

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

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# **Stafford College**

**May 1996**

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**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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**THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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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**

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

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# FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 52/96

## STAFFORD COLLEGE

### WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected April 1995-January 1996

#### Summary

Stafford College is a major local provider of post-16 education and training. It has effective links with the local community, the local TEC, LEAs and higher education institutions. A distinctive feature of the college is the college-wide timetable which embraces most full-time courses and offers students flexible access and a wide choice of programmes. The college careers staff provide a high level of service and support for students. The college benefits from effective governance and management although there is a need to review some staff roles and procedures. Teaching staff are generally well qualified, experienced and effectively deployed; there is a strong commitment to staff development. A major franchise has been developed with companies to provide in-company training. The student charter is clear and informative. There are positive working relationships between staff and students, though improvements are required in the tutorial system. Examination results in vocational areas are generally good but some examination results are below average for the sector. The quality assurance process is effective and is being improved. The college management information system does not always provide timely and accurate data. The central learning resources are organised as curriculum workshops and provide an impressive facility. The quality of some accommodation is unsatisfactory. The college should give further attention to health and safety in some areas.

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

| <b>Aspects of cross-college provision</b>   | <b>Grade</b> |
|---|--------------|
| Responsiveness and range of provision       | 1            |
| Governance and management                   | 2            |
| Students' recruitment, guidance and support | 2            |
| Quality assurance                           | 2            |
| Resources: staffing                         | 2            |
| equipment/learning resources                | 2            |
| accommodation                               | 3            |

| <b>Curriculum area</b>                                      | <b>Grade</b> | <b>Curriculum area</b>   | <b>Grade</b> |
|---|--------------|--|--------------|
| Science (mathematics, computing and information technology) | 2            | Health and caring  | 2            |
| Construction  | 3            | Art and design (and performing arts)   | 2            |
| Engineering   | 2            | Humanities (English, psychology, sociology, geography, history and politics) | 2            |
| Business  | 2            | Basic education (including adult and SLDD provision)                         | 3            |
| Catering and leisure, including franchised provision        | 2            |  |              |

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1 The inspection of Stafford College took place in five stages. Specialist subject areas were inspected in the spring and autumn terms of 1995, enrolment and induction procedures at the start of the autumn term, aspects of cross-college provision in January 1996 and franchised provision in March and April 1996. Twenty-four inspectors spent 95 days in the college. They visited 232 classes, involving 2,461 students. They examined students' work and a range of college documentation. Meetings were held with members of the corporation, college staff, students, parents, local employers, teachers from local schools and representatives of the community. Discussions were also held with a representative of the local training and enterprise council (TEC).

### **THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS**

2 Stafford College is a large further education college based on four sites in the town of Stafford, which has a population of 60,000. The college serves the town and a large part of mid and south Staffordshire, a rural area with several small towns including Rugeley, Uttoxeter and Codsall. The catchment area extends to the edge of Wolverhampton and the Black Country. The college is an associate college of the University of Staffordshire and of Wolverhampton University and its higher education provision is franchised from these institutions. The college sees itself as firmly based in the local community, although some of its higher education courses recruit nationally.

3 There are six high schools in the town of Stafford and several others within mid and south Staffordshire, all of which have sixth forms. The college tries to work with them as closely as possible. There are five other further education colleges within 16 miles. About 75 per cent of local 16 year olds choose to stay in full-time education.

4 Stafford is a county town and administrative centre. Employment opportunities are generally good. At the time of the inspection, the unemployment rate was about 6.5 per cent. There are large employers in engineering and other technical manufacturing and many small businesses. A wide range of skills is required of the workforce. Two per cent of the college's students are from minority ethnic groups; this exceeds the proportion in the local community.

5 At the time of the inspection, the college had enrolled 2,800 full-time and 29,300 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, respectively. The college exceeded its growth target in 1994-95. It had already exceeded its target for 1995-96 when it was being inspected.

6 In 1995-96, the college employed 180 full-time teachers and a further 63 full-time equivalent part-time teachers. There were 179 full-time equivalent support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. Teaching staff are deployed flexibly within 16 teams which have curriculum and cross-college functions.

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Several teams have direct responsibility for the care and support of students.

7 The college's mission is to provide flexible education and training to meet individual aspirations and the needs of the local economy. It is being pursued through the offer of a wide range of courses and growing provision in the community and industry. The strategic plan identifies the need for improved guidance, assessment of individual needs, better links with schools and the modularisation of the curriculum. Increased training for adults is seen as making an important contribution to the achievement of the national targets for education and training. The college has developed a distinctive central facility equipped with resources for learning. This is intended to achieve greater flexibility in methods of learning and to enable students to choose patterns of study which best suit them. Although further development is required the college has made substantial progress in implementing its mission.

### **RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION**

8 The college offers vocational and general education programmes ranging from foundation level to higher education. It has courses in all the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas except agriculture. There is a large programme of General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level), GCE advanced supplementary (AS) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects. Most General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes are offered at all levels, although not all of these have recruited students. There is a wide range of full-time and part-time vocational programmes, including many National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) validated by the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and other awarding bodies. The college runs access to higher education courses, a degree course in hotel, catering and licensed retail management, and higher national diplomas in art and design, and business and finance.

9 The college has successfully introduced a cross-college timetable grid which has made access to courses more flexible and widened students' choice. The grid includes most full-time courses and enables students to choose additional subjects to add to their main programme of study. Some students have constructed their own programme, such as the garage owner who was able to take NVQs in both business and motor vehicle engineering. The college is committed to the modularisation of all its courses. Students have benefited from the new curriculum. There is increased choice and more opportunity to transfer between courses. Some students have been recruited who would not previously have considered entering further education. However, they have not always been well advised in constructing their programme of study. For example, GNVQ students have not yet taken advantage of units from other GNVQ programmes. The non-advanced curriculum has been aligned with local school timetables, so that school pupils can take advantage of college courses.

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10 The college has good relations with local secondary schools. A code of practice, introduced since incorporation, seeks to ensure that 15 and 16 year olds are given clear information and advice on educational opportunities post-16. School representatives say that the code works well. Co-operation with schools has involved joint teaching of GNVQs, college staff acting as verifiers for some school-based GNVQs and school pupils obtaining NVQs at the college. The college runs a partnership project with local primary schools to help parents develop their skills in being parents and to involve them more closely with the school; the project has included workshops in reading, writing and behaviour.

11 Parents of college students are generally satisfied with the quality of information they receive on their children's progress, although some would appreciate more frequent reports. Staff are regarded as accessible and helpful.

12 Links with Staffordshire local education authority (LEA) and other local authorities are strong and productive. The college acts as agent for the provision of LEA-funded leisure courses in Stafford. The courses are taught on the college's main site and in several centres within the borough. FEFC-funded courses are offered alongside this provision. Professional advice for the support of students with visual and hearing impairment is purchased from the local authority.

13 Community representatives spoke warmly of the college's responsiveness. Several courses are validated by the Universities and Colleges Access Network and the college works with the Workers' Educational Association to provide courses in community centres. The college has close relations with adult day centres and this has increased the opportunities available to adult students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Adult basic education is offered in five volunteer centres and the college has provided tutor training in these and other centres. Adult education is also offered in two Wolverhampton schools. Examples of responsiveness cited by community representatives included the provision of English for speakers of other languages at a local Sikh temple. The community provision aligns well with the college's 'Strategy 2000' initiative which seeks to create greater flexibility in methods of learning and to establish teaching and learning in locations best suited to students. A Saturday college has recently been opened to widen the opportunity for study.

14 Relationships with the Universities of Wolverhampton and Staffordshire are good. Regular meetings are held at directorate level. The close links help to ensure the smooth progress of students from college to university, particularly students progressing to the University of Wolverhampton from courses in hotel, catering and licensed retail.

