

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Strode's College

September 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-95

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 114/96

STRODE'S COLLEGE SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected April 1995-June 1996

Summary

Strode's College is a sixth form college in Egham in north west Surrey. It provides a wide range of GCE A level courses for 16 to 19 year old students. The college is expanding its provision by introducing GNVQs and courses for adults. It was the first sixth form college to introduce a foundation course in science run in collaboration with a university. The college is strongly committed to providing activities for students which enrich their main studies. Governors are supportive of the college. Managers consult widely with staff and internal communications are good. Enrolment and induction procedures for students are thorough. Students receive impartial guidance and advice on their choice of courses. There is good support for adults at the college's outreach centre. Examination results are good in many areas of work. Staff development is well planned and energetically promoted. The college should: clarify the functions of its committees; address the limited understanding among heads of division about managing curriculum areas; market its full range of provision more effectively; provide more support for students who need help with their learning; improve retention rates on some courses; ensure that surveys of students' opinions of courses provide comparable data and allow students' responses to be anonymous; provide more private study areas and social areas for students; and improve the library stock.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science and computing	2	Art and design	2
Mathematics	3	Social sciences	2
Business	2	English and languages	3
		History and geography	3

INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection of Strode's College in Surrey took place in three stages. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected early in September 1995. Specialist subject areas were inspected in April 1995 and again in April 1996. Inspectors visited 100 classes, analysed students' achievements and examined students' work. Aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in June 1996. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, the senior management team, heads of division, staff with cross-college responsibilities, teaching, support and administrative staff, and students. Inspectors also met a group of employers, a representative from the Surrey Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), community representatives, and parents of students attending the college. They examined policy statements, documents describing internal systems and controls, and minutes of meetings.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Strode's College, which is named after its benefactor Henry Strode, is situated in the town of Egham in north west Surrey. Its history can be traced back to 1706. It was established as a voluntary-controlled sixth form college in 1975, and it occupies the site of a former boys' grammar school. The trustees of the Henry Strode Foundation, an independent charity, own most of the land and buildings. The college attracts students from north Surrey and south Berkshire, and some from the outer London boroughs. It operates an outreach centre in Chertsey.

3 At the time of the inspection, the college had 946 students, of whom 830 were attending full-time courses. The majority of students are aged 16 to 19. There is a small but growing number of adults. Enrolments of full-time students have increased by 22 per cent since incorporation. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are given in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The college employs 73 full-time equivalent staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The work of the college is organised within three teaching divisions: science and mathematics; arts and humanities; and social and business studies. Heads of division manage both teachers and pastoral tutors.

4 The college competes for school leavers with six other sixth form colleges in Surrey, four large general colleges of further education, and several secondary schools which have their own sixth forms. It also competes with schools and further education colleges in Berkshire. The proportion of 16 year olds in Surrey who continue in full-time education has been high for many years; since 1993 it has not been less than 77 per cent. In 1995, a quarter of the college's new entrants came from its two partner schools. The remainder came from 76 other schools, including some in the independent sector. The number of students from Middlesex and Berkshire has grown significantly in recent years.

5 The college's mission includes a commitment to providing education of quality and breadth; promoting excellence in every sphere of its activities; supporting individuals to achieve their full potential; increasing participation in education; and enabling students to progress to higher education or to work.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

6 The college offers 34 General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects, 16 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects, and 15 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects. It also offers General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) in three subject areas at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, although the numbers recruited on to some of these courses are small. The range of GCSE subjects is being reduced as the college develops its GNVQ programmes.

7 The college encourages students to undertake activities that enrich their main studies. The accreditation of some enrichment activities has encouraged students to participate. The opportunities are extensive. For example, students of modern languages, of music and of art can take part in student exchanges, work experience and visits to the continent, including eastern Europe. All students select at least one course from the wide-ranging complementary studies programme. There are courses which are intended to develop students' information technology skills. Another course helps students to understand industry. Many students on a GCE A level course choose to take a GCE AS subject. The extra-curricular activities on offer change each year. Facilities in drama and music are in constant demand. However, many enrichment sessions are poorly attended, especially those in general studies. There is an extensive programme of sports and recreational studies. The college has a historical connection with the Worshipful Company of Coopers, which selects an apprentice from the college and awards two bursaries each year for study-related travel. Many students participate in community service. The Christian union meets regularly and is well supported. There is a weekly opportunity for collective worship, which satisfies the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of *The Further and Higher Education Act 1992*.

8 The college has strong links with its two partner schools. Year 11 pupils in these schools are regularly informed about the college's programmes. Enrolments from other schools have increased following the college's renewed efforts to ensure that its publicity reaches teachers, pupils and parents. However, few of the students and parents spoken to during the inspection were aware of the college's GNVQ courses. Links with higher education providers are good. These include compact agreements under which students can follow planned routes to specific higher education institutions. Next year, the college hopes to recruit students to a part-time course designed to provide access to higher education courses in the social sciences.

9 The college has a small number of courses designed for adults, and a few adults enrol on existing full-time courses. The science foundation course, run in conjunction with Kingston University, is one of the college's notable successes. The college was the first sixth form college to develop such a course. Attempts to launch evening courses for adults have been largely unsuccessful. The college is determined to persevere in its efforts to attract students to evening classes. A member of staff has responsibility for devising and promoting courses for adults and the college has links with the Surrey youth and adult education service. The college has set up a centre for adults, away from the college, which offers facilities for study at times which suit the students. Adult learners, including women returning to study, and local employers have begun to make full use of the centre's facilities for information technology and research. At present, the provision offered by the centre is comparatively small and demand is high. The content of some of the promotional material for adult students is not easily understandable.

10 Staff at all levels are aware of the national targets for education and training and the challenges they pose. The college has a good working relationship with the Surrey TEC. It has recently succeeded in its bid to the TEC for development funding to set up open learning centres at the college which will be part of a network operated in conjunction with another sixth form college and partners in the public and private sector. The centres are beginning to provide learning materials, designed to allow students to study on their own. Students who cannot attend college regularly may use the centres' facilities at times which suit them. The college has also begun to develop distance learning materials for students who cannot come to college and who have to study at home or in their workplace. The college is on the Internet and students are making good use of this. Employers occasionally visit the college to give talks to students and some provide work experience placements. Most contacts with employers are made by individual members of college staff. There are no systematic arrangements for establishing and maintaining liaison with employers. There is scope for the college to co-ordinate and expand its links with employers.

