

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Stourbridge College

June 1994

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a statutory duty to ensure that there are satisfactory arrangements to assess the quality of provision in the further education sector. It discharges the duty in part through its inspectorate, which inspects and reports on each college in the sector every four years. The Council's inspectorate also assesses and reports on a national basis on specific curriculum areas and advises the Council's quality assessment committee.

College inspections involve both full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have specialist knowledge and experience in the areas they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member from outside the world of education and a nominated member of staff from the college being inspected.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are described in the Council Circular 93/28. In the course of inspecting colleges, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also summarise their judgements on the balance between strengths and weaknesses using a five-point scale. 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.*

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 42/94

STOURBRIDGE COLLEGE

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected September 1993 – March 1994

Summary

Stourbridge College in the West Midlands offers a broad range of courses which are responsive to local demands. It has a well-developed, effective schools liaison team and close operational links with Dudley Training and Enterprise Council. There are comprehensive policies relating to recruitment, guidance and equality of opportunity which are implemented and monitored. The quality of teaching and learning is generally good. The teaching staff are well qualified and experienced and there is a systematic approach to staff development. Of particular note is an established quality assurance system which has created extensive quality standards and specifications. Examination results in vocational courses are good. The college should improve the quality and reliability of the information technology provision for students across the college. Other areas for improvement are the support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on mainstream courses, effective diagnosis of students' learning needs and support for the development of basic literacy and mathematical skills, the low examination success rate in some GCSE and GCE A level subjects, and the tutorial system.

Grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics	4	Health & social care	2
Science	3		
Engineering	2	Art & design	3
Business, management, professional studies	3	Humanities	2
		Languages including ESOL	3
Leisure & tourism	3	Students with learning difficulties	3

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	4
Responsiveness and range of provision	10
Governance and management	21
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	31
Teaching and the promotion of learning	42
Students' achievements	51
Quality assurance	60
Resources	66
Conclusions and issues	74
Figures	

INTRODUCTION

1 Stourbridge College was inspected during Autumn 1993 and Spring 1994. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the beginning of the college autumn term. Specialist subject areas were inspected during the periods 8-10 December and 5-6 January 1994, and aspects of cross-college provision from 28 February to 3 March 1994. Five full-time and 12 part-time inspectors took part for a total of 67 inspector days.

2 The team inspected courses in business, management and professional studies, leisure and tourism, health and social care, engineering, mathematics, art and design, science, humanities, languages including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors visited 120 classes, examined samples of students' work, and held discussions with governors, staff and students. They also met local employers, parents, representatives of Dudley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and other representatives of the local community.

3 The inspection was carried out according to the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. The framework describes a four year cycle. When this cycle becomes fully established colleges will have the opportunity to respond to the findings of earlier inspection visits before their quadrennial inspection and the subsequent report. As the inspection of Stourbridge College occurred early in the cycle, the opportunity for such a response was not available.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

4 Stourbridge College in the West Midlands is a medium-size general further education college. It operates on five sites in the town of Stourbridge and has a horticultural unit in Halesowen. At the time of the inspection there were approximately 1,900 full-time equivalent students on roll. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2, respectively. The college had 242 full-time equivalent staff including 122 full-time teachers. A profile of staff, expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 3.

5 Stourbridge is situated in the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley on the south-west edge of the West Midlands. Manufacturing employment in the area is larger in proportion than the national average but has been declining rapidly. Many large employers were lost in the 1980s recession. There are few large employers other than the local council. There has been a steady growth in service industries.

6 Neither the local manufacturing sector nor the services sector suffer from a shortage of relevantly-skilled labour. Many employees with higher level skills travel out of the area to work. Few of the unemployed, available for work, are skilled or qualified in the areas most likely to be demanded by local employers if there is a growth in the local economy. There is no strong tradition of training amongst local employers.

7 Dudley borough has a low rate of participation in full-time education post-16, although numbers are rising rapidly. In 1991, 47 per cent of Dudley school leavers continued in full-time education. This rose to 55 per cent in 1992 and to about 60 per cent in 1993. The rate is still below the national average rate which rose from 60 per cent to about 70 per cent over the same period.

8 As well as serving students from the local communities, the college takes a significant number of students from neighbouring districts and from the commuter villages of north Worcestershire and south Staffordshire. The one school in the borough which has a sixth form is small and some distance from the college. Schools from outside Dudley account for nearly one quarter of the college's full-time recruitment. There are three other further education colleges in the area, although all are different in character from Stourbridge College. The proportion of 16 year olds recruited has risen over the last three years.

9 The college in its mission aims to meet local demands and raise expectations for learning. It plans to increase the scale, and to a lesser extent the range of its provision and to improve the quality and flexibility of existing services. The strategic priorities of the college are to:

- satisfy the personal educational demands of learners
- raise standards of achievement
- be accessible to all who are entitled and able to benefit from its service
- attract new participants
- contribute to the local economy and also more widely
- excel in its fields of study
- use resources to maximum effect to achieve its goals.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

10 The college has a good range of full-time and part-time vocational and general education programmes. Recent curricular developments include the international baccalaureate and a national diploma in urban environment conservation. Full-time equivalent enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 4.

11 There is a schools liaison team which has been effective in increasing recruitment from local schools. The college share of school leavers has increased from 19 per cent in 1991 to 38 per cent in 1993. During the year, the college organises 'taster days' in many of its vocational sectors to assist school leavers in making their choices.