15 The college has close and successful links with the Staffordshire TEC. The principal and other senior managers have been members of TEC committees and steering groups. Training credits are offered in a range of



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vocational areas and in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The relevant courses are delivered mainly through the college's own training company. The college has worked jointly with the TEC and other partners in the Trent Challenge to bid for single regeneration budget funding. The successful bid includes a learning resource and guidance centre in Rugeley, which is planned to open in 1997. The college has recently been successful in obtaining money from the competitiveness fund for a facility to help local print and publishing industries become more internationally competitive. The college is an active member of the Staffordshire Partnership which has supported a range of activities including work placement for GCE A level students and professional practice in graphic design. Other TEC-funded activities include the 'breakthrough scheme' in which the college's own careers service provides careers guidance to adults. The TEC has helped the college in achieving Investors in People accreditation and is providing support for pre-school and post-school hours activities for school children aged between 5 and 15. The TEC regards the college as responsive and is satisfied with the quality of its service. However, it would value more precisely documented evidence of achievement.

16 Liaison with employers is of a variable quality, although there are some successful initiatives. The college is a major accredited centre for training for Mitsubishi plc. It has also developed a significant franchise with companies in the licensed retail trade through which it provides in-company training for employees nationwide. This provision has done much to open up new avenues of training for adult employees in the industry. Some of the college's course teams have a named contact person for company links but there are few formal advisory committees, a point of concern for some employers. The college is considering the revival of some liaison committees, for example in motor vehicle engineering. While some employers praised the responsiveness of the college, others were more critical. Some employers were unaware of the college's training company. Given its documented commitment to meeting employers' needs, the college should strengthen and extend existing arrangements for liaison with employers.

17 The college generally markets its courses effectively. There is a marketing team which has a substantial budget. The team has succeeded in promoting a strong corporate image. The marketing plan focuses on three distinct client groups: 16 to 19 year olds, employers and the wider community. Specific targets are set and broad objectives are supported by operational priorities. The team makes effective use of market research to help identify education and training needs. A recent survey of local employers showed that there were demands for retraining, the updating and enhancing of skills, and flexible provision in the college and the workplace. Information on the college and its courses is disseminated during visits to local employers, through mailshots, at open evenings and open days, and at meetings with careers officers. Staff attend careers

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events and visit schools to alert school leavers to what the college offers. Enquiries from prospective students and other clients are thoroughly analysed. Attempts have been made to discover why applicants who have accepted offers at the college fail to enrol. Staff in some curriculum areas feel remote from such marketing activities.

18 The quality of the college's publicity material is high. Separate well-designed prospectuses for full-time and part-time courses are distributed widely. These are supplemented by leaflets giving details of individual subjects. An eight-page newspaper was distributed to 100,000 homes shortly before the college open day in June. The college advertises selectively in newspapers and on radio.

19 The college guidance centre has a key role in advising students before they enter college. It also offers support to students following the publication of their GCE A level and GCSE results. A file of press coverage is maintained and students' achievements are reported in the college magazine.

20 The college has a co-ordinator for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is some specially-designed provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, mainly for adults, but the emphasis is on integrating these students with other students on mainstream provision. Regular links are maintained with two local special schools and with special units in a number of secondary schools. The college has been involved with successful European social fund bids which have funded a range of initiatives, including vocational training for adults with mental health problems and access to further education for people with disabilities.

21 The college's equal opportunities committee has a wide membership. A subcommittee has produced a revised equal opportunities statement, issued in October 1995. The statement emphasises the responsibility of each member of staff for promoting equality, stresses the need to evaluate course materials for the way in which they represent equal opportunities and gives advice on combatting discrimination in work placements. The committee is consulted to ensure that college publications promote equal opportunities. An equal opportunities support group gives support to those alleging discrimination or harassment. Training in equal opportunities awareness has been provided for staff and an equal opportunities resource section has been established in the central learning area. In meetings with inspectors, minority ethnic representatives praised the college's ethos. A multicultural forum meets two or three times each year, attended by staff, students and leaders of local minority ethnic communities.

## **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

22 The corporation has 10 members, although it is planned to increase this number to 12. At present there are five business members, including

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a nominee of the Staffordshire TEC, a community member, one staff representative and one student representative, the county deputy chief education officer, and the principal. There is a vacancy for the community member. The full corporation board holds at least four meetings a year and these are well attended. Members have a clear understanding of their strategic role. Responsibility for operational matters is delegated to senior managers and the chairman ensures that these matters are carefully monitored. There are three committees: audit, nominations and remuneration. The board takes appropriate steps to ensure effective and efficient use of resources. They also take a key role in strategic planning, monitoring and the development of quality in the curriculum. Corporation members were fully involved in the development of the college charter, which was highly commended by the Department for Education and Employment.

23 Comprehensive documentation is provided for the board well ahead of meetings. The college uses the expertise of corporation members, especially on financial and personnel matters. Codes of practice dictate that corporation members undertake an annual review of their effectiveness and there is a register of members' interests. Members of the corporation are highly supportive of the college; they are aware of college affairs and often participate in social and community events. They make regular visits to the college to discuss curriculum issues and to meet staff and students. There is a productive working relationship between the chairman of the corporation and senior managers.

24 The college has an effective two-tier management structure with senior managers acting as functional heads. The senior management group comprises the principal and eight directors, each of whom holds a cross-college responsibility. There is no vice-principal. Teachers and support staff are divided into 32 teams, each with a defined teaching or administrative role. The team leader for each group reports to a director and carries responsibility for the recruitment, deployment, development and welfare of their team members. Teachers may be grouped as curriculum or course teams. Many teach across different courses, which makes it difficult for some staff, particularly part-time teachers, to attend team meetings. Staff are pleased with the responsibility that the structure allows them, although some feel overburdened. The college is sensitive to these problems and is undertaking a review of roles and procedures in the college; a consultant has been engaged to evaluate the workload of teaching staff.

25 The college has an academic board, which has two subcommittees, for teaching and learning, and quality. The subcommittees are generally effective, but many college staff do not regard the academic board as having a significant role. At present, the board does not validate courses, nor has it been wholly effective in reviewing the academic direction of the college.

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26 The corporation and staff at all levels contribute to the development of the strategic plan. The plan is brief and does not fully describe how operational targets are to be met. Most functions of the college are centrally controlled. The senior management group meets regularly. A college booklet and regular briefings from the principal and other senior managers keep staff informed about issues and targets derived from the strategic plan. Generally, staff teams feel well informed and consulted on the college's aims. They are not so aware of the procedures used in strategic planning and evaluation.

27 There are job descriptions for most members of staff and lines of responsibility are clearly defined. Staff are made aware of curriculum reviews through regular meetings with directors and the principal's twice-yearly talk. Effective course review documents and action plans are being used in many curriculum areas. Communication within the college is generally effective. The college newsletter provides useful information and is appreciated by staff. Responsibilities for policies relating to equal opportunities, health and safety, student support and environmental issues are clearly allocated. However, in some curriculum areas, insufficient attention has been given to health and safety matters.

28 The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 is £17.42 per unit, based on 510,905 units. The median for general further education colleges is £17.84. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

29 Financial planning, teaching costs and other key resources are centrally controlled. Financial performance is regularly monitored and adjustments are made to resource allocations every three months. Budget allocations are based on student numbers using a college-devised formula. Control methods are in place and budget holders receive monthly summaries of expenditure. Budgets for supplies and services are devolved to some staff team leaders, although staff at the curriculum level sometimes have little understanding of the criteria used in the budget allocations. There is no unit costing at programme and course level and performance indicators, such as enrolments and retention rates, are used with varying effectiveness.

30 The college has an information strategy that provides a framework for developing objectives and actions to meet the college's management and information requirements over the next five years. The management information system is used to provide information for a wide range of internal and external reports. For example, all attendance data for students are collected and reports sent back to curriculum teams for monitoring as part of the review and control process. The college recognises that it has significant problems with the present management information system, particularly in respect of its ability to deliver data accurately and on time. Areas for improvement have been identified.