11 The college has a marketing policy and there is a marketing manager who co-ordinates activities across the institution. Despite the college's efforts to promote its courses, many sections of the local community are unaware that the college is expanding the scope of its provision to meet the needs of a wider range of students. The current prospectus contains inaccuracies, and does not adequately reflect the college's commitment to adults and to those from minority ethnic backgrounds. There is little effective market research.

12 The college has a long-established and comprehensive equal opportunities policy which has been revised recently. There are clear procedures for monitoring its implementation. The equal opportunities

committee pursues issues effectively. It has, for example, produced helpful materials on equal opportunities for tutors to use during the students' induction programme.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

13 The corporation board has 10 independent governors, a TEC nominee, two trustees, two staff governors, one parent and one student governor. The principal is a member and the vice-principal is a co-opted member. The board has four committees: finance and general purposes; policy; audit; and remuneration. The remuneration committee has extended its remit to include personnel issues. Its membership includes all the chairs of committees, and it is used to co-ordinate the work of all the board's committees. The minutes of the remuneration committee's meetings do not differentiate between matters relating to the confidential work of the committee and those which cover the committee's more general business. The chairman of the board appraises the performance of the principal against agreed targets. The remuneration committee is informed of these targets and receives the chairman's report on the principal.

14 Governors are very supportive of the college. Collectively they offer the college a valuable range of expertise. They have a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management. Papers are frequently returned to managers for redrafting in order that issues of policy and of implementation may be better distinguished. There is a draft code of conduct for governors and a register of interests is being established. The level of governors' contact with, and knowledge of, the college varies. The college regularly organises training sessions and 'visit days' for governors but only a third of business governors have been able to attend these. Although governors have had the college's emerging quality assurance system explained to them, they have not looked at performance indicators other than GCE A level examination results.

15 Governors review the effectiveness of their own work. In 1995, the audit committee undertook a full review of the board and its committees. Changes have included new terms of reference for committees. There remains some overlap in the remits of committees. In particular, the remuneration and policy committees, and the audit and finance and general purposes committees duplicate some of each other's activities. There is no search committee to provide a formal method of recruiting new governors. Although the papers on finance presented to the board are clear and well written, the quality of papers on other matters varies greatly. It is not clear which agenda items and papers are for information and which are for discussion and action. The agenda for board meetings contains two standing items to allow staff and student governors to report their concerns. The minutes indicate that these members tend to represent their particular constituencies rather than acting as objective college governors. The clerk to the board carries out his duties effectively. However, he has no job description.

16 The strategic planning process has improved over the last three years. As a result of the recent review of the strategic plan the college is aiming to combine the previously separate processes of course review, setting of enrolment targets and business planning. Staff at all levels have welcomed being involved in discussions leading to the 1996-99 plan, and they applaud the new consultative management style. In the new planning process, governors discuss strategic issues in the policy committee, and the college consults the TEC about these. The senior management team finalises the plan and presents it to the corporation board. Teaching staff in subject areas, divisions and staff with cross-college functions have produced self-assessment reports and action plans. These will be taken into account during the formulation of the strategic plan and it is intended that their detailed objectives will form the basis of the college's annual operating statement. However, the quality of the self-assessment reports varies widely. The targets set are inadequate or unclear and the financial consequences of recommended actions are not considered. The reports do not always contain effective evaluation of students' retention rates, examination results and progression data. Staff in divisions and those with cross-college functions do not rigorously measure performance against indicators and targets for improvement.

17 The senior management team, which comprises the principal, the vice-principal, the director of student services and the finance director, meets weekly. The quality assurance and planning manager, the three heads of division, the director of continuing education, and the senior management team form the management review group, which meets once a month. There are 17 other committees covering aspects of the curriculum, quality and resources. Each has terms of reference, although a number of the committees discuss the same issues. Meetings are appropriately minuted but action points minuted at one meeting are not always picked up at subsequent meetings. All committees act in an advisory capacity to the senior management team. The extent to which they act as executive committees depends on the status of the chair.

18 Communications in the college are good. The college was reorganised in September 1995 and many senior staff are new to their current roles. There are job descriptions for all senior staff and most other staff. The roles of administrative staff have also been reviewed and clarified in order to strengthen staff teams. The roles and responsibilities of senior managers are generally clear. There is also a clear job description for the role of head of division. In practice, however, heads of division have varying levels of understanding about their new responsibilities. Heads of division were previously senior tutors with responsibilities that were primarily pastoral. They retain their former pastoral role and delegate some of their newer responsibilities, such as those for managing budgets, quality assurance and aspects of curriculum development, to others. There is also some confusion over the titles used by managers in written and spoken communication. For example, the titles of head of division, senior

tutor and divisional leader are used synonymously. The heads of division committee, chaired by the director of student services, is still called the senior tutors' committee.

19 Patterns of organisation within and between divisions vary significantly. In one division, some staff in related subjects have worked well together on common curricular developments, whilst in other subject areas there has been little collaboration between teachers. The majority of subject leaders work enthusiastically to help and support their staff and to carry out curriculum development. In a minority of subjects, there is poor management, teamworking is significantly underdeveloped, and teachers see any external intervention or monitoring of their work by others as an affront to their professional independence.

20 The college has general targets for enrolments but no specific targets for individual courses or subjects. In 1994-95, the college exceeded its target of units of activity. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Its average level of funding for 1995-96 is £18.82 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.37. The college is developing new mechanisms for deploying its resources. Budget holders receive regular financial reports. The finance director provides training for budget holders. Money for capital equipment is allocated against bids from managers. Money for the consumables budget is allocated according to an agreed formula. The heavy reliance on full-time staffing restricts the college's use of part-time staff, who might have particular expertise to bring to the new courses which are being developed. Unit costs are not calculated but ways of identifying them are being developed.

21 The computerised student database provides an appropriate range of information and meets the new requirements of the national individualised student record effectively. Although examination results, retention rates and students' destinations are recorded, they are not used systematically for planning. Information from the finance and student databases is used to provide an appropriate management information service.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

22 There are policies for all aspects of students' guidance and support. Procedures for enrolling students from schools are comprehensive and effective. Senior members of staff from the college are assigned to each of several local schools. Pupils in year 11 are shown the college video, which was made and produced by college students, and are given ample information on the college and its courses. Pupils also attend a half-day introduction to the college in the summer term to meet subject teachers and their prospective personal tutors. Students speak highly of the lively open evenings they attended, and of the help they received when making their choice of subject or course. The college also organises a two-day

science and mathematics fair for year 10 pupils from local schools. The links between subject teachers and schools have weakened following the demise of some of the local subject panels.