12 Two of the stated objectives in the strategic plan are to provide open access and equality of opportunity. The principal takes a strong lead in both these areas. There is a sound equal opportunities policy, which includes procedures for its monitoring, and an equal opportunities working

party. All staff receive a copy of the policy in their handbook. Quality characteristics, standards and measures for equal opportunities appear in the college's quality assurance system.

13 The college has carried out a thorough analysis of its students by age, ethnicity, gender and course. It has also identified the areas of its provision which have not recruited adults or students from ethnic minority backgrounds and it plans to focus recruitment on these areas. The work provides a good example of the constructive use of management information.

14 The college has done much to encourage women to study in areas where they are traditionally under represented. The proportion of females on full-time engineering courses is above national norms; there are popular day-release technical courses for women only, and students on the women-returners course are encouraged to study technological subjects. Open-learning business courses are popular among Asian women. One initiative involves a group of mainly Asian women who are undertaking training in garment manufacturing on a recently-accredited National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) course. The college has established a centre and a trading company in Lye in order to respond to community demands for work-based training. There has been further penetration into educationally underprivileged areas in the locality through the establishment of community networks. The college has a thriving nursery which is also available to non-students. Some adults attend college on full-time access to higher education courses but most attend on a part-time or evening basis.

15 The co-ordinator for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has established a cross-agency steering committee which assists in developing and supporting the arrangements for part-time students with severe learning difficulties who attend, in the main, from social education centres. The co-ordinator has encouraged college sections to provide opportunities for these students. As a result, brickwork, painting and decorating, plumbing, business and administration, caring and engineering are involved in contributing to the specialist provision. There are good links with social services for specialist part-time courses for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, only 12 students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were following mainstream courses. Many of the college buildings are unsuitable for wheelchair users, but the college is able to accommodate other students with disabilities.

16 There are good relationships with employers. Most, but not all, sectors have a thriving employer consultative committee and there are particularly effective links in the business administration, management and professional sectors. The college is developing a business liaison team and a supporting computerised employer database to improve co-ordination. In 1990, it surveyed a stratified sample of 100 local

companies and received a 44 per cent response. There was general satisfaction with the curriculum offered by the college but many of the respondents suggested a longer working year and more short courses.

17 The links with employers include arrangements for work placements. Most students on full-time courses undertake work experience. Some of the college sections make clear to students and providers the precise task to be completed during work experience. Full-cost work in the sectors of engineering, horticulture and management is increasing, some of it developed through the business enterprise centre.

18 There are close links with Dudley TEC. These have resulted in a variety of TEC-funded initiatives, including the promotion of the Investors in People scheme, accreditation of staff under the management charter initiative, and support for adult guidance and the accreditation of prior learning.

19 Staff at all levels are aware of the government's policy for national education and training and targets. The college is an accredited centre for NVQs in three sectors. There are General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) courses in business studies at intermediate and advanced level and staff development has taken place as part of their planned introduction in most other sectors. There are compacts with The University of Central England in Birmingham and Wolverhampton University, and access links with Worcester College of Higher Education.

20 The college has a reasonable marketing budget for a college of its size. The marketing plan is effectively focused on various client groups. There is a comprehensive summer promotional schedule. Research into postal codes, and the timing of enrolments has produced useful data about the effectiveness of advertising media and has influenced policy.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

21 Membership of the college governing body represents a range of business and community interests. The 15 members include seven who have an industrial and commercial background, three community representatives, two college staff, a college student and the principal. At the time of the inspection there was a vacancy for a business member. The governing body has four scheduled meetings a year. Other meetings are convened as necessary. There is an appropriate range of subcommittees. Meetings are usually well attended although one recent meeting of the governing body had to be adjourned because the business members present were below the number required.

22 The governors are committed and supportive. They use their expertise in financial, commercial and community matters to assist the college. Governors were closely involved in the process of drawing up the college mission statement and used their specialist knowledge to help formulate some aspects of the strategic plan. Their first priorities have been to make a success of incorporation and to ensure the financial stability

of the college. They have taken an interest in the performance indicators developed by the college but have yet to establish indicators to measure their own performance. A member of the governing body serves on the college equal opportunities group. There have been few other contacts between members of the governing body and college staff.

23 The principal has a clear vision for the college and provides strong leadership. The strategic plan has clearly stated corporate objectives which emphasise improvements in the quality and flexibility of the service. College policies on equal opportunities, health and safety and student support are well documented and supported by relevant cross-college groups.

24 The management structure of the college has recently been revised. The new management team consists of the principal, deputy principal, two vice-principals and four assistant principals. Each member of the team has a lead role in some aspects of management but, in practice, much of the responsibility is shared. There are 15 staff with responsibility for the co-ordination of a range of cross-college technical support and specialist services. There are eight cross-college management groups which are co-ordinated by the management team to act as a forum for generating ideas and for decision-making. A number of other management and advisory groups exist, operating under the aegis of the college management team or the academic board. While this large number of cross-college groups supports a high level of developmental activity, meetings make considerable demands on the time of some staff, particularly at senior and middle management level.

25 Most staff appear to understand the new management structure. Many value the opportunities it has created for greater participation and more rapid decision-making. However, some staff, who are not members of the management groups, feel remote from the consultative and decision-making process. The organisation of teaching departments has changed over a period of some 12 months. There are now 11 sections, each led by one or more section heads. The section heads report to a designated member of the management team for day-to-day operational purposes. They also choose from that team a manager who is responsible for their appraisal and developmental support. A number of section heads do not yet fully understand the implications and responsibilities of their new role. Some sections operate effectively as a team and have departmental plans which reflect the overall aims and objectives embodied in the college strategic plan; others lack a sense of corporate identity and direction.