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## **STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

31 Since 1992, responsibility for students' recruitment, guidance and support has been vested in client services, which is located in newly-refurbished and attractive accommodation on the main college site. The open access area is available to prospective and current students. Information and advice are available on admissions, courses, interviews, careers, welfare and learning support. Students particularly appreciate the extensive opening hours, the welcome they receive and the quality of the services provided.

32 Policy documents for admissions, enrolment and induction, and for the tutorial guidance programme are thorough. In addition, there are informative review and discussion documents on the tutorial process. The student handbook is detailed and the customer charter provides clear information on students' entitlements and responsibilities. Course and induction handbooks vary in their quality and usefulness. Some other printed materials, such as the documents on admissions procedures directed at students and parents, are unattractive and difficult to use.

33 The college operates a flexible admissions service. It has recently introduced a scheme under which students can enrol at three points during the academic year. Forty students took advantage of this to enrol in January 1996. All full-time students receive at least one admissions interview. These are conducted by well-informed senior tutors. In turn, senior tutors are supported by an admissions team of teachers who have received some specialist training. Most students find the advice helpful; a few feel they have been given inappropriate and sometimes inaccurate advice and this view is supported by the information available on course transfers and non-completions. Course open days are held in May and June. Some involve imaginative 'taster' sessions or presentations, but students found others dull and limited in the value of the information they provided.

34 Part-time students have benefited from improvements to the support provided for them. They can use specialist admissions staff for advice at enrolment. They can also attend taster sessions organised for certain courses in the pre-term week in September. All part-time students who attend for a significant number of hours have been allocated a personal tutor. Support for students studying on company premises as part of franchised provision is comprehensive and readily available. Generally, the information and advice given to part-time students is comprehensive and useful.

35 During the main September enrolment, all full-time students, except access course students, are given Basic Skills Agency modified assessments; part-time students have the option of this screening. The assessments result in recommendations for support in numeracy, communication and information technology workshops, as appropriate. Students also have access to the workshops without referral. During the

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inspection, students spoke appreciatively of the help and support provided. For a minority of students, the assessment outcomes have taken too long to process, leading to delays in providing additional support. The college does not undertake a formal evaluation of the effectiveness of its learning support.

36 The induction process for full-time students is generally effective although a minority of the students expressed reservations about it. The process has been evaluated, but, at the time of the inspection, staff were unaware of the outcome.

37 Some students do not fully understand the range of opportunities that exist within the sophisticated curriculum and timetable. Consequently, they are unable to match their programme to their specific needs, as the timetable allows. Accreditation of students' prior learning is at an early stage of development. Some staff are working towards accreditation of prior learning qualifications, but pilot accreditation schemes have waned.

38 Most students and staff value the tutorial system. Students are generally content with the level of support they receive. All full-time students have a personal tutor who is generally one of their teachers. The tutorial role is clearly defined and there are timetabled opportunities for group and individual tutorials. Two fixed tutorial slots are provided for students perceived to be at risk of dropping out; this is proving of particular value to GCSE and intermediate GNVQ students. Senior tutors, careers staff and other specialists support tutors, for example in running discussions on specific issues within group tutorials. A useful tutorial resource base had been established in the client services area.

39 Where problems have arisen with the tutorial system, they have usually been the result of timetable clashes, for instance in the case of some GCE A level students, the use of inappropriate rooms or a failure to follow the recommended tutorial programme. Some staff feel insecure about providing group tutorials on topics where they have limited knowledge, such as drug abuse or HIV/AIDS. Not all tutors are aware of the tutorial resource base and staff and students based away from the main site do not always feel able to make use of client services and the learning support workshops. The college has recently introduced action planning. This enables students, in consultation with their tutors, to set their own learning objectives and evaluate their progress towards achieving them.

40 Attendance is effectively monitored by tutors, and teachers and there is a widespread perception that closer monitoring during the present academic year is improving attendance and retention. Staff are generally alert to these issues and are looking at strategies for further improvement. Tutors welcome the support of senior tutors in following up absenteeism. However, communication between client services and teaching staff is widely perceived as too slow.

41 The careers support offered to students is exemplary. At the request of tutors, careers staff have run tutor group sessions on a wide range of careers related issues. Open sessions and time set aside for individual interviews are well advertised and these facilities have now been extended to the Oval site. The well-resourced careers area is helpfully organised. It is open every day and one evening each week. Students speak highly of the careers service. Additional careers interviews are provided by the local careers service on two days a week at set periods during the year.

42 The counselling service is helpful, responsive and rightly valued by students and their tutors. The college employs a full-time qualified counsellor who is helped by a volunteer team from the teaching staff. Members of the voluntary team are themselves provided with effective professional support. Confidentiality is respected and safeguarded. There is sensible co-operation with the ecumenical chaplaincy which offers another useful strand of support for students.

43 The provision of creche facilities is well organised to meet students' childcare needs. There are 25 places available and an excellent 'after school hours' club for 5 to 15 year old children of students and staff.

44 Although the college seeks to identify those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities before entry, it has not always succeeded and occasionally subject staff have not received advance notice before the arrival of students who require support.

#### **TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING**

45 Of the 232 sessions inspected, 60 per cent had strengths that outweighed weaknesses. In 9 per cent of sessions, the weaknesses outweighed the strengths. The following table summarises the grades given to the sessions inspected.

##### **Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study**

| <b>Programmes</b>                               | <b>Grade</b> | <b>1</b>  | <b>2</b>  | <b>3</b>  | <b>4</b>  | <b>5</b> | <b>Totals</b> |
|---|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|---------------|
| GCE AS/A level                                  |              | 13        | 15        | 15        | 4         | 0        | 47            |
| GCSE  |              | 1         | 5         | 6         | 5         | 0        | 17            |
| GNVQ  |              | 7         | 24        | 15        | 3         | 1        | 50            |
| NVQ   |              | 5         | 17        | 10        | 4         | 0        | 36            |
| Access to higher education/<br>higher education |              | 0         | 3         | 4         | 0         | 0        | 7             |
| Basic education                                 |              | 3         | 6         | 5         | 2         | 0        | 16            |
| Other vocational                                |              | 8         | 22        | 14        | 1         | 0        | 45            |
| Other   |              | 4         | 7         | 2         | 1         | 0        | 14            |
| <b>Total</b>                                    |              | <b>41</b> | <b>99</b> | <b>71</b> | <b>20</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>232</b>    |

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46 In all areas of the college, there were good working relationships between staff and students. Schemes of work were good. Teachers demonstrated their knowledge and expertise and used a suitable range of teaching methods. Students were set regular assignments, which were marked at the appropriate standard. Students received useful feedback but teachers' written comments were not always as helpful as they might have been in advancing learning. There were robust systems in place for monitoring and advising students on their progress. Key features of successful sessions included thorough planning, stimulating tasks, appropriately challenging content and the relevant use of information technology. Learning was often reinforced by the effective summary of the main points. In some sessions, students were not given enough opportunity to do things for themselves. Teachers sometimes failed to check that students were learning effectively. In many areas, sessions were affected by low attendance.

47 In science, the project work and practical assignments were suitably challenging. Some good use was made of information technology. Students were provided with extensive course documentation, though not all of it was used effectively. In a link class with a special school, an experiment using mixtures and solutions enabled students to learn parts of the national curriculum. The successful management of sessions ensured that students with a wide range of abilities could learn effectively. Students were making good progress in handling apparatus, making observations, recording results and drawing conclusions.

48 In many computing sessions students were eager to ask questions and discuss their work. Technical information was communicated at a level appropriate for the stage of the course and the abilities of students. In several sessions students used modern software packages to good effect. Group work helped students to develop their programming and information technology skills. Detailed assignment briefing sheets and good written comments on assessed work contributed to the quality of assignment work. In most mathematics sessions, students learned purposefully and effectively. In some vocational sessions, course materials were given a helpful practical context. On occasion, teachers failed to make use of available teaching aids when these would clearly have been beneficial. The worksheets devised by staff were of a very high standard.