23 Applicants for full-time courses are interviewed by tutors and the relevant head of division. They receive effective and impartial guidance. Many are shown around the college, and staff give of their time generously for this purpose. Interviews for part-time adult students are equally thorough. Students can change their courses during the first half term. There is, however, no systematic college-wide monitoring of the transfer of students between courses, nor any analysis of the changes made. Induction procedures are carefully planned. The first tutorials are organised to help students settle into the college. Students receive a college handbook and subject handbooks, but the quality of some of these is poor and a few lack important information. Students are made aware of their rights and responsibilities through the college charter, the equal opportunities policy and the brief handbook on the college. The college encourages students to maintain their records of achievement.

24 Each full-time student has a personal tutor. Subject teachers monitor students' progress regularly, and their reports are used by tutors when discussing overall progress with students. Students are organised in tutorial groups which contain both first and second year students. There is a short daily group tutorial and a longer session each week for 16 to 19 year old students during which a tutorial programme is followed. The programme is sufficiently flexible to allow students to see their tutors by arrangement. The programme covers topics which include equal opportunities, how to survive in higher education, and health education. Many students find it useful, but some reported that its value to them varied according to the extent of tutors' interest in particular topics. Individual students have special meetings with their personal tutors three times a year, when the normal teaching programme is suspended. At these meetings, students discuss their progress with their tutor and agree new learning targets. Most students find the meetings helpful. Some said that they had not received any individual tutorials. Although the college seeks students' views on the quality of the enrolment and induction programmes, there has been no formal evaluation of the tutorial programme. Parents are contacted swiftly by tutors if a student fails to attend for three days in succession or otherwise gives cause for concern. Parents receive reports on their children's progress. They speak highly of the college's efforts to keep them informed and of the support which students receive. Guidance for adults is good. The support they receive from tutors helps to boost their confidence.

25 The director of student services oversees the work of the heads of division, each of whom leads a team of tutors in his or her division. There are regular meetings to discuss the tutorial system, and training sessions and comprehensive tutorial information packs are provided for tutors. The work of tutors is not always managed effectively. Not all heads

of division share and disseminate good tutorial practice. There is inconsistency in tutorial procedures. Reasons why students are absent from college are not recorded systematically by all tutors and they are not analysed in sufficient detail.

26 The college has screened students' spelling skills for more than 10 years, and in September 1995, at the start of the enrolment process, it introduced the national Basic Skills Agency tests on literacy and numeracy for all students. The results are made available quickly so that heads of division are well informed about their students when advising them on their programmes of study. In September 1995, 49 students, representing approximately 5 per cent of the student body, were identified as needing support in reading, writing and numeracy. The co-ordinator for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities interviews all students who are diagnosed as needing help and arranges individual programmes for them. Twenty-five students, which is 3 per cent of the full-time student body, are currently receiving long-term learning support. Staff from the North West Surrey Literacy Support Service are employed for two hours a week to give help with reading. The co-ordinator for students with learning needs places a file in the staffroom with information on students currently receiving help, and teachers can add to this the names of other students who need support. Some students spoke highly of the help they had received. Others found the materials provided by the support service inappropriate for their age. Some students fail to attend the support sessions regularly. Many students reported that they are reluctant to seek help with their basic skills because they believe they will be stigmatised if they do so. Furthermore, the cramped and uninviting accommodation where the support sessions take place does not encourage them to come forward. Additional support in numeracy is insufficient to meet the demand.

27 Sessions on study skills are available to students during their induction. Students' needs for training in information technology skills are discussed and identified during the enrolment process and those who require help are encouraged to take appropriate courses. Generally, however, the college fails to provide enough support for students in developing their information technology skills. The college is planning to establish a core skills base room. Few departments have subject or topic workshops where students may receive help with particular difficulties related to their courses.

28 Advice on progression to higher education is good. Careers advice is available from the college's head of careers and from Surrey Careers Service. Advisers are available for two days a week to give students individual guidance, and to help with the overall guidance programme. They have contributed to the training of tutors to help them to improve career planning for students. They also provide careers advice for adult students. The guidance programme for students who intend to go on to higher education is well developed, but support for those seeking work is

less effective. Opportunities for students to participate in work experience or work shadowing are limited and poorly publicised.

29 The students' council, which is affiliated to the National Union of Students, has been active in organising social and charity events and in promoting the wider interests of students through its membership of the equal opportunities committee. The officers of the council have involved themselves successfully in college life. Some students show a lack of interest in the council.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

30 Of the 100 teaching sessions observed, 56 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. Only 3 per cent had weaknesses which outweighed strengths. The proportion of lessons graded 1 and 2 is below the average for the further education sector, published in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1994-95*. A summary of the inspection grades awarded is given below.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		11	29	31	0	0	71
GCSE		2	4	6	3	0	15
GNVQ		2	5	3	0	0	10
Other		0	3	1	0	0	4
Total		15	41	41	3	0	100

31 The average attendance in the teaching sessions inspected was only 79 per cent. It was lower than this in science, mathematics, English and some social science lessons. The lowest level of attendance (67 per cent) was in science and the highest (88 per cent) was in history and geography.

32 Many learning programmes are well designed and well managed. Some schemes of work, for example those for modern languages, are detailed and their content extends beyond the requirements of examination syllabuses. Some lesson plans are also carefully devised and the objectives for the work are shared with students. The best lessons are well structured, have a clear beginning and end, and allow students time to reflect and review their progress. Poorer schemes of work are vague; they contain only the syllabus provided by the examination board; there is no reference to specific learning activities or assessments. A few teachers did not plan their lessons adequately and allocated too much or too little time to the content they were covering.

33 In the better lessons, students worked hard and purposefully. Classroom materials were relevant, up to date and clear. Teachers made highly effective use of audio-visual aids, varied the pace of their delivery and provided the students with a range of appropriate activities. In some cases, they helped students to analyse evidence from less obvious sources

in order to make judgements about issues. For example, a group of students in a physical education class was examining how literature had affected participation in sport. They made good use of Sir Henry Newbolt's poetry, other literature and associated television programmes. At intervals, the teacher asked pertinent questions to help students make connections between the source materials and current sporting practice. Students compiled a useful list of early influences on participation in sport. In some lessons, however, insufficient use was made of audio-visual and other aids. The teachers' introduction of topics was dull, and students were provided with little variety of appropriate activities. Students were plainly bored and some chatted throughout the lesson.