26 All staff receive a handbook containing major policy statements and details of procedures to be followed. The principal prepares and circulates widely a digest of the minutes of significant cross-college team meetings. Considerable reliance is placed on oral communication of the proceedings of various college and course team meetings. This is not always effective, particularly for staff who are not members of those meetings or who are

unable to attend because of other commitments. The management team has recently assigned to one of the vice-principals responsibility for improving the effectiveness and openness of internal communications.

27 Good use is made of management information in the planning and monitoring of enrolments. Staffing and finance are carefully allocated in accordance with the objectives of the strategic plan. Expenditure is monitored regularly by senior management and reasons sought for any significant departure from plans. There are some inefficiencies in the allocation of accommodation arising from the lack of an effective centralised timetabling and room allocation system. Some work has been undertaken on calculating unit costs but this is still at an early stage of development.

28 In 1992-93, the college's unit of funding for each full-time equivalent student was £2,490. The median for general and further education colleges was £2,444. Summaries of the college's recurrent income and estimated expenditure are shown in figures 5 and 6.

29 The college management information system is technically of a high standard. There is staff expertise to produce reports on demand. There is a good enrolment system using bar coded labels and an optical mark reader register system. Registers can be produced automatically and attendance information collected rapidly. There is little duplication of data input and databases are used imaginatively to produce course lists and the prospectus. There are sufficient staff to undertake the data input activities associated with pre-enrolment and enrolment. Destination and examination results are produced for publication. The system is used to provide regular reports on retention rates and section heads are asked to investigate in detail any withdrawal rates significantly above the college average.

30 Although the system can produce data on a variety of topics, in practice little information appears to flow to course leaders and other staff. For example, attendance data are not conveyed to course teachers and there are problems in determining attendance patterns of students from the system despite the effort taken in collecting the register data. Some staff development has taken place and a survey of staff requirements for management information has been undertaken but the level of response was disappointing. Insufficient information has been conveyed to the teaching staff to allow them to make informed judgments about the data they require from the college information system in order to use it effectively.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

31 The information provided for students is clear and concise. There are policy statements on recruitment, induction and personal tutoring. The procedures for the application, selection and enrolment of students are well planned, and supported by good documentation and specifications

for quality improvement. There are also clear procedures for accreditation of prior learning, assessing basic skills, and counselling and guidance.

32 As part of the effective liaison with schools, college staff visit schools to talk about the college's courses, and pupils subsequently visit the college and attend sample lessons. The college funds and sustains a link course with a local special school and this enables its students to have an insight into life at college and college staff to make an early assessment of their learning needs.

33 There is no coherent strategy for the development of learning support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on mainstream courses and no staff development to improve the quality of this support.

34 All potential full-time students have an initial careers advice and guidance session before their interview. The recently-opened advice centre in Church Street provides an information, careers and guidance service, and this is supplemented by annual parents' evenings and regular talks for students. Students particularly valued the careers activities arranged for specific subject areas. Two thirds of enquiries were for advice on higher education. There should be more encouragement for other students to use the careers services available. The college has a contract with the local TEC to carry out accreditation of prior learning. Additional careers support is provided by careers service staff who attend the centre two or three days a week depending on the demand. Advice and counselling is also provided to students on social security benefits, finance, and accommodation. The centre is a little distant from the largest site of the college and this may partially account for the fact that the counselling service is currently under used.

35 A number of students on leisure courses had expectations that their courses would have a greater sports bias than was in fact the case. The college is aware of this and plans to change future recruitment information. Some students with more severe forms of learning difficulty and/or disability following separate specialist courses were unclear about the particular course they were joining. These students receive an initial outline assessment of learning difficulties, but there are no formal arrangements with external support services such as educational psychology. The college uses its college information system to fulfil its duty under the Disabled Persons' Act 1986 to inform the local social services department of students with disabilities leaving full-time courses.

36 All full-time students take part in an induction programme which varies in duration and style according to the course for which they have enrolled. There are very helpful and comprehensive handbooks for both students and tutors, although few advised students of their rights and responsibilities. The student induction material contains information on assessment and marking. Induction is led by personal tutors who encourage students to make use of the basic skills workshops. Staff teaching students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have their own induction handbook. Part-time students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities following specialist courses were the only part-time

and/or disabilities following specialist courses were the only part-time students to receive an extensive programme of induction. The procedure for students to transfer to other programmes is well documented and includes an optional interview with a careers' adviser. In practice, however, students remained unclear about the actions they should take and few consulted the careers' adviser.

37 All full-time students have tutorials. Tutorial packs are issued to all staff, but they are not widely used and overall tutorial practice is inconsistent. The college has set up a tutorial working group aimed at improving provision. Students on separate specialist courses for learning difficulties and/or disabilities should also have a personal tutor so that their college co-ordinator is not over-burdened. There is no formal support for other part-time students. Despite these shortcomings, students spoke warmly of the support provided by individual teachers and tutors.

38 All full-time students are expected to maintain records of achievement. The use of records is evident among students in their first year, but less so subsequently. On some courses, students have the opportunity to undertake an outward bound course. There is also a pilot scheme offering some sporting activities to leisure and art and design students.

39 The college has a firm policy about absence from courses which is stated in the student handbook. However, teachers and tutors are less than systematic in following up absences.