49 In engineering, the varied teaching methods and lively presentations ensured that student were interested and learning effectively. There were good schemes of work and teaching was well planned. In many sessions, informative and effective demonstrations were used to support the lectures. Students usually had a chance to speak and ask questions but more opportunity to do things for themselves would help them to learn. The pace of work was usually appropriate. Workshop sessions were stimulating; tasks were focused to ensure the development of relevant skills and knowledge. On BTEC courses, common skills were being



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developed successfully through the integrated assignments. However, students were not given enough instruction on how to apply these skills.

50 Construction students were generally attentive and motivated. They worked well in groups and on individual activities. Teaching sessions were well organised. The work had clear aims and was suitably paced. Course materials were well produced and of an appropriate standard. Some teachers failed to ensure that learning was taking place and, in a few cases, the quality of students' work was poor. Staff often drew on their experience to place learning in an industrial context. In some sessions there were vigorous and stimulating exchanges between students and staff. Students were encouraged to ask questions and these were usually answered carefully. Some teachers routinely praised good work and this helped to motivate students.

51 In business, there were comprehensive schemes of work which matched the aims and specifications of the course being taught. Core skills were taught effectively, although numeracy and foreign languages skills were not well integrated with other elements of work. The quality of some lessons was reduced by the lack, or ineffective use of, teaching aids. Good use was made of question and answer sessions to check students' knowledge. Most lessons were well managed. The standard of note taking was good and student's files were well maintained. Encouragement was given to adult returners and they were well supported in class.

52 Most of the teaching in catering was effective. Course documents were of high quality. Courses were well planned and provided a coherent and vocationally relevant experience for students. Internal verification was carried out conscientiously. A flexible timetable permitted students with different abilities, following differing patterns of attendance, to be taught together. For example, students from several courses and with a wide range of abilities worked together to prepare and serve meals to the public in the college restaurant. The experience enabled them to learn team skills and develop a range of NVQ competences. Teachers were supportive and made judicious use of spontaneous demonstrations to help students learn. The licensed trade franchised courses are delivered effectively and the training materials developed for use within them are of a high order. These materials provide good support for the managers delivering the programmes.

53 Travel and tourism students benefited from the organisational skills of teachers, their ability to draw on their vocational experience and the judicious use of interactive methods. Teachers controlled their classes in a friendly and productive way. A wide range of teaching methods, including open questioning, exercises and project work, was used to keep students interested and learning effectively. Practical activities were especially successful. Good use was made of appropriate information technology. Students gained valuable work experience in the college travel shop and in a local travel agency.

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54 In social studies and childcare, considerable effort had gone into producing programmes that were well structured, planned and documented. Students were helped to practise a range of skills, setting their own objectives and gathering and evaluating information. Most lessons were effectively taught and the work undertaken by students was suitably challenging. In the best sessions, students were encouraged to be creative. Sometimes, teachers missed opportunities to check that learning was taking place. Assessments were of an appropriate standard. Learning was strengthened by the constructive comments on students' work.

55 In art and design, the teaching teams were strong, lessons had clear aims and objectives and the work set for students was appropriate to each level of study. Students were well informed about their progress both formally and informally. The taught programmes enabled a flexible approach to study which was helped by interdisciplinary links with other areas. Students were lively when engaged in practical activities but less forthcoming in group discussion. The small number of mature students worked well with younger colleagues and played a leading role in group activities. In performing arts, well-structured and well-paced practical work successfully extended students' specialist knowledge and vocabulary. The teaching of performance in the GCE A level programme was of high quality. Detailed records of students' work and achievement enabled teachers and students to make effective use of previous experience. In one session, students were asked to reflect on the main constituent elements of performance in a carefully-directed discussion; in so doing, they were encouraged to draw on their experience of the course to date. Their analyses were followed by preparation, in small groups, for a performance in which they drew on what they had been doing. All were clearly enjoying the experience and increasing their understanding of performance through their practice of specialist and core skills.

56 The quality of teaching and learning in history and politics varied significantly. In some lessons, more could have been done to challenge students to think for themselves. In history, appropriate emphasis was given to primary source documents. In some politics lessons there was vigorous debate between staff and students. In one successful session, class discussion led to links being made between contemporary political knowledge and political ideas. Handouts, which summarised key points, offered a useful basis for revision for examinations. In history and politics, the development of oral skills was sometimes neglected. In English, courses clearly address the requirements of the examination syllabus. Supporting documents are detailed and focused, properly reflecting course aims. Students' coursework is often of a high standard. All written work is marked by more than one teacher. Staff work well as a team.

57 Geography, psychology and sociology students received detailed programme handbooks. The extensive use of team teaching encouraged the spread of good practice. In one exemplary session on earthquakes the

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teacher made effective use of various teaching aids. Students' attention was engaged and key points emphasised with clarity. Teachers often worked with individual students reviewing their progress and discussing their learning objectives. Adult students were appreciative of the support for study skills, such as note taking, that was built into their work. Self-discipline was encouraged by the way in which absences and other issues were handled.

58 The teaching on specifically-designed programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was of a high standard. Teachers used a variety of teaching methods. Students were extensively involved in organising their own learning. Sessions were planned and delivered within a clear structure. Cross-college support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was well focused and effective; there was good support for students with a range of disabilities in a variety of subject areas. In some sessions there was inadequate differentiation of tasks to meet the wide range of students' abilities. The teaching methods used in adult basic education are too restrictive. There is also a lack of information technology for assisted learning. Some mainstream staff are not sufficiently aware of the kind of support required for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In one successful session, a theme of road safety was used to help a group of adults with severe learning difficulties to develop communication and other life skills; the use of local photographs stimulated discussion and learning.

### **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

59 Eighty-seven per cent of students enrolled at the college are over the age of 18. Around 60 per cent are studying at foundation and intermediate levels, 26 per cent at advanced levels and 2 per cent on higher education courses. Students enjoy their studies, work with enthusiasm and speak highly of the college. They make effective use of learning resource areas to work independently. Attention to safety, including the use of protective clothing, varies. Most students are developing information technology skills or had gained these skills and could apply them in assignment work during the second year of their studies. Students' achievements on the college's complementary elective studies programme, for example in sports, performing arts, photography, cooking and car maintenance, form part of their record of achievement.

60 GCE A level pass rates in science vary substantially. In 1995, one chemistry course had a pass rate of 92 per cent and 58 per cent of students gained grades A to C; both percentages were above the national averages. Pass rates in biology courses ranged from 14 per cent to 83 per cent. GCSE results were below the national average in most areas. High pass rates were achieved for both the BTEC national and the higher national certificate in computer studies. GCE A level results for mathematics varied; GCSE results were poor with only 15 per cent of 16 to 18 year olds achieving grades A to C. Pass rates at grades A to C were higher for students over

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the age of 19 but still below the national average for general further education colleges.

61 Construction students often work well, individually and in groups. The technical content and presentation of some of their assignments is not as good as it might be. Some lapses in safety need to be addressed, including the failure to wear goggles while cutting bricks. All part-time students taking the BTEC certificate in civil engineering achieved the award but most pass rates in construction were poor.

62 Engineering students are developing relevant skills and expertise. They handle equipment and tools competently and confidently. Examination pass rates were mixed. Those for the engineering training authority courses were good: all students passed at technician level and 82 per cent at craft level. Some students found difficulty with the mathematics content of GNVQ engineering courses.

