

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Suffolk College

July 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-96

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 85/97

SUFFOLK COLLEGE

EASTERN REGION

Inspected March 1996-March 1997

Summary

Suffolk College offers an extensive range of further and higher education courses and good opportunities for progression. The corporation contributes effectively to the development of the college. There is effective strategic planning and a well-established committee system. The college has wide-ranging and effective student support services. There is some effective teaching and good additional support for students. Course monitoring and review procedures are effective. Specialist equipment is of a good standard. Academic and support staff are well qualified. A major reorganisation is taking place which is intended to produce a more effective focus on further education. The college should: extend the range of opportunities at entry and foundation level; enhance organisational structures to support the management of its further education provision; improve the accuracy and reliability of management information; improve the arrangements for students' guidance and admissions to further education courses; monitor and improve the quality of teaching on some courses; improve retention rates and pass rates on further education courses; develop further the use of quality standards, targets and performance indicators; and address the inadequate library resources for further education students.

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		3
Quality assurance		3
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	3
	accommodation	3

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Health, social care, hairdressing and beauty therapy	3
Construction	3	Art, design, performing arts and media	3
Engineering	3	Humanities	2
Business, administration and management	2	Basic education and supported learning	3
Hotel, catering, leisure and tourism	3		

INTRODUCTION

1 Suffolk College, in Ipswich, was inspected between March 1996 and March 1997. Inspectors spent 100 days inspecting curriculum areas and aspects of cross-college provision. They visited 271 classes and examined students' work. Meetings were held with members of the corporation, senior managers, staff with cross-college responsibilities, lecturers, support and administrative staff and students. Discussions took place with local employers, community representatives and the careers service staff. Inspectors met the chief executive of the local training and enterprise council (TEC) and representatives of the local education authority (LEA). They also attended college meetings and examined policy statements, minutes of committees and working papers.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Suffolk College is a large college providing further and higher education. The college was formed in 1957 as Ipswich Civic College by the amalgamation of three separate institutions: Ipswich School of Art and Design; the School of Commerce; and the School of Technology. In 1961, the college moved to new buildings close to the town centre and in 1974 became Suffolk College. In 1996, following a process of accreditation, the college was designated 'University College Suffolk: a University College of the University of East Anglia'.

3 Suffolk is a predominantly rural county with a population of 650,000, widely dispersed in small towns and villages. The county town of Ipswich has a population of 125,000. Rural transport links are poor. The historic economic importance of agriculture and related industries within Suffolk has declined in recent years. Economic development has focused on trade and container traffic links with the continent through the ports of Ipswich and Felixstowe, and in the growth of service industries. The areas of greatest employment are distribution, retail, leisure and hotels, and other services such as banking, finance, and insurance.

4 There are three other further education institutions in Suffolk: West Suffolk College in Bury St Edmunds, approximately 25 miles to the north west; Otley College of Agriculture and Horticulture, near Ipswich; and Lowestoft College, about 40 miles away. The college operates in an increasingly competitive environment in Ipswich and south Suffolk. Colchester Institute and the Sixth Form College, Colchester are within 20 miles in Essex. In the southern area of Suffolk there are 16 high schools, seven of which have sixth forms. One of these is a voluntary aided technology college. The college is the main provider of higher education in Suffolk; there is no designated higher education institution in the county. The nearest providers are the University of Cambridge, the University of Essex, Anglia Polytechnic University, which has sites in Cambridge and Chelmsford, and the University of East Anglia in Norwich.

5 The college recruits adult, further and higher education students. Over 40 per cent of its overall student numbers, excluding those on leisure courses, are on higher education courses, including almost 50 per cent of its full-time students. Approximately 50 per cent of the higher education students are recruited from Suffolk and the neighbouring areas of East Anglia. Of the further education students, the majority are enrolled from the southern Suffolk area, with a small percentage from the northern fringe of Essex and the rest of Suffolk.