40 A survey has revealed that a significant number of students have major weaknesses in literacy and numeracy. A planned foundation course may provide increased opportunities for some students to develop basic core skills. The learning workshop provides a welcoming environment for students with basic skills needs. Each student attending the workshop has an individual plan. Records of progress are efficiently kept. However, the workshop can become overcrowded, especially when occupied by a whole teaching group, and resources, particularly reading materials, are limited. Care should be taken to ensure that all staff involved in the workshop are fully trained in the teaching of basic skills. The support system for mathematics includes a pilot survey of mathematical achievement of students on entry, a mathematics unit, and the beginnings of a scheme under which selected students work on individual programmes which have clearly-defined targets. These initiatives will need expansion if a fully effective diagnostic and support service is to be established. The work will have to be effectively co-ordinated with the numeracy work carried out in the learning workshop. There is a recently-established drop-in workshop facility for modern foreign language students which is currently restricted to small numbers.

41 Each of the elements of learning support within the college has a different team manager within senior management. As a consequence, it is difficult to develop a coherent and comprehensive strategy for learning support.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

42 Thirty-eight per cent of the 120 teaching and learning sessions inspected had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses. In a further 44 per cent the strengths and weaknesses were balanced. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE A/AS level		2	10	13	3	1	29
GCSE		1	3	3	0	0	7
BTEC		1	13	18	9	0	41
GNVQ		0	1	7	4	1	13
NVQ		0	2	2	1	0	5
Other		1	12	10	2	0	25
Total		5	41	53	19	2	120

43 There were well-planned and coherent programmes in many of the curriculum areas. Lecturers had a good command of their subject and relationships between staff and students were generally good. Effective teaching and learning sessions were seen in all subjects. They were carefully organised, the work was challenging and the teaching supportive. Students had a clear idea of what they had to achieve; lecturers used a range of appropriate methods and the work was well matched to the skills and experience of the students. In business studies, engineering, humanities and social care, more than half the sessions had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses. The quality of some sessions in engineering and humanities was outstanding.

44 There were detailed schemes of work in most, but not all, subject areas. Where they were lacking, there were inconsistencies both in the quality of teaching and the amount and quality of work produced by students. In some teaching sessions, there was a failure to match the work to the needs of individual students. This was particularly the case in GCSE mathematics classes where many students who were resitting the examination required, but did not receive, the kind of teaching which would have given them fresh motivation.

45 In vocational sessions, theory and practical work were sensibly related. In a Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) first diploma engineering session a design and construct assignment was outstandingly successful in drawing together several aspects of the curriculum and showing students how progress is made from an initial idea. Starting with a concept, the project progressed through the design stage to the manufacture and testing of a working engineering assembly.

The students were thoroughly involved in the task, working both individually and in teams with great enthusiasm.

46 In humanities, there were high standards of teaching in the majority of classes. For example, in a first-year GCE advanced level law session on the concept of 'pressure groups', the tutor provided good quality hand-outs, employed the overhead projector to focus attention on key points and made sensitive use of students' contributions. The students examined the process of constructing and justifying an argument even though the argument was not one with which they necessarily agreed. The processes involved in the session were themselves an important means of exploring the concept of legal advocacy.

47 In some less successful sessions, time was wasted. There was unnecessary copying of notes in an engineering session and in several science sessions. Work in a few humanities, modern languages, science and social care classes lacked challenge and was of a poor standard. In the more successful art and design sessions good use was made of a standardised teaching brief. In others, students worked without understanding the purpose and requirements of the exercise and without appropriate support from the lecturer, the pace of learning was slow and the tasks lacked rigour. Some of the sessions in business management administration and modern languages relied too heavily on lecturer input and direction. The teaching in mathematics lacked imagination. Teachers used a limited range of methods and the learning environments offered little to stimulate the interests of students.

48 Lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were generally well prepared. Lecturers used flexible and imaginative approaches and the resource materials were adequate. There was a commitment to develop externally-validated courses, and NVQ records of practical competencies achieved by these students were generally well maintained. However, there was little opportunity for progression from specialist courses to other mainstream courses and there were no links with local work experience providers. A coherent strategy of cross-college support for mainstream students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has yet to be developed.

49 Many of the assignments set for students were imaginative and suitably challenging. There were some excellent examples in health and social care. However, significant numbers of assignments, in several subjects were insufficiently demanding. There were no guidelines on content and presentation, on the policy for grading or the weighting to be given to specialist grammar and punctuation. Most assignments and projects were marked conscientiously and there were many examples of constructive and helpful written comments from teachers. Students reported that assignments were usually returned to them within an acceptable time-scale.

50 Assessment and review designed for students with severe learning difficulties were well developed and the results of college activity fed into the social services department's individual programme plans for service users.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

51 College students were generally enthusiastic about their courses, particularly so in conservation and engineering courses. In art and design, few students conveyed any real sense of excitement about their studies.

52 A high percentage of students found the group work in their course useful, and effective team-working skills were developed in art and design, engineering and in some humanities areas. There was little structured pair or group work in modern foreign languages.

53 Many students have weaknesses in basic skills including note-taking. On some GCE courses, essay writing skills are not sufficiently developed. Students do not always take advantage of the help available in the learning workshop.

54 On most programmes, information technology is not sufficiently well developed to allow students to integrate the technology into their work. There was appropriate use of information technology in business courses, but not in mathematics or science. Some students in art and design have not received an effective introduction to specialist information technology applications, primarily owing to the lack of modern software and hardware and to timetabling arrangements which meant that students had to share machines and were unable to develop individual keyboard skills. Research, using the CD-ROM facilities in the library, was underdeveloped.

55 Students' levels of understanding and commitment were generally appropriate. In many areas, including business, management and professional studies, engineering and humanities, students achieved good standards in relation to their ability. Access students' standards of work in science and mathematics were also good.