63 Business administration students work purposefully and effectively to produce work of a high standard. Pass rates are high compared with national averages. In 1995, there were outstanding results in shorthand. Business studies students are developing good information technology skills although, in a few cases, they are not making full use of the available facilities. Some part-time courses, particularly the Association of Accounting Technicians courses, have high retention and pass rates. The pass rate on the BTEC national diploma in business and finance has been over 87 per cent for the last three years. In 1995, the pass rate for the higher national certificate in business and finance was 90 per cent. Pass rates in two of the seven GNVQ external tests were low; some students had repeatedly taken the tests without success.

64 Hotel and catering students work well in teams and achieve good standards in practical sessions. Careful attention is paid to safety. Students' work on the higher national certificate in institutional management is of a high standard. Pass rates in hotel and catering are uneven; those for NVQ level 2 in food services and reception are low. Retention rates on the GNVQ hospitality and catering course are poor. On some courses students have achieved high pass rates and retention rates are good. For example, all students taking the BTEC national diploma in hotel and catering passed their examination and there has been a pass rate of over 90 per cent for the last three years on the BTEC national diploma in leisure, travel and tourism. The majority of students who study through the franchised course provision achieve their unit assessments at the first attempt and their primary learning goal within predetermined target timescales, although adjustments have had to be made to the time required for the achievement of the NVQ at level 2. Trainees display appropriate levels of skill in their work and work well both alone and as members of teams.

65 Students on childcare courses work well in groups. They carry out their work placement duties confidently at local day nurseries. Pass rates

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have been high for the last three years although retention rates have been modest on all but the National Nursery Examinations Board (NNEB) course. In contrast, on health and social care courses results in 1995 were poor in comparison with previous years. Many students failed to achieve the necessary core skills competence in information technology and many intermediate level students did not complete their courses. In 1994-95, 30 per cent of students from the first-year advanced course failed to progress to the second year. The pass rate on the GNVQ health and social care course was low, at 40 per cent, but students on the BTEC national diploma in health studies achieved a good pass rate of 88 per cent. The national diploma course also had a good retention rate of 80 per cent.

66 Students on art and design and performing arts courses, show a high level of commitment and desire to achieve. Performing arts students develop impressive team working and interpersonal skills. Students achieve appropriate standards and are generally able to work without supervision. The quality of typography in graphic design is modest, as is students' application of photography to design situations. In some applied design work, the determination to achieve the final product is sometimes at the expense of understanding the process. Examination results were generally in line with national averages, although results for GCE A level music have been poor in recent years. In 1995, GCE A level media studies had a pass rate of 96 per cent, which was above the national average; 57 per cent of students gained passes at grades A to C. All students taking BTEC national diploma courses in graphic design and photography achieved the qualification but retention rates were in the region of 60 per cent. Pass rates on the intermediate GNVQ in art and design (38 per cent) and GCE A level art (30 per cent) were poor. There were problems of unpunctuality and absenteeism in several areas.

67 English students' communication skills, both written and spoken, are generally well developed. Most students achieve excellent outcomes and develop well intellectually and socially. GCE A level results have been excellent for the last two years. In 1995, the pass rate was 96 per cent. Fifty-three per cent of students achieved grades A to C at GCSE, but there was a high drop-out rate. Students' achievements in the other humanities subjects varied substantially. In all but English and sociology, GCE A level results in humanities were below the national average. There is low attendance and poor retention on several humanities courses.

68 Most adult basic education students and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are only given the opportunity to achieve college-based certificates. Progression to more advanced provision is limited. For example, 76 students obtained a college certificate, but only 43 obtained a nationally recognised certificate. Many students have taken open college network accredited courses for the first time this year.

69 According to the data in the tables published by the Department for Education and Employment in 1995, the 263 students aged 16 to 18

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entered for GCE AS/A level examinations scored, on average, 3.6 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure.

70 The college is part of the Advanced Level Information System programme which predicts the expected GCE A level results from a student's GCSE entry score. In 1995, students achieved GCE A level results above those predicted in art, English literature and pure mathematics with statistics. In computing, mathematics and physics the results were below those expected. In all other subjects, results were in line with expectations. The added value scores for 1995 were not as high as for 1994.

71 Eighty-seven per cent of the 16 to 18 year-old students in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment's 1995 performance tables were successful. This places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure.

72 The percentage of full-time students completing their course has dropped for the second year in succession and now stands at 78 per cent. The college has identified a high proportion of withdrawals from GCSE and GNVQ intermediate programmes. It keeps extensive information on non-completion and tries to identify the reason for each withdrawal. Courses which have recorded a 100 per cent retention rate in the second year of study include the BTEC higher national diploma in business and finance, several BTEC national diplomas and the professional hospitality diploma.

73 There has been a significant increase in the number of college students progressing to higher education, from 281 in 1993-94 to 344 in 1994-95. The figure for 1994-95 represents 55 per cent of those who were eligible. It includes 47 per cent of the students completing GCE A level courses, 60 per cent of students on the foundation diploma in art and design, 46 per cent of all students passing BTEC national diploma courses and 27 per cent of those undertaking an access to higher education course. Twenty-three per cent of students completing their GCE A level courses, and 51 per cent of those studying the general GCSE programme, continued in further education.

74 In 1995, 287 students went directly to full-time employment. Students taking the NNEB course have been particularly successful in gaining employment; almost 90 per cent of the students took full-time jobs or progressed to higher education. The college has information on students' destinations which allows it to undertake useful analyses and to identify areas of concern. It has information on the destinations of 78 per cent of its students.

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## **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

75 The college charter was published in summer 1994 and reviewed by the senior management group in autumn 1995. All students are issued with a copy. The charter contains information about what students should expect when undertaking a course. It establishes standards, entitlements and provides contact names for employers and groups within the local community. Staff are aware of the commitments set out in the charter. The charter was one of only 20 further education charters to be highly commended by the minister for further and higher education.

76 The college's strategic plan contains a clear policy statement on quality. In addition, the college has a comprehensive statement on the mechanisms for translating this policy into action. The principal has taken personal responsibility for quality assurance over a two-year evolutionary period. The academic board quality subcommittee, chaired by the principal, sets policy and the senior management group has overall responsibility for its implementation. Ownership of quality is firmly based in the curriculum and administrative functional teams. A college quality facilitator is available to give guidance and support. The quality assurance procedures have been extended to include the college's extensive franchise operation. They are being effectively used to monitor this provision.

77 At the heart of the quality assurance system are the 'summer reviews' which cover both curriculum and administrative areas. These are prepared against a clear framework which identifies clients, defines standards, documents procedures and measures outcomes. Each team review leads to the creation of action plans and the implementation of these is monitored carefully. Generally, the summer reviews are of a high standard and are leading to evident improvements in the quality of provision. Nevertheless, the college has recognised that further work is necessary if they are to define clear quality standards for all areas of work. It plans to improve the consistency of documentation, including quality manuals. It is also developing a scheme of internal audit, to include inspections of curriculum and support areas.

78 The college is making systematic use of performance indicators, although it has yet to adopt the FEFC's six performance indicators. Summer review reports make use of data on examination results, retention and destinations. The senior management group monitors withdrawal rates. The college makes use of value added Advanced Level Information System data for GCE A level students. It has also undertaken a value-added analysis of students' achievements on GCSE and GNVQ intermediate courses. However, a detailed analysis of such surveys has yet to be undertaken. The college is actively involved in a national project, involving a range of colleges, which seeks to compare performance against financial considerations.

79 Programme area reviews for most areas were carried out in 1995. The reports incorporate information associated with quality, resources,

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curriculum design, internal and external assessment, and students' achievements. All reports contain action plans. They yield valuable information, but their lack of uniformity limits their use. Approximately 40 teachers, working in pairs, have undertaken mutual classroom observations for the last two years with the intention of improving teaching and sharing good practice. Quality control policies for the licensed trade franchised programmes are comprehensive and, although in some instances they are not always consistently followed, they are generally carried out effectively. More needs to be done by the college to satisfy itself that the quality and competency of the programmes are uniformly sound.