34 There are good working relationships between teachers and students, and in the better lessons work was conducted in a spirit of good humour and endeavour. In these lessons, students worked well individually, in small groups or in class discussion. Teachers asked searching questions to extend students' critical and analytical skills. They checked regularly that students had understood concepts or principles by putting challenging questions to each student. For example, in an English GCSE lesson in which a student gave a presentation to the class on the advantages and disadvantages of policemen carrying guns, the teacher ensured that all students participated in the debate that followed. Students' contributions revealed their ability to analyse the issues critically, and to use appropriately sophisticated language to describe their conclusions. In other lessons, there were good opportunities to apply theory. In a business studies lesson, for example, students put human relations theory into practice by ably using questionnaires to measure aspects of each other's personalities.

35 Some students learn also how to analyse and criticise each other's work constructively, and how to develop and use appropriately sensitive language for the purpose. For example, in an art lesson, paintings were displayed which students had created under examination conditions. Students were given the marking criteria and asked to assess publicly each painting in turn, giving clear reasons for their judgements. The teacher then disclosed his marks and gave reasons to justify them. The exercise was conducted with good spirit, and there was considerable agreement between the students' and the teacher's marks.

36 In weaker lessons, students did not have enough opportunity to ask questions or express their ideas. For example, some history, geography, social science, business, mathematics and English lessons were monopolised by teachers, and students spent most of their time taking lengthy notes on information which could have been conveyed to them in handouts. In some lessons, the same students answered every question or dominated discussion, whilst the remainder of the class remained silent. Some teachers answered all their own questions. The pace of the work was often too slow, especially in English and social science; students could usually have achieved more in the time. Teachers' expectations of students

were often too low. The level of work was pitched at the middle or lower range of students' ability and was not demanding enough for the most able students. In several instances, teachers missed opportunities to harness students' enthusiasm. In mathematics lessons, for example, students were considerably frustrated because teachers failed to give credit for solutions to problems which were different from, but equally valid to, their own.

37 Homework is set regularly. The usefulness to students of teachers' assessment of marked work varies considerably. Some teachers provide students with helpful guidance on how to improve their performance whilst others give their work no more than an occasional tick. In areas such as business studies, teachers sometimes failed to engage the attention of the whole class when introducing new topics or explaining new operations, and some students carried on with other work regardless. In some areas, students' skills in information technology are developed appropriately. In other areas, such as social sciences, history and geography, students are provided with insufficient opportunity to develop these skills for research or to improve the presentation of their essays through wordprocessing.

38 In some instances, teachers used differentiated materials and set differentiated tasks to match the varied levels of ability in the class. For example, at the start of a modern languages lesson, students were given an exercise which they could carry out in one of three different ways. The students then tackled the exercise effectively using the way of working which best suited their ability. In many lessons, however, teachers rarely used appropriately differentiated materials.

39 Students work well in workshops for some of their assignments, and there is due regard for health and safety. In a GNVQ business foundation lesson, students worked purposefully on a well-designed first aid assignment, largely independently of the teacher, who monitored the proceedings discreetly. They made good progress, using appropriate sources and helping each other when they were stuck. Geography students have valuable opportunities to carry out fieldwork. In many subjects, students are provided with a programme of relevant visits. For example, second-year GCE A level law students spent two days at a police training college, where, in addition to other activities, they joined in with police trainees. Students took the roles of people who had committed offences. Their experience of being treated as offenders helped them to gain a better understanding of the public order issues which they discussed later in the classroom.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

40 Most students enjoy their work. They appreciate the support they receive and develop good relationships with their teachers. Adult students at the outreach centre value their teachers' supportive and informal teaching style. Students work well on their own and in groups. Some

students are developing their information technology skills whilst at college and putting them to good use. For example, some have contributed to the production of a local history compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database and have put the history of Strode's College on the Internet. Others have inadequate skills in information technology for the jobs they might be expected to take up or the higher education courses they hope to study.

41 Over the three years, 1993 to 1995, pass rates in some GCE A level subjects have fluctuated widely. Results were generally good until 1993. They declined in 1994 but improved in 1995. In 1993, there were 515 entries in 34 subjects. The pass rates were above the national averages for sixth form colleges in 28 subjects and below in only six. The average pass rate at grades A to E was 89 per cent. In 1994, there were 740 GCE A level entries in 34 subjects and pass rates were above the national average for sixth form colleges in 19 subjects and below it in 15. The average pass rate at grades A to E fell to 83 per cent, which was then the national average for sixth form colleges. There were very good results in biology, business information systems, geography, media studies and theatre studies, with pass rates between 11 and 17 percentage points above the averages for these subjects. The pass rate was 100 per cent in media studies, theatre studies and art, each with a substantial number of entries. There were good pass rates in some other subjects with five or fewer entries. The pass rates in chemistry, English literature, government and politics, political history, physics, psychology, social biology, sociology, and textiles and fashion fell to below the national averages for these subjects in 1994, having been above them in 1993, and some declined by nearly 30 per cent. Results were particularly poor in physics, sociology, chemistry and textiles and fashion, and pass rates in these subjects were between 11 and 22 percentage points below the national averages. Student retention rates were below 85 per cent in 18 subjects.

42 The college subscribes to the advanced level information system which enables institutions to calculate the extent of students' achievements on GCE A level courses by comparing their GCE A level results with their GCSE grades on entry to the college. The data derived from the advanced level information system for 1994 indicate that, for four GCE A level subjects, the college enrolled students who had statistically significant below average GCSE grades and GCE A level results in two of these subjects were poor.

43 In 1995, the college entered 663 students for 33 GCE A level subjects. The average pass rate was 89 per cent, which is above the national average for sixth form colleges. The pass rates were above the national average in 22 subjects, the same as the national average in one, and below it in 10. There were particularly good pass rates, which were 12 or more percentage points above the national average, in business information systems, economics, French, English language, physics, and social biology.

The improvement in results for physics and French was substantial and all students passed. The pass rate was 100 per cent also in social biology and media studies, each with a substantial number of entries. The pass rate in theatre studies fell from 12 percentage points above the national average to 9 below, and in geography from 11 percentage points above to 26 below. Results in eight subjects were below the national average in 1994 but rose above it in 1995. In a further eight subjects, however, results fell below the national average in 1995. The student retention rate was below 85 per cent in 21 subjects.

44 There are limited data on entries for 1993. In 1994, there were 78 entries in 11 GCE AS subjects. The average pass rate was 71 per cent, just below the national average for sixth form colleges. There were good results in business information systems, psychology and sociology. Pass rates in other subjects were below the national averages. The poorest results were in French, where no one passed, electronic systems, geography, and physics. Pass rates were between 23 and 31 percentage points below the national averages for these subjects. Student retention rates were below 85 per cent in five subjects.