56 The college does not offer full-time GCSE courses except as part of other programmes which students are following. In 1993, only 13 per cent of the students aged 16-18 years achieved passes in mathematics at grades A-C compared with a national average of 27 per cent. The 53 per cent pass rate, grades A-C, in English was close to the national average for all students and better than the average of 46 per cent for general further education and tertiary colleges. Entries in other subject areas were small and results for 16-18 year old students in most cases were modest. Results at 19+ were generally better. Students, aged 16-18, achieved a 9 per cent pass rate at grades A-C in human biology; for students aged 19+ the rate was 43 per cent.

57 The performance of 19+ candidates was also better than that of 16-18 year olds at GCE A level. The average points score of the 48 full-time students aged 16-18 entered for two or more GCE A levels (where

A=10, E=2) was 7 whereas the 11 full-time students aged 19+ had an average points score of 15. The 65 full-time GCE A level students achieved a pass rate of just under 50 per cent compared with a national average of 66 per cent for sector colleges excluding sixth form colleges. The corresponding rates for 1992 and 1991 were 67 per cent and 58 per cent, respectively. In 1993, all full-time students in economics, art and design, law, physics and sociology passed their examinations and English students achieved a 93.3 per cent pass rate. These figures are well above the national averages for the respective subjects. In contrast, smaller numbers of students taking science and modern languages have achieved consistently poor results over the last three years. In 1993, the overall GCE A level pass rate in all subjects at higher grades, A or B was just over 16 per cent. In comparison, the national average was 30 per cent. In some, but not all cases, examination results are a reflection of students' modest attainments on entry. It is questionable whether students always receive the most appropriate advice on courses to study when they first enter college.

58 There are many examples of high achievement in vocational areas. In 1993, 88 per cent of the 209 in their final year of study for BTEC national diplomas achieved the award, placing the college's performance just outside the top third of institutions within the sector. Out of 108 full-time students aged 16-18 enrolled on intermediate, level 2 courses, 95 gained a pass. Results for the small number of part-time students and students aged 19+ were very good. On advanced, level 3 courses, all 42 part-time students, 182 out of the 203 full-time students aged 16-18, and 58 out of the 64 students aged 19+ gained their awards. All students aged 16-18, enrolled on NVQ level 1 and level 2 courses gained awards, as did the majority of the 196 students aged 19+. At level 3 only 27 out of the 44 students enrolled gained an award. In business, management and administration results were, with few exceptions, good. In engineering, art and design, and English for speakers of other languages, results were satisfactory. In modern languages, at all levels, the results in examinations validated by the Royal Society of Arts were good.

59 Detailed information is available on student retention rates. In general, the rates are high. The college is now analysing changes in enrolments on a term-by-term basis. The drop-out rate between 1 November 1993 and February 1994 was 6.8 per cent. Destination statistics are similarly well monitored and show that, overall, a high proportion of students progress to higher level courses or to employment. All the BTEC first students who gained awards in design and engineering continued in further education. All the BTEC national students who gained awards in three-dimensional design or nursery nursing proceeded to jobs or to higher education. Overall, 91 per cent of BTEC first students continued in further education. Ninety-one per cent of successful GCE A level students and 84 per cent of BTEC national students progressed to employment or to further study. Of the successful students at GCE A level and BTEC national, 57 per cent entered higher education.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

60 The college's quality strategy is well defined. Within this framework, the college has developed quality characteristics, standards, and measures. The quality system is well established within the college and has developed strongly over a period of several years though it is acknowledged that there is still further work to be done.

61 The college principal has initiated and strongly championed the approach to quality within the college. He ensures the maintenance of the system, monitors the shifting balance of its strengths and weaknesses and takes action when it is needed. Although the system is strongly led from the top, large numbers of staff have been involved in quality assurance at various times, though there continues to be some who play little part in its operation.

62 An extensive and extremely impressive set of quality standards has been created. At present there are 30 specifications each containing a collection of standards, covering such matters as admission interviews, caring courses, course review and evaluation, course management, enquiries and reception services, and tutorials. Many of the standards, for example, targets for success in examinations and for student progression, are defined in measurable terms and are monitored statistically. The college is at an advanced stage of developing its own charter.

63 Each standard has a reviewer and a date by which reviews are due. The reviews are reported to the quality improvement committee and issues of general concern are taken to the college management committee. Quality is also monitored, and improvement plans are devised, through well-developed course review and evaluation procedures which cover all full-time courses. The relation between the quality standard system and the course review process should be examined in order to prevent unnecessary duplication.

64 Useful and reliable statistics on students' achievements, destinations and withdrawals of students are collected and discussed in course reviews, but the college does not have a composite quality report covering key quality indicators, student perceptions, quality issues from course reviews, and findings from the quality standards reviews. Analysis of trends in each of these elements could be undertaken in more depth. Student perception data have yet to be gathered and analysed regularly and systematically. The college should consider how it could best publish and distribute some of the rich data it possesses on the quality of the service it provides.

65 There is a strong commitment to staff development. The college is working towards the Investors in People award and development plans for individual staff are emerging from the process of staff appraisal. Priorities for staff development do not simply come from the top but emerge from a number of sources including the appraisal process itself. So far, there has

not been an effective measure of the impact of staff development on the college.

RESOURCES

Staffing

66 Most managers and staff do not have job descriptions, but their roles and responsibilities are clarified through a comprehensive appraisal system which is currently being implemented. This provides an analysis of staff training needs. There is a systematic staff-development programme and managers are currently using the management charter initiative as part of their development.

