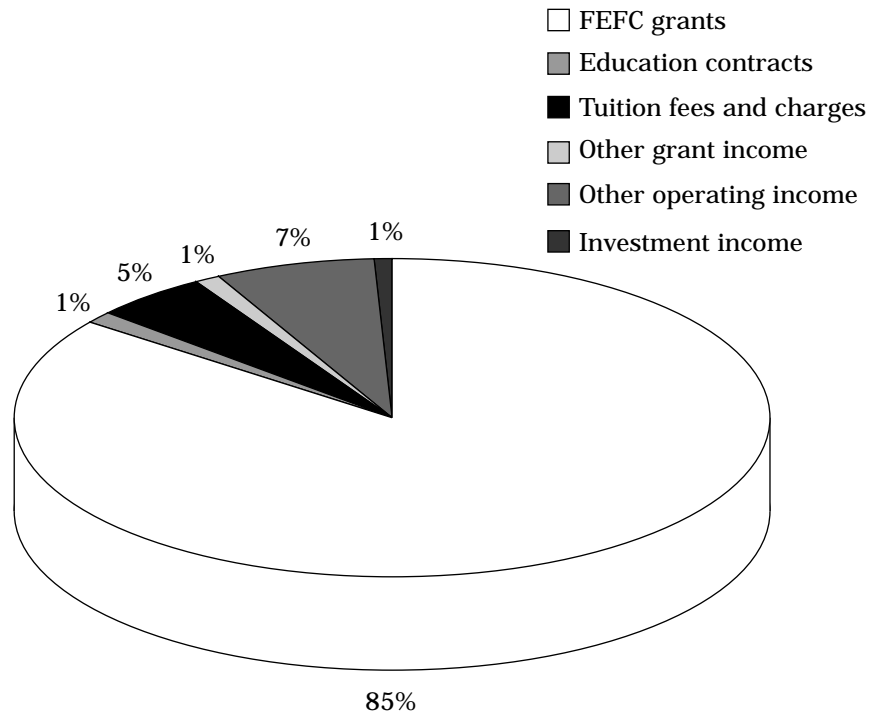
South Trafford College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at January 1997)



Full-time equivalent staff: 363

Figure 5

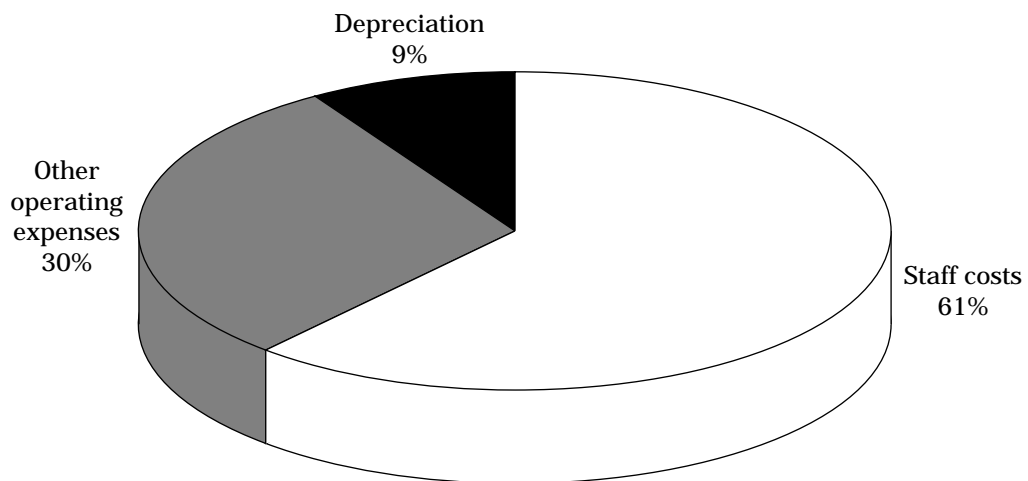
South Trafford College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £9,485,000

Figure 6

South Trafford College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £10,167,000

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