45 In 1995, the college entered 181 students for GCE AS examinations in 10 subjects. The average pass rate at grades A to E fell to just 52 per cent, almost 20 percentage points below the national average for sixth form colleges. Of the 181 students, 128 were entered for general studies. Only 41 per cent of the students entered for this subject achieved a pass grade. In five of the remaining nine subjects, there were entries of only four students or fewer. In the nine subjects for which data are available, retention rates were below 85 per cent in three.

46 Students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1994, scored on average 4.4 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This placed the college among the top third of all colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, according to data published by the Department for Education and Employment. In 1995, students aged 16 to 18 scored an average of 4.7 points per entry, placing the college once again in the top third of colleges in the further education sector.

47 In 1993, the college entered 402 students for 17 GCSE subjects. Results were above the national average for sixth form colleges in only 7 subjects. In 1994, there were 408 entries in 15 GCSE subjects. Fifty-four per cent of entries achieved grades A to C, which was above the national average for sixth form colleges. Results were above the national average in nine subjects, the same as the national average in one subject, and below it in five subjects. In design, geography, physical education, science in society, and sociology the results were 16 or more percentage points above the national averages for these subjects. In both physical education and the newly introduced science in society, all students gained grades A to C. However, in mathematics and Spanish, results were,

respectively 23 and 27 percentage points below the national averages. Students' retention rates were above 85 per cent in only five subjects.

48 In 1995, there were 301 entries in 13 GCSE subjects. The success rate for grades A to C was 53 per cent, which was above the national average for sixth form colleges. Results were above the national averages in seven subjects, the same as the national average in one subject, and below it in five subjects. Results in geography improved still further to 29 percentage points above the national average, and the good results in physical education and sociology were maintained. The greatest improvement was in history where the results rose from 12 percentage points below the national average in 1994 to 32 percentage points above it in 1995. Results in English language and in art fell below the national averages in 1995, having improved to exceed them in 1994. Students' retention rates over the three years 1993 to 1995 have generally fallen from an already low base. The students' retention rate was above 85 per cent in just five subjects.

49 One-year vocational courses were introduced at the college in September 1994. In 1995, there were 69 entries in seven subjects. The average pass rate in vocational examinations at all levels was only 59 per cent. The pass rate in the GNVQ foundation level business course was significantly better at 67 per cent, although the students' retention rate was only 69 per cent. At GNVQ intermediate level, the pass rates in business and in health and social care were good, but in leisure and tourism the pass rate was just 27 per cent. Nobody achieved the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) qualification in video production, and only 38 per cent of the students who entered, passed the childcare examination. There was a 100 per cent pass rate in the sports leaders course. The first GNVQ advanced level course in business was introduced in September 1993. In 1995, all five students who entered for GNVQ advanced business passed but the retention rate was only 64 per cent.

50 Students have achieved well in sport, fundraising for charity, and music. For example, two students are Middlesex county rugby players, and women students came first and second in the Surrey schools cross-country running championships. One student was the Surrey under-18 golf champion, and another won the 1,500 metre race in the Surrey athletics championships. A woman student won a gold medal in the 200 metre sprint in the World School Games in Cyprus and won a bronze medal in the 200 metre sprint at the World Student Games in Portugal, where she represented England. Two students sponsored by the Coopers' travel bursaries scheme, have taken equipment to a Moscow children's hospital, where they helped to redecorate some of its wards. Another student won first prize in a national music composition competition.

51 Of the 376 students who left the college in 1993, 34 per cent went on to higher education, 18 per cent continued in further education, 30 per

cent found employment, 8 per cent pursued other activities, and the destinations of 10 per cent were unknown. Of the 365 students who left in 1994, 45 per cent went on to higher education, 8 per cent continued in further education, 16 per cent went into employment, and the proportion of destinations that were unknown rose to 31 per cent. Of the 327 students who left in 1995, 45 per cent went to higher education, 7 per cent continued in further education, 24 per cent found employment, 5 per cent pursued other activities, and the destinations of 19 per cent were unknown.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

52 The college introduced some elements of quality assurance prior to incorporation, but did not persist with them. In 1992, a quality manager was appointed and a quality committee was established. As yet, the college does not have a quality assurance policy. It has looked carefully at a range of models for quality assurance before devising its own system. Some components of this system have only recently been implemented and the system has yet to provide substantial evidence of its effectiveness.

53 Self-assessment reports from each subject area form the basis of the system. These incorporate the advanced level information system data on students' performance. However, the general inclination of staff is to attribute disappointing examination results to the failings of individual students instead of focusing on other possible causes, such as their own teaching and course planning. Other weaknesses of the reports lie in the nature of the targets set by subject areas and the way these are defined. Targets are not defined precisely enough so that it is sometimes difficult for subject areas to identify the specific improvement which has been achieved. Objectives for some subject areas relate to the maintenance of current standards and performance rather than to their enhancement. Few performance indicators have yet been devised, and there are no quality standards for classroom activities. The amount of reporting involved in the detailed self-assessments for each subject area is substantial. Heads of division evaluate subject reports and the quality of their commentaries on them varies widely. Some written feedback to subject teams contains thoughtful analysis and prompting to teachers to be more stringent in their evaluation. In other cases, managers' assessments amount to no more than ticks and brief commendations.

54 Students contribute to course assessment by participating in surveys of their views which are conducted three times in a two-year course. They discuss in groups their likes and dislikes about the college and its provision, or answer questions from staff. Those spoken to said that, although they valued the opportunity to express their opinions on their courses, they found the questions were too directed. Students in some subject areas said that they felt constrained by the close supervision of staff during the surveys. Some teachers acted as reporters during the students' discussion and, in the eyes of some students, were selective in their minuting of the students' views. Others questioned the points students were making.

A few students complained that they were unable to criticise what they regarded as inadequate teaching. There is no means to ensure that students who make legitimate criticisms may, if they so wish, remain anonymous. Furthermore, the findings of each survey and information about actions taken on criticisms and complaints, are not always relayed to the students. In the areas of media studies and science, students were able to cite improvements that had resulted from their comments. The way in which surveys are conducted provides no means of collecting data which can be compared and assessed and outcomes cannot be used effectively for planning.

55 Different parts of the quality assurance system are not yet sufficiently well integrated. Three committees share oversight of curriculum quality, and the liaison between them is not well planned. The quality committee deals mainly with operational aspects of the system, although its terms of reference suggest a wider remit. The curriculum committee uses information on the quality of courses to advise the senior management team about new courses or those to be withdrawn. The management review group deals with the more critical aspects which may arise in relation to the quality of the curriculum at a point when they are considered problematical. It is unclear who has overall responsibility for quality assurance and control and for initiating improvements. The governors' involvement in quality assurance is slight.