67 The majority of staff are suitably qualified and have relevant industrial or other experience. Eighty-five per cent of salaried and many of the part-time teachers have a teaching qualification. One third of all teaching staff have 10 or more years service. The library is under the management of a professional librarian. The college implements its equal opportunities policy in selecting and recruiting staff.

68 Staffing levels are adequate. Technician support in most areas is satisfactory and makes a creative contribution to the learning. However, there are insufficient information technology technician staff to cope with the unreliable equipment and the number of sites. This results in significant numbers of machines remaining broken and in academic staff having to maintain printers and software on remote sites.

Equipment/learning resources

69 The college is well equipped in most areas of work, and there is a range of well-maintained and readily-accessible teaching aids. The practical classes in the print shop support the college in the production of many of its materials. Workshops are well laid out, the equipment is of high standard and students are well trained in the proper use and care of equipment. Students in the art and design areas are less disciplined in their use of equipment. Leisure and tourism courses are under-equipped and operate in uninspiring surroundings.

70 The college-wide provision of information technology is unsatisfactory. The majority of the computers are old, unreliable and incapable of running up-to-date software. They are adversely affecting students' learning. There are insufficient computers within the college to allow students to complete assignment work in their spare time. The few high-specification machines are located in classrooms which are sometimes locked and sometimes used for teaching purposes not related to the use of such technology. There are few machines located in staff rooms to help staff.

Accommodation

71 The quality and provision of accommodation vary significantly at each of the college's locations. The Church Street and main Hagley Road sites have many good facilities, including welcoming and well-organised main reception areas. The Longlands Centre is a former school and the buildings vary in quality. Whilst most of this site has recently been refurbished, some of the remaining areas do not provide attractive areas for learning. The fabric of the buildings at the Longlands occasionally suffers from vandalism associated with public access through this site. The horticultural unit has good glasshouse and outdoor facilities.

72 Teachers have suitable work rooms. The refectory facilities are adequate, but there is a shortage of common areas for students on some sites. Most of the trade workshops are well maintained and reflect good industrial practice. The leisure and tourism and art and design areas are below this standard. Many information technology rooms are untidy and contain broken equipment. In several of the information technology rooms, the layout of the furniture is inappropriate and benches have been built at the wrong height for correct keyboard use.

73 An adequate budget supports good library and learning resource facilities. As group work continues to develop, facilities for students to work together in the library are reaching capacity and there is a shortage of study places. There is a pleasant nursery in the main building which is expanding into self-contained accommodation. The general cleanliness of some parts of the college is poor but a new cleaning contract has recently been negotiated and this is expected to improve the standard. Students have access to several off-site facilities, notably the Crystal Leisure Centre.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

74 The college is making good progress towards the achievement of its strategic priorities. Particular strengths of the college are:

- a range of courses which meets demands
- close operational links with Dudley Training and Enterprise Council, higher education institutions and some employers
- an established quality system with an extensive range of quality standards and specifications
- a well-developed and effective schools liaison team
- the generally good quality of teaching and learning
- the implementation and monitoring of comprehensive college policies relating to recruitment, guidance and equality of opportunity
- good levels of achievement on vocational courses
- a systematic approach to staff development.

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

- the inadequate provision for information technology across the college
- the introduction of more effective diagnosis and support for the development of basic literacy and mathematics
- the development of a coherent strategy for supporting students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on mainstream courses
- weak results in some GCSE and GCE A level subjects
- the effectiveness of the tutorial system.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)

 - 3 Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)

 - 4 Enrolments expressed as full-time equivalents by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)

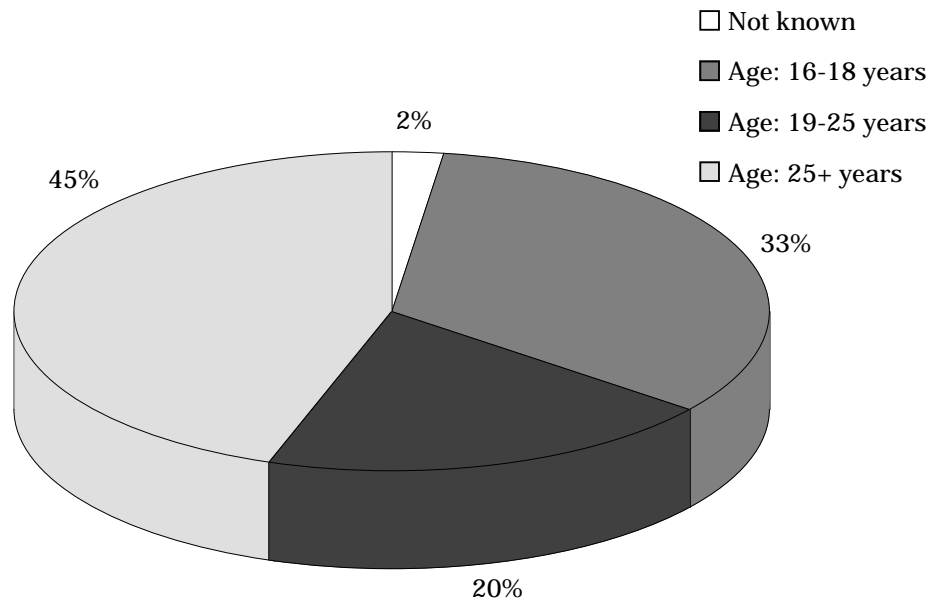
 - 5 Estimated income (1993-94)

 - 6 Estimated expenditure (1993-94)