6 In February 1997, there were 23,358 enrolments of which 5,117 were full-time students and 18,241 were part-time students. Approximately 80 per cent of students are over 18 years of age. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3. The curriculum of the college covers nine of the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) programme areas. The college employs 827 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 405 are full-time equivalent teachers, 95 directly support learning (for example, technicians and instructors) and 327 have other support roles. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7 At the time of the inspection, a fundamental reorganisation of the college was being undertaken. The changes separate further from higher education and are intended to improve the quality of courses and focus more on customers. The reorganisation will be fully implemented from August 1997. In the existing structure, the senior management group comprises the principal, vice-principal, director of finance and the chief administrative officer. The strategic management group is supported by an academic executive group chaired by the vice-principal and comprising the four deans of faculty, the dean of cross-college programmes and the academic registrar. The work of the college is currently managed by 13 schools grouped into four faculties and a cross-college programmes unit. The schools are responsible for separate subject areas and the day-to-day management of students, staff and resources. The cross-college programmes unit deals with educational programmes which extend beyond the boundaries of individual schools, such as general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses.

8 The college's mission is to provide education, training and consultancy services of a high quality in a supportive environment in which equality of opportunity, community access and educational progression are paramount. The college is committed to serving the local and regional community as well as contributing to the higher education needs of Suffolk and nationally. The aim is to increase the number of full-time equivalent students to 8,000 within three years, of which 4,000 will be in higher education and 4,000 in further education. A task group, with wide membership including influential members of the community and the college corporation, has been convened to promote a university for Suffolk. The objective is to establish a large community campus in Ipswich, based

at Suffolk College, which will provide further and higher education, supported by local learning centres using advanced telematics for teaching and learning.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 Suffolk College provides an extensive range of vocational courses extending from foundation level to postgraduate degrees and diplomas. In most curriculum areas, students can progress from further education to higher education courses within the college. Eight general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) are provided at advanced level, nine at intermediate level and one at foundation level. The college also offers a wide provision of courses leading to the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diplomas and certificates. The range of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) is more restricted and is mainly concentrated at levels 2 and 3. Courses at level 4 are offered only in business studies. There is limited provision of NVQ courses in health and childcare and of part-time courses in art and design.

10 There is a wide range of subjects at GCE A level. Twenty-one are offered full time and 25 part time. There is tuition for 18 general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects within the part-time programme. A modular access to higher education programme is available in business, humanities, science or technology. An international foundation programme is franchised from the University of East Anglia to provide for progression to higher education for overseas students.

11 A large programme of adult education covers a wide range of educational and recreational activities and has over 18,000 enrolments. It is delivered in close collaboration with 16 local schools and offered in 93 locations across south Suffolk under an agreement with the LEA. This programme offers opportunities for people in remote rural areas to take courses for GCSE, GCE A level, RSA Examinations Board (RSA) and Open College Network qualifications. There is scope for more development of further education courses at 'outreach' centres within the community education programme. A particular success of the programme is the Friday Club which is targeted to the needs of the over 50s. The club offers opportunities for theatre visits and other social activities as well as a range of adult education classes.

12 In some curriculum areas, attendance patterns have been organised to provide wider opportunities for students with particular needs. For example, a fast-track course in business administration is arranged at times which fit in with students' family commitments. The timetable for the BTEC national diploma in public services has been organised to enable students, all of whom are members of the army cadet force, to participate in training activities for one day each week, as part of the course, and over some weekends. In some areas, for example in construction, and some GCE A level and GCSE subjects, open learning materials are available to support students who are not able to attend college on a regular basis.

However, in other areas there is little provision of resource materials to allow students to study on their own. Difficulties in providing tutors has also limited the take up of open learning offered through the community and leisure learning programme.

13 The college provides opportunities for students to participate in a range of social, sports and additional academic activities. Only a small number of full-time students have taken up additional studies in modern foreign languages or for community sports leadership awards. There are few opportunities for students taking GNVQ courses to take additional qualifications. There is no college policy covering the development of key skills for all students. Course teams in some areas have not identified ways of enabling students to achieve national targets.