56 Staff appraisal was reintroduced in 1995, with separate schemes for teachers and support staff. Appraisal of all staff is expected to be completed for the first time by 1996. Many reviews of teachers have been thorough. The review process includes up to four observations of the teacher being appraised at work in the classroom, scrutiny of course plans, lesson plans and students' work, as well as an appraisal interview. Staff speak well of the process. Appraisal of support staff is less well advanced and very few support staff have been reviewed so far. The guidelines for the appraisal interviews of support staff are more sharply focused on performance than those for teachers although there is no requirement for support staff to be observed at their work. Although the staff-appraisal scheme is designed to help staff identify their needs for professional development, its outcomes are not necessarily taken into account when planning staff development. The appraisal schemes for both teaching staff and support staff will be reviewed in the autumn of 1996 with a view to forging them into one coherent system. The college is aiming to achieve the Investors in People award in 1997.

57 In 1995-96, the college allocated a modest budget of £9,000 to staff development, approximately 0.4 per cent of its recurrent income. This sum does not take account of the cost of four in-service training days provided for all staff each year, or of in-house courses run by college staff. The staff-development manager and the staff-development committee ensure that the college's priorities are addressed and the devolving of £2,000 to each division has encouraged more staff to take part in training

because funding for it is accessible. Staff development is well planned and energetically promoted. Teachers and support staff have participated in a broad range of events and courses and they are required to report back on them for the benefit of colleagues. The college co-operates with other Surrey sixth form colleges for some aspects of staff development, notably the training of newly-qualified teachers and managers. They receive a careful and professional induction to the college, which includes preparation for special events such as parents' evenings. They are also encouraged to observe the work of more experienced colleagues. A scheme has recently been established to assign mentors to all new staff.

58 In its charter, the college sets out its commitments as a series of guarantees to students and parents, and in some areas it defines clearly the level of service that can be expected. All students receive a copy of the charter. However, some students reported that there had been little discussion of the charter during induction or in tutorials, and few regarded it as having any significant part to play in shaping their life at college. Some of the language in the charter is unnecessarily complex. The college has monitored the effectiveness of its charter.

59 The college has produced a self-assessment report using the headings in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. More detailed and separate reports relating to each of the headings were produced immediately before the college inspection. The report covers many significant issues, but takes a less critical view of some aspects of the college's provision and performance than that reached by inspectors. There is an action plan, but few of the targets are quantified and there is no order of priority for action.

RESOURCES

Staffing

60 The college has 45 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 28 full-time equivalent administrative and support staff. There are two foreign languages assistants. Just over half the teaching staff and 70 per cent of the support staff are women. There are no women in the senior management team. Teaching staff are appropriately qualified and experienced for the courses they teach. Seventy-nine per cent of the full-time and part-time teachers have first degrees and 19 per cent have higher degrees. Four teaching staff do not have formal teaching qualifications. Four teachers have training and development lead body qualifications, and 10 more will shortly begin their training for these. There is a general lack of commercial or industrial experience among full-time teachers. The college has no policy on industrial secondment or work shadowing. Some teachers who have been appointed recently to teach on vocational programmes have appropriate industrial experience. Staff loyalty to the college is strong and there is a very low turnover of staff. There are clear procedures for staff recruitment and appointment, and they take good account of equal opportunities issues.

61 There are nine full-time equivalent technical and support staff who work directly with students. They are well qualified and experienced. Support staff work in three teams: estates; student support; and secretarial. The college has yet to decide the composition of the technical support team.

62 Class sizes range from two to 31 students. Staffing costs account for 78 per cent of the college's total income. The college could not provide inspectors with a satisfactory calculation of its staff:student ratio. Twenty-six per cent of classes have fewer than 10 students and 53 per cent fewer than 16.

Equipment/learning resources

63 Most curriculum areas are sufficiently equipped with specialist teaching aids. Although a significant amount of equipment is old, most of it is serviceable and well maintained. Audio visual equipment is held centrally and access to it is well managed. There is an excellent reprographic service. Most classrooms are appropriately furnished with whiteboards and overhead projectors, but some rooms, such as those used for English and mathematics, are poorly equipped. In art and design, there are inadequate storage facilities and no information technology facilities that are of industry standard. There are insufficient resources for students pursuing modern languages to study on their own. Some equipment shows signs of strain and overuse. The college does not have a rolling programme for replacing equipment.

64 The library was established in 1992. Previously, the students used the adjacent town library which the college subsidised. There are only 7,000 books but texts and materials are relevant and new. The annual library budget is £8,000, and this is supplemented by other college funds and donations. There has been a constant improvement in the library's systems. Computerised lending has been introduced, and a book search facility is networked to computers around the college. The library staff monitor levels of book borrowing, but there is no system to record which students from which courses borrow books. Liaison between the library and teachers is good, and library staff are kept informed of new curricular developments.

65 The college has 92 computers for students to use which form part of a network. There is one computer for every nine students. There are good facilities, particularly at the college's outreach centre, for students to work on their own using information technology, multimedia resources and the Internet. There are three centres in the college with 21 computers available to students at any time. Other computers are in specialist areas which are heavily used for classes and the machines are not usually accessible to individual students.

Accommodation

66 The college buildings consist of a main block built in 1915, two handsome wings of former almshouses built in 1823 and 1839, a science and mathematics block built in 1976, and 16 huts. Various additions to the buildings have been made since 1960, notably a sports hall, a library which was converted from the former gymnasium, and a conference block comprising a large room, a small office, and a kitchen. The college occupies a site of six hectares, which includes extensive playing fields. In addition, the college has its own boat house on the Thames at nearby Staines, and uses a room in a school five miles away in Chertsey as its outreach centre.

67 There is an effective maintenance and improvement programme for accommodation. Every effort is made to provide students with a pleasing and stimulating environment. The college's buildings are clean, tidy and in generally good decorative order. The huts are well furnished and some have been divided into smaller offices where tutors can meet with individual students. Some small rooms have been converted to offices, and one has been made into a good reprographics centre. The college has installed new showers and changing rooms in the boat house. The use of rooms is gradually becoming more efficient. There is some spare capacity, however, because some rooms are too small for the size of some classes and are under used. There are particular problems over lack of space in, and the accessibility of, the accommodation used for art and drama.