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

Figure 1

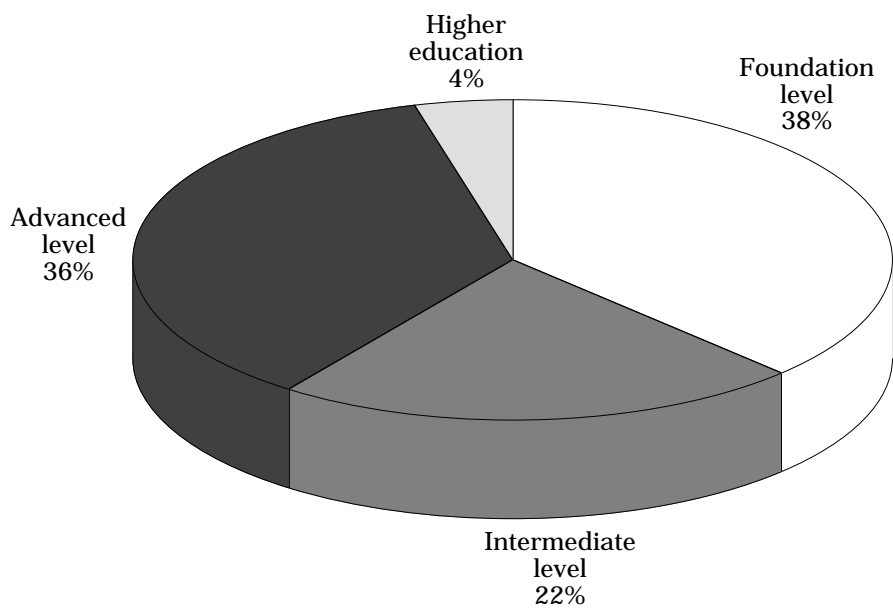
Stourbridge College: percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)



Enrolments: 5,452

Figure 2

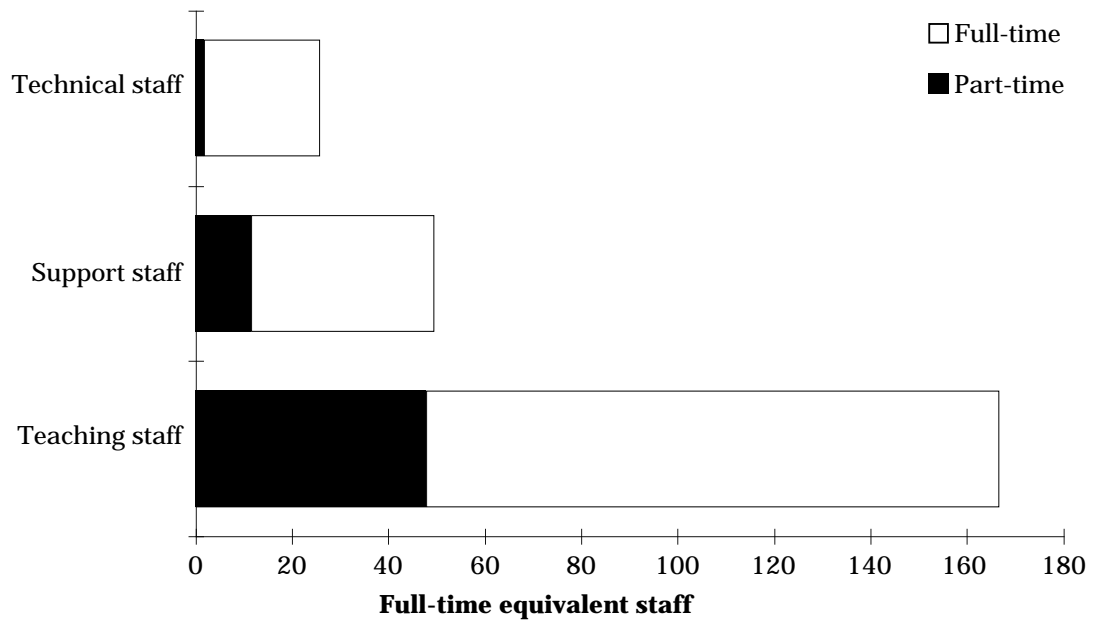
Stourbridge College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)



Enrolments: 5,452

Figure 3

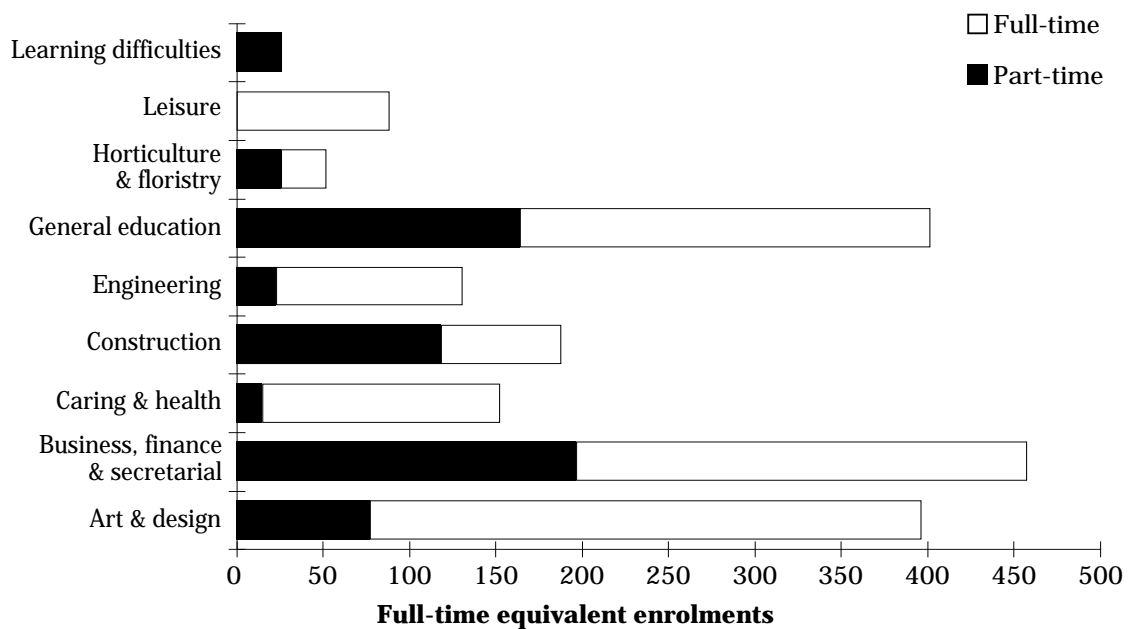
Stourbridge College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)