14 There have been attempts to increase the number of students from groups which have not usually entered further education. About half of the full-time further education courses at intermediate level do not specifically identify entry requirements. As well as the GNVQ foundation level course in health and care there is an innovative modular further education access course. This course provides accreditation at entry level, foundation and intermediate levels. The college sponsors the adult basic education service run by the LEA.

15 Provision for students with moderate learning difficulties is available within the further education access course, a supported training scheme and a range of part-time courses. The further education access course offers a wide range of qualifications with opportunity for progression. There is little provision for students with severe learning difficulties. There is a part-time, one day a week orientation course for adults with severe learning difficulties which is designed to develop their confidence and social skills as a first step to their entry to other college courses. In addition, the part-time pre-vocational and pre-integration courses provide additional support in literacy and encourage such students to progress to mainstream courses. There has been insufficient analysis of the demand for education and training for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

16 The college has close working relationships with other higher education providers. One of the college's main strategic aims is the development of higher education courses to meet the needs of the local community. The college offers higher national diploma courses and modular degrees in most programme areas. The college also provides diplomas of higher education in social work, midwifery and nursing, a degree in nursing and postgraduate courses in science, management, and radiography. In addition, advanced further education courses and courses leading to professional qualifications are offered by the college in nearly all curriculum areas.

17 The college has been successful in developing a number of European contacts and initiatives. There have been successful bids for European

funds, such as the Leonardo and Socrates funds, to support visits, exchanges and work experience programmes. Joint projects between academic institutions in Europe and the college have enabled students and staff to gain valuable experience of education and working practices in other countries. The college hosts meetings for the European Movement which attract large audiences for prominent speakers.

18 The main activity of the marketing and international development unit is to publicise college programmes. Newspaper, radio and other advertising is used to promote the college. A series of open days and evenings are held in college and information stands are taken to a variety of venues, including the Suffolk show and local supermarkets. There are well-organised and informative full-time and part-time course guides. Course leaflets are written to a house style. Publicity materials for foundation and other courses do not take sufficient account of the reading abilities of students with low levels of literacy. Market research is not undertaken by the unit. Some analysis of the demand for new courses is done by course teams and faculties. However, there has been no systematic market research to identify market sector needs and inform promotional activities.

19 Individual course tutors have established productive links with employers. There is strong employer representation on many course committees and some faculties have employer liaison groups. These provide opportunities for employers to provide feedback on the value of courses, and in several instances, to contribute to the design of new courses. For example, in science, new courses in pharmacy, environmental science and sports science have been developed in response to local market needs. In other areas, for example in hairdressing and beauty therapy, links with employers are less well developed. There is little contact with employers for students following GCE A level programmes. Training and consultancy services for employers are provided through the college company. The company has identified some 'niche' markets, for example in radiation protection, occupational health and design consultancy. The college has chosen to limit the range of provision that is marketed and supported by the college company. Some areas of the curriculum are not marketed directly to employers.

20 Relationships with Suffolk TEC are effective. The senior management teams of the TEC and the college hold a joint annual review of labour market intelligence. This informs the college's strategic plan. The college plays an active role in the local economic development forum, 'Partners for Prosperity'. It has responded to a range of TEC initiatives to promote lifelong learning. These include the establishment of the Suffolk Management Development Centre, and the development of more flexible patterns of study and greater opportunities for accreditation within the adult community and leisure learning programme.

21 The college has recently given a higher priority to the development of links with schools. The college regularly attends careers events at local

schools and three schools have taken up the offer of 'taster' days for year 11 pupils. There is collaboration with schools and another local further education college to provide a booklet for year 11 pupils detailing options for post-16 education. Some subjects have good curriculum links with schools. For example, in art and design there is support for schoolchildren to exhibit their work. The college has been involved in the franchising and development of GNVQ courses in several local schools.

22 The college maintains good relationships with community organisations. For example, BTEC national diploma performing arts students have collaborated with the Wolsey Theatre in Ipswich to work as a performing company for six weeks at four Suffolk venues. The college has worked with the police and other public services to develop a uniformed services course. There are links with local minority ethnic groups. For example, art and design tutors have facilitated the exhibition of the work of local black artists. The college maintains close links with groups concerned with improving opportunities for people with disabilities and it is developing projects with the Prince's Trust.