68 The lack of areas for private study or group study constitute a significant weakness. The library is overcrowded and when they do not have classes, few students stay to work at college. Students also lack social areas. The library is often used inappropriately as a common room.

69 The college has commissioned independent surveys to help it identify ways of improving and maximising the use of its accommodation. It now has a new building strategy and has changed its timetabling arrangements to make better use of rooms. It has drawn up a proposal for a new building to provide better accommodation for art and design, some general purpose teaching spaces, replacement of the dilapidated sports pavilion and the provision of changing room facilities. The proposal has been endorsed by the corporation board, has received planning consent from the local authority, and has recently been forwarded to the Further Education Funding Council. The college anticipates that the building will be completed by September 1997. Plans include establishing an open learning centre and, in the longer term, replacing the huts. The refectory has been extended but it remains inadequate as a student social area. The college is exploring ways to improve the accessibility of the buildings for those with impaired mobility.

70 The college has a well-conceived health and safety policy, which is rigorously implemented. Governors, parents and trustees join in teams which carry out health and safety inspections three times a year.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

71 The main strengths of the college are:

- its commitment to enriching the learning experiences of students
- its foundation course in science run in conjunction with Kingston University
- its thorough enrolment and induction processes
- its support for adult students at the outreach centre
- good internal communication resulting from a new management style
- good examination results in many areas
- the effective management of its staff development programme.

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

- the shortcomings of its marketing
- ambiguities in its committee structure
- the lack of clarity about management of divisions
- the underdeveloped learning support for students
- poor retention of students in many areas
- poorly designed and inadequately administered surveys of students' views
- insufficiently searching course reviews and self-assessments
- the lack of study areas and social areas for students
- the small library stock.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)

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

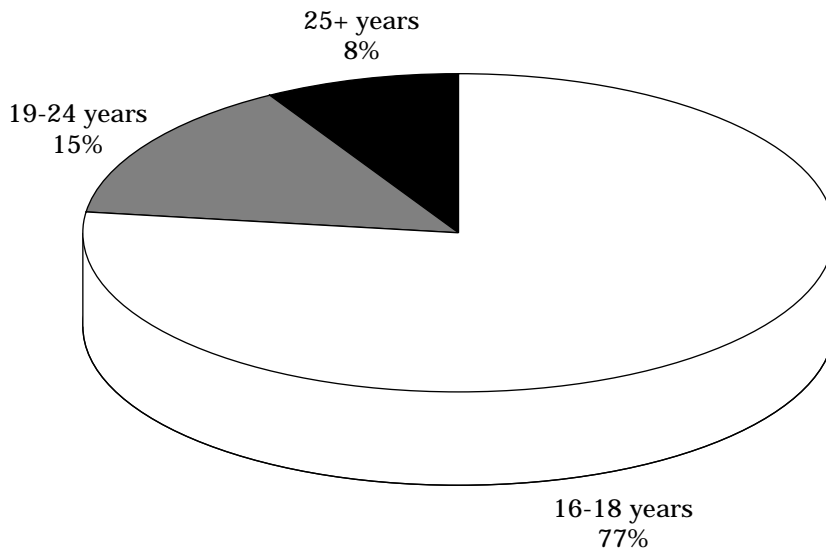
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

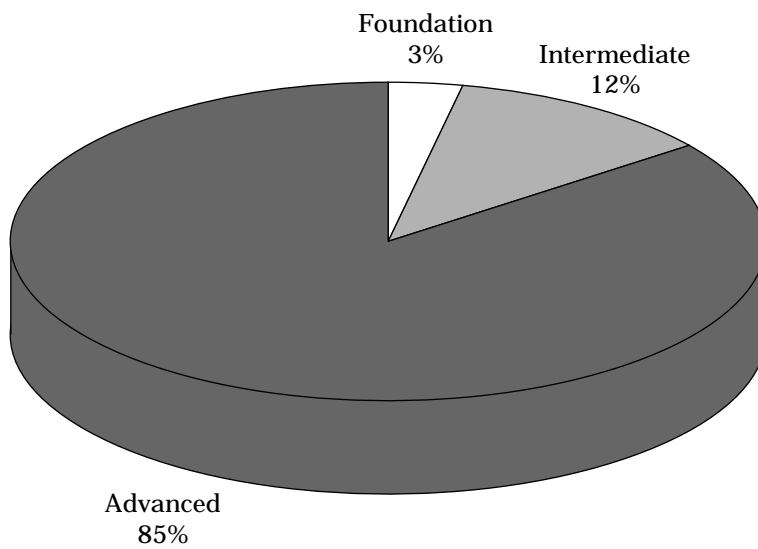
Strode's College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 946

Figure 2

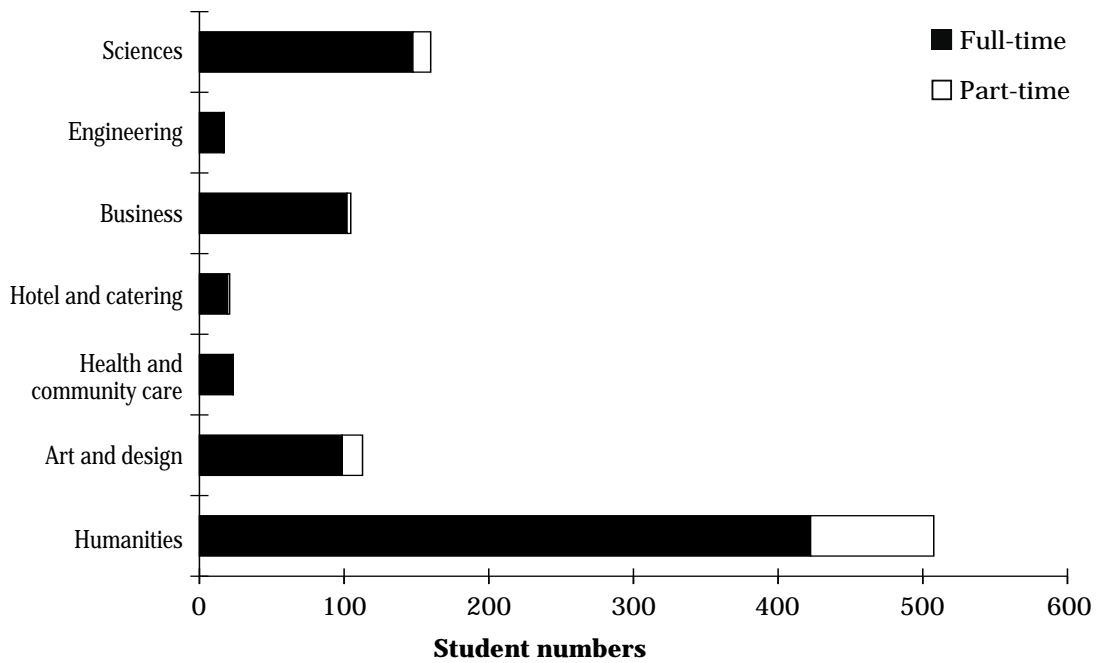
Strode's College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 946