Full-time equivalent staff: 242

Figure 4

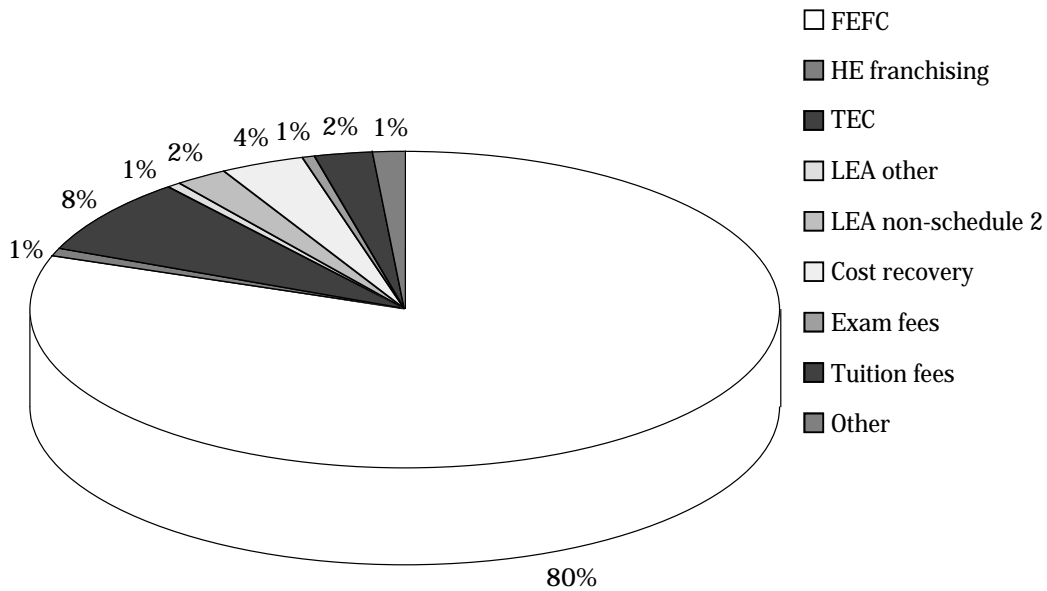
Stourbridge College: full-time equivalent enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1993-94)



Full-time equivalent enrolments: 1,896

Figure 5

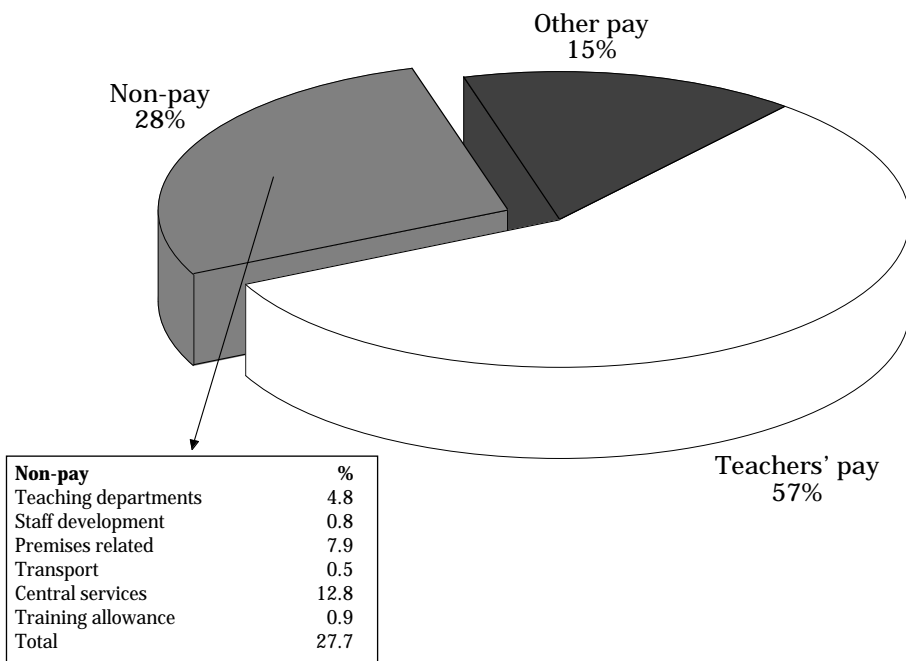
Stourbridge College: estimated income (1993-94)



Estimated income: £8,297,146

Figure 6

Stourbridge College: estimated expenditure (1993-94)



Estimated expenditure: £8,060,728

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