80 The college makes use of surveys of students' perceptions in many areas of its work. Three such surveys have been used over several years, covering student enquiries which have not led to enrolment, induction and individual curriculum areas. A comprehensive cross-college student survey was also undertaken in 1995. A survey of staff views on the performance of various internal services, including the performance of the senior management group, has also been undertaken. A variety of employers' surveys over the past two years has included a recent one about the European Social Fund. All the surveys have given valuable information to help in improving the quality of provision.

81 The college has a strong commitment to staff development and a clear policy is incorporated in the strategic plan. A staff-development plan has been agreed and is reviewed annually. The budget of £75,000 for course fees and travel expenses accounts for nearly 1 per cent of recurrent expenditure. A full-time director of staff development has been in post since 1992 and a teaching support co-ordinator from 1994. In July 1995, the college achieved Investor in People status. Preparation for this has provided a clear focus for improving staff-development procedures for all academic and support staff. Development procedures are clearly linked to annual review interviews for both full-time and part-time staff. A policy of continuous quality improvement has been adopted. The college has undertaken staff-development activities associated with quality assurance and plans to spread best practice for its next round of summer reviews. Information is collected from a needs analysis survey, from curriculum groups and through the staff-appraisal system. Individual staff-development needs are decided through the annual review interviews.

82 The senior management group evaluates the effectiveness of staff-development activities annually. Both in-house and external courses are thoroughly reviewed and the improvement of teachers' academic qualifications are monitored. Staff who have been on external courses sometimes make formal presentations to colleagues. The college has a systematic and comprehensive induction process for all new full-time staff, which includes a system of mentoring during their first year. Introductory teacher training is given where appropriate. Induction opportunities are available for new members of the corporation.



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83 The college has produced a self-assessment report for the last two years based on the headings set out in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Realistic strengths and weaknesses were identified in most areas. There were no specific cross-references to other supporting evidence or documents to qualify the judgments. Although no grades were awarded for each section, sufficient strengths and weaknesses were produced to suggest a grade. There was a fairly close match between the college's assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and the findings of the inspection team.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Staffing**

84 The college has well-qualified and experienced teachers who are effectively and efficiently deployed. They have embraced developments in the curriculum with enthusiasm. Of the 243 full-time equivalent teaching staff, 180 are full time. Fifty-five per cent of the full-time staff have first degrees or the equivalent, 27 per cent have a higher degree, and 82 per cent are teacher trained. About 25 per cent of staff are undertaking professional updating. The average length of service in the college is 6.3 years. Over 90 members of the teaching staff hold Training and Development Lead Body assessor awards, and a further 50 are working towards the award. A commendably high proportion of staff in business administration have gained the award. Only 14 staff hold the Training and Development Lead Body internal verifier award, although a further 51 staff are working towards its achievement. Progress towards the Training and Development Lead Body accreditation of prior learning award is slow within the vocational areas. Because of the significance of the accreditation of prior learning in some vocational areas, more emphasis needs to be placed on staff achieving appropriate qualifications. The industrial and commercial experience of some staff is becoming dated; for 70 per cent of the vocational staff it dates back more than five years. This issue, although recognised within the college, has yet to be addressed strategically as a college priority.

85 The senior management group comprises seven men and two women. At the next level, among team leaders, senior tutors and programme leaders, there are 18 women and 21 men. The college has established innovative mechanisms to monitor the utilisation of teaching staff. Course team leaders and other managers make requests for staff against the agreed programme. The effective deployment of staff is helped by an annually-updated directory containing subjects and courses which staff can teach effectively. Efficiency is carefully monitored against annual workloads. The system used is sophisticated and takes account of the complexity of the tasks undertaken. The utilisation of teaching staff for 1994-95 was 93.5 per cent. Early indications were that this would rise to 96.3 per cent in 1995-96. An advantage of the approach is that staff who

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were being under utilised could be identified and supported by a sensitive and largely successful redeployment scheme.

86 The 179 support staff are seen as integral to the successful development of the college. Sixty-three per cent are full time. Technical, administrative and clerical staff are competent, experienced and well managed. Twenty per cent of support staff are undertaking professional updating. The idea of auditing staff skills might usefully be extended to support staff. There are 61 full-time equivalent technicians across the college and these are generally well deployed but the level of support in business administration is limited. There is a need for further clarification of the criteria used for allocating technicians and their roles in relation to management information systems, central learning resources and specific programme areas. The college benefits from a low turnover of support staff, whose average length of service is six years.

### **Equipment/learning resources**

87 The director of physical resources has overall responsibility for all college equipment and resources. All equipment is available to any of the curriculum areas and this increases its use and flexibility. The college acknowledges that its three-year capital equipment strategy linked to the corporate plan has still to be fully implemented. A replacement policy linked to maintaining the asset value of the college has yet to be established, although detailed work is in hand. There are clear stages to the capital bidding cycle and ample opportunities for curriculum areas and other areas to make bids.

88 Since incorporation, over £450,000 has been allocated to improving information technology facilities, and these are now of high quality. The college has some 450 personal computers, 75 per cent of which are up to modern standards. Most of the machines are networked and supported, in the main, by laser printers. Students can use industry-standard software. Approximately 290 workstations are available for students' use, in addition to the four rooms of free-standing computers. Students' access to equipment is generally good, both in the information technology centre and the learning resource centre. The ratio of full-time equivalent students to computer workstations is 10:1. There are a few compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database titles for students to use. The college has produced detailed statistics of CD-ROM and software usage which will be of increasing value. An information technology strategy working party is looking at the curriculum implications of the Internet.

89 Equipment within curriculum areas is varied in its amount and quality, though there is much which is of high quality. Media studies students have access to an editing suite which meets professional standards. An innovative resource base has been created for psychology students and the college has invested in state-of-the-art digitised photographic imaging equipment. There are good hand tools for use in bricklaying and woodworking. Some very high-quality mathematics

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learning materials have been developed and licences to use the materials have been sold to many other organisations. The sharing of resources by business studies staff is an example of good practice which could usefully be adopted by other areas. There is pressure on ageing basic photographic equipment; sports equipment is inadequate for the increased student numbers; typewriters and typing room furniture are in a poor condition; and there is a shortage of sufficient modern motor vehicles for students' work. The audio-visual resources which attracted unfavourable comment from inspectors, have been considerably improved in recent months.

90 Learning resources and services in the college are an impressive feature of college provision. They are available at the main site and at two annexes. The central learning services is a collection of 10 separate subject-based centres or workshops, with a quiet area. The centres combine library resources with computing and study facilities. Across the three sites the learning material's collection comprises 52,000 books, 400 periodicals, 12,000 slides and 1,250 video cassettes. The bookstock is being updated at the rate of 4,000 items a year. In most subject areas inspected, the bookstock was adequate although in business studies and secretarial studies many texts were dated and higher level computing courses texts were inadequate. There is effective collaboration with the county library service in meeting the needs of art and design students. A wide range of other learning materials in over 20 subject areas is also available. During term time, staff provide adequate cover for the service points on each site. Of the 12 learning resources staff, six are professionally qualified. Opening hours are adequate and include two hours on Saturdays.

### **Accommodation**

91 The college's main site, situated near the town centre, comprises five blocks dating from 1939 to 1982, three of which interconnect. The oldest block, the Tenterbanks building, was recently listed. The newest block, the Whiteley building contains a refectory and a sports hall, which is used under a licence agreement by Staffordshire University. All other sites are within a mile radius of the main site. Art and design courses mainly occupy the Oval annexe, a group of buildings comprising a former school and converted houses. There are also three mobiles which are in a poor state of repair. Since incorporation, the college has occupied one wing and several rooms in the Chetwynd sixth form centre, run by the local authority. The ownership of the assets associated with the Chetwynd centre has yet to be agreed with the local authority.