Figure 3

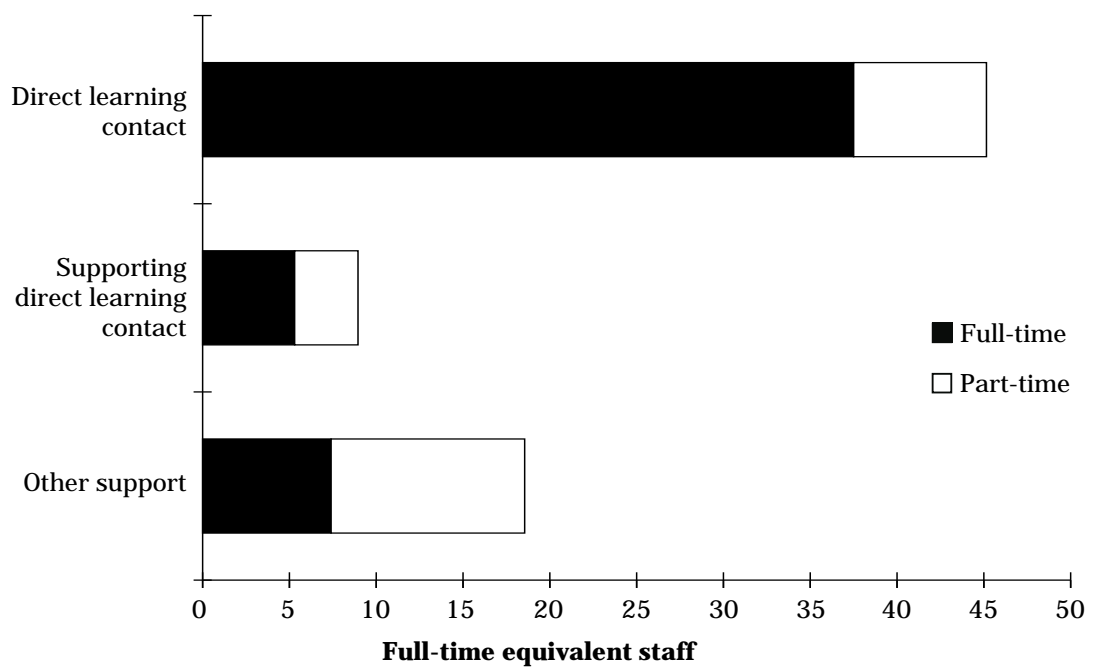
Strode's College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 946

Figure 4

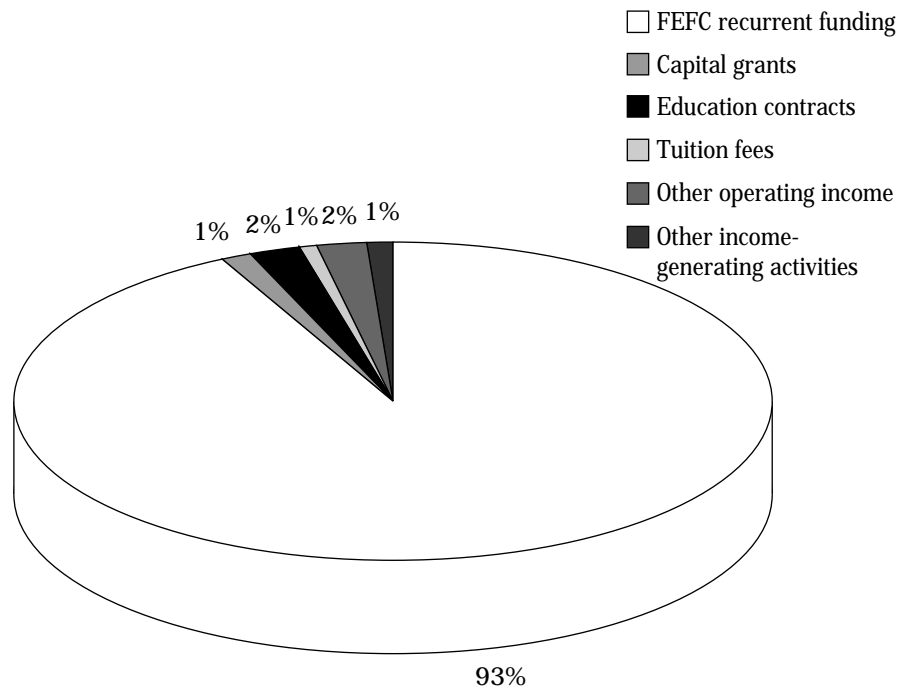
Strode's College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 73

Figure 5

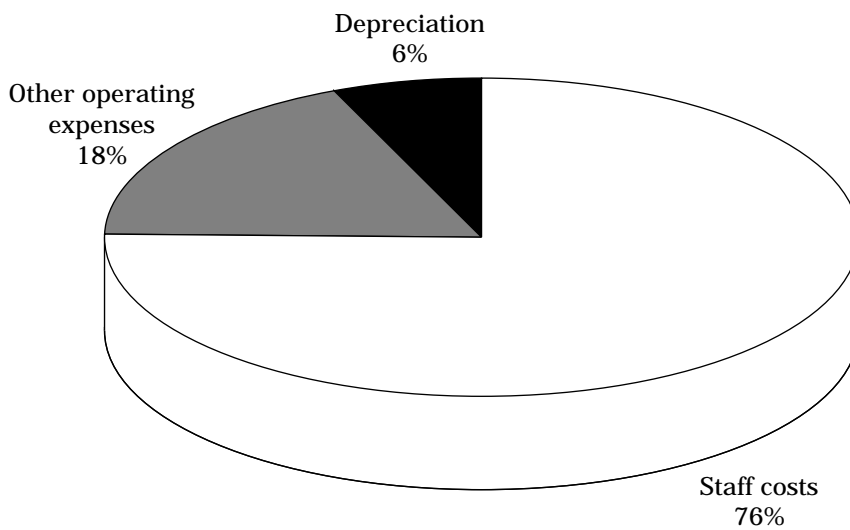
Strode's College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £2,164,000

Figure 6

Strode's College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £2,252,000

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