92 The condition of the college buildings varies. Except for Tenterbanks, buildings on the main site are in a good state of repair, having benefited from considerable investment since incorporation. There are major problems in the Tenterbanks building; costly repairs to concrete cladding, sound proofing and re-roofing have been programmed for the summer of 1996 as part of a comprehensive three-year maintenance programme.

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Despite the many improvements, much of the internal accommodation is in a poor state of repair and decoration. Many rooms on all sites are drab, bare or noisy. This was confirmed by students' responses to a recent perception survey. The college has sound energy policies and tight controls over costs of utility and cleaning services.

93 The strategic plan recognises the need to modify and improve the accommodation, partly in response to changing client groups. An accommodation review was undertaken by consultants in 1994. A strategy was subsequently agreed for improving the quality and utilisation of the main site buildings and the Oval, and for the disposal of the mobile accommodation where possible.

94 Comprehensive space and room utilisation surveys have been undertaken since 1994 and targets have been set to improve the efficiency with which accommodation is used. Rooms are allocated centrally and major changes of use have been introduced on parts of the main site to make more effective use of the accommodation. For example, a large central learning resource area, a new central student services unit and a GNVQ information technology core skills area have been created. The latter was formerly an unused engineering workshop. The need to improve dust extraction in the carpentry and joinery workshop has been partly addressed. The refurbished and newer accommodation on the main site is clean and well maintained. Refectory facilities on the main sites are satisfactory but very limited elsewhere. Students have access to the sports facilities on the main site and are able to use the town's leisure centre by arrangement.

95 The teaching accommodation varies in size, layout and appropriateness. In some areas of work, such as science, health and childcare, catering and construction on the main site it matches course requirements well. Rooms are unsatisfactory for teaching some aspects of humanities, including history and politics. Access for wheelchair users is good on most of the main site. Room signing is generally adequate on the main site, except at Tenterbanks, where it is poor. The college is poorly served by public road signs. The college is considering how to overcome the acute problem of the lack of space for students to park cars.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

96 Stafford College is making good progress towards achieving the aims set out in its mission. The strengths of the college are:

- effective governance and management
- a good student charter
- a distinctive and flexible curriculum
- a continuous, multiple entry-point admissions service
- a good careers guidance service
- a good relationship between staff and students

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- a strong commitment to staff development
  - well qualified, experienced and competent staff
  - the major provision of franchised courses
  - strong links with the LEA
  - a good quality assurance process
  - high-quality central learning resource facilities
  - high-quality mathematics learning packs developed by staff.

97 If the college is to continue to strengthen its provision and raise standards, it should:

- improve the management information system to provide accurate and timely data
- review some staff roles and procedures
- improve the effectiveness of the tutorial system
- improve the standard of some accommodation
- develop more college advisory committees
- improve some examination pass rates
- develop accreditation of prior learning
- improve attention to health and safety in some areas.

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## FIGURES

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

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

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

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

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  - 5 Estimated Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

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  - 6 Estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

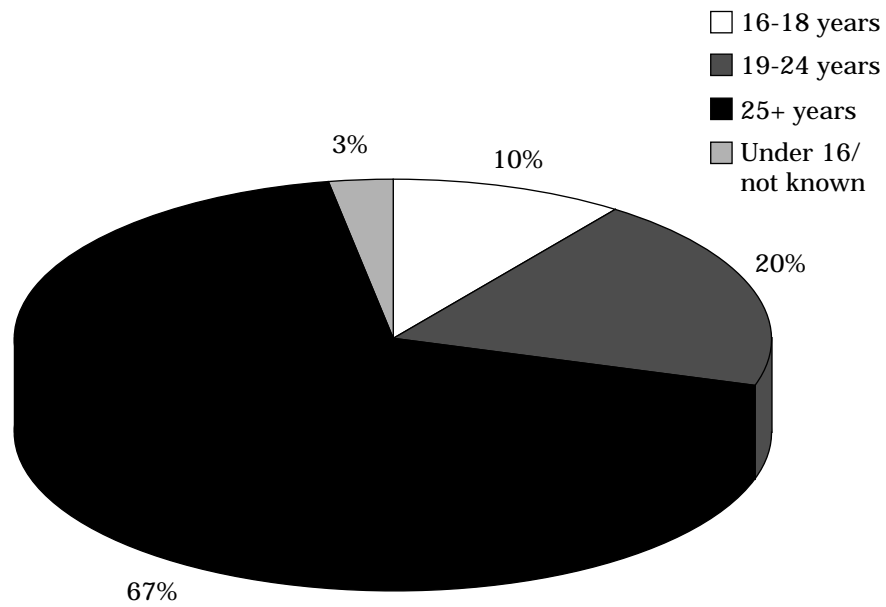
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**Figure 1**

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

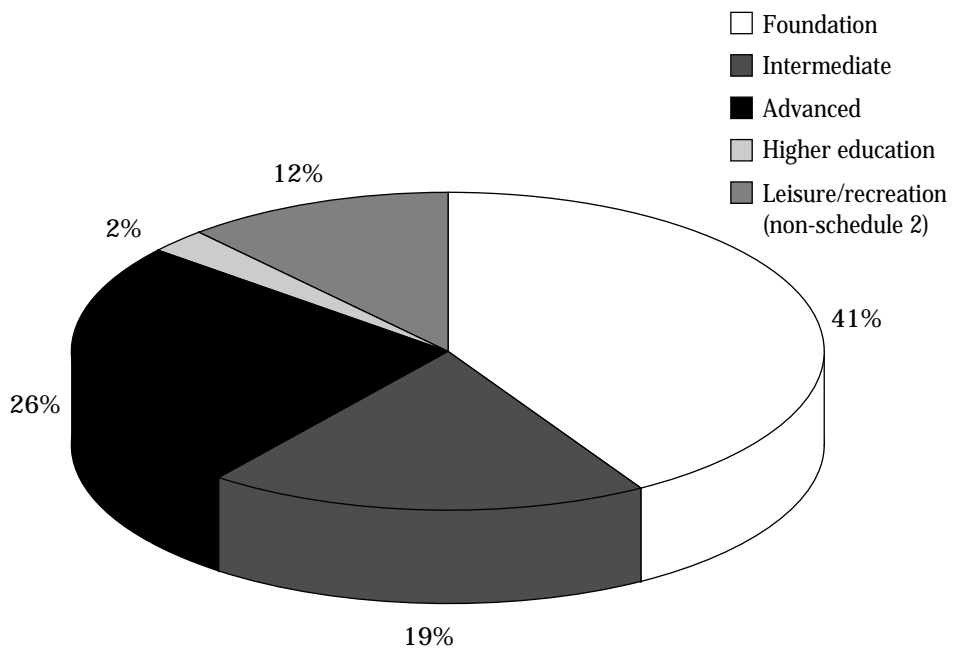


Student numbers: 32,100

**Figure 2**

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

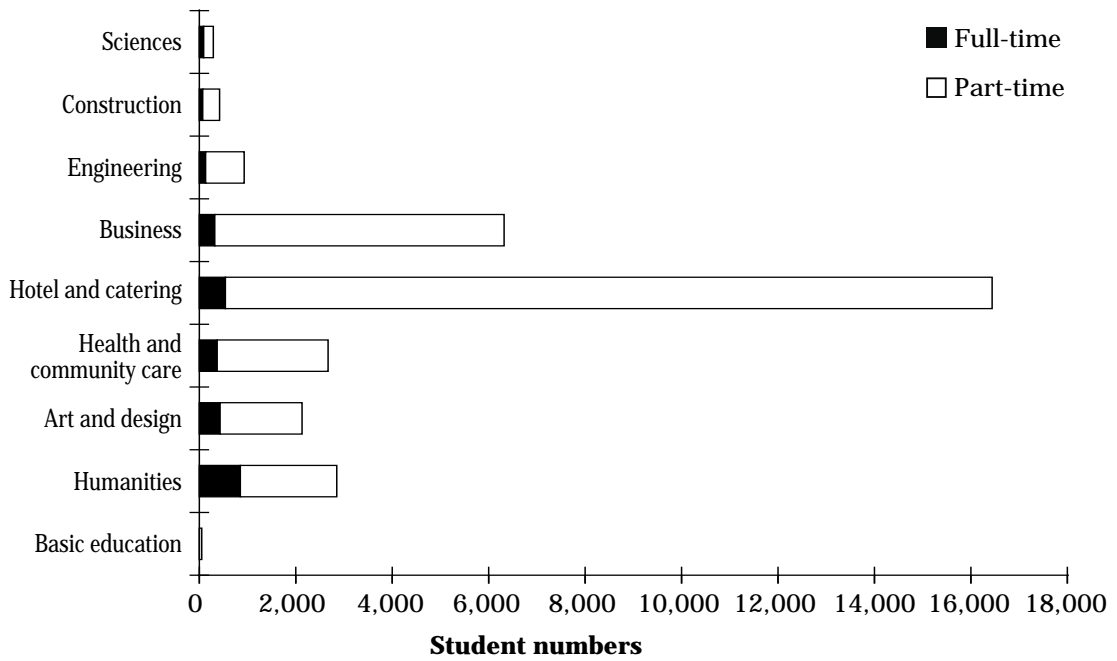


Student numbers: 32,100

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**Figure 3**

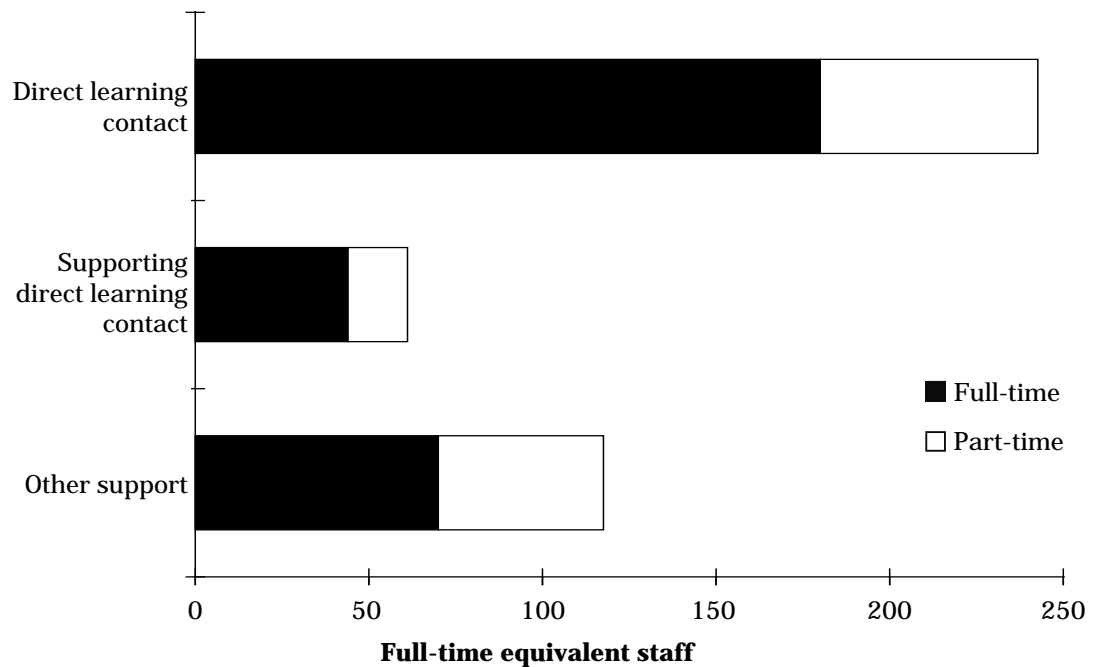
**Stafford College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1995-96)**



Student numbers: 32,100

**Figure 4**

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



Full-time equivalent staff: 421

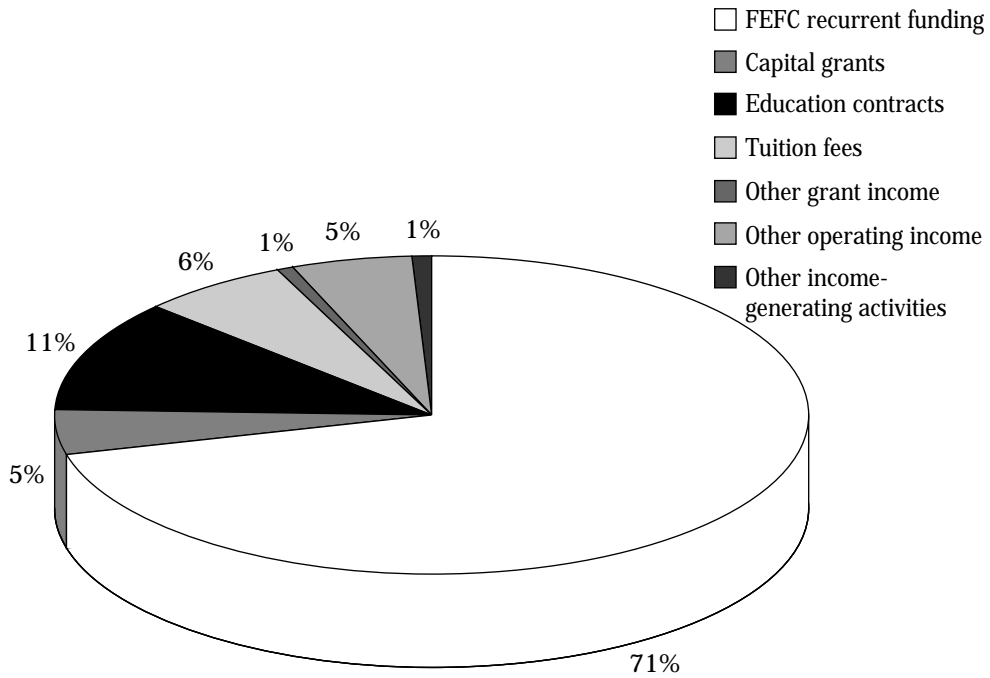


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**Figure 5**

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**Stafford College: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1996)**

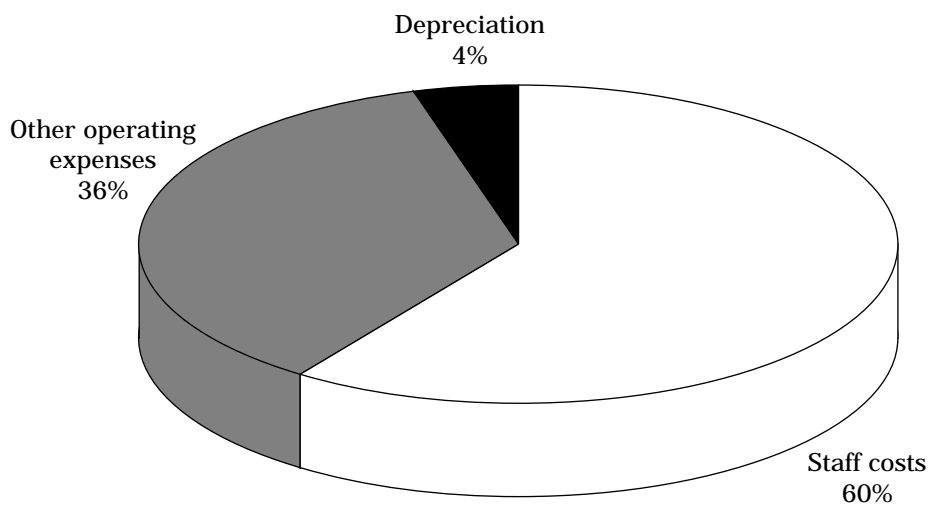


Estimated income: £14,388,000

**Figure 6**

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**Stafford College: estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)**



Estimated expenditure: £14,438,000

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