23 The college has well-developed policies for equal opportunities. A long-established advisory committee has commissioned research into equal opportunity issues. However, some curriculum areas have done little to implement and promote the policy. The college produces an annual report of current practice on equal opportunities which is evaluative and self-critical.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

24 The corporation has 17 members. There are currently two vacancies. Corporation members have a wide range of expertise and community interests appropriate to the needs of the college. A number of members, including the chair of Suffolk TEC, work at senior management level in industry. There is only one woman member. The corporation provides an induction for new members but there is no formal training policy for members. Training for specific purposes occasionally takes place. Members have identified that more training would prove helpful, particularly for members of the audit committee.

25 Documentation related to governance is thorough and clearly presented. There is a comprehensive corporation handbook which includes a register of members' interests, a code of conduct and a calendar of meetings. The board has seven subcommittees: audit, finance and employment; physical resources; remuneration; student appeal; staff disciplinary; and search. Detailed background papers are presented to members for corporation and subcommittee meetings, and members are well briefed on strategic issues. The subcommittee structure supports the main work of the corporation effectively. Attendance at meetings is satisfactory. Corporation members attended two-day residential meetings on strategic planning in 1993 and 1997, at which they identified key objectives for the college.

26 Corporation members have evaluated their own performance. The self-assessment indicated that a greater awareness of academic matters and quality issues is required. Reports on students' achievements, progression and retention rates are received by the corporation. However, members have not had sufficient involvement in setting and monitoring performance indicators for the work of the college. More effective arrangements are needed to enable corporation members to understand the further education work of the college staff. The format for financial reporting requires further development in order that members can more easily assess monthly income and expenditure against financial targets.

27 There are well-established procedures for strategic planning. Strategic objectives are shared widely with staff and are reflected in school operational plans. Consultation takes place with staff, students, employers and Suffolk TEC through the academic executive group and a task group of the academic board. Strategic plans take account of national targets for education and training and are developed in consultation with course leaders and heads of school. The achievement of national targets for education and training is monitored at college level by a strategic planning group. Less attention is given to monitoring the achievement of these targets at course level. Further education enrolments grew significantly prior to incorporation. The college has not met its own enrolment targets in line with expansion in the sector over the last three years.

28 Members of the senior management team have well-defined, broad responsibilities for strategy and for developing policy. Staff at all levels are clear about their roles and in many parts of the organisation, support staff and teachers work effectively together. Senior managers consult with staff through a well-established committee structure. However, the present organisation of the college does not effectively support the management and development of further education in the college. Managers have not paid sufficient attention to the implementation and monitoring of further education issues. The college has recognised these issues and the current reorganisation is intended to create more direct management of further education.

29 The college has a comprehensive committee structure. The academic board has a significant and clearly defined role. It is the parent body for the faculty boards and committees on quality assurance, equal opportunities and teaching and learning. Committees have distinct terms of reference and provide a means of informing academic staff about the development of the college and its policies. There are fewer opportunities for support staff to be involved. Communication systems do not work effectively for all functions and across all sites. There is often a delay in the receipt of information at annexes and an over reliance on paper-based forms of communication. The weekly newsletter, which is highly valued by staff, helps to address some of the communication problems.

30 Course leaders have wide responsibilities and the varying quality of support and guidance for middle managers means that course management is of inconsistent quality. Some course teams have developed action plans containing measurable objectives that are monitored. School meetings are well documented and have clear action points. Cross-college working groups have been established to support new developments and initiatives; examples include the GNVQ and internal verification forums and the teaching and learning methods committee both of which provide an opportunity for staff to discuss common differences and share good practice.

31 Strong central financial controls are in place. At the time of inspection, procedures for costing courses and delegating budgets were at an early stage of development. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding in 1996-97 is £18.79 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £17.97 per unit.

32 There is a clear strategy for, and commitment to, the future development of effective management information systems. However, current software does not support present needs for financial and other management information. Management information systems have been unreliable and managers have little confidence in the accuracy of the information they provide.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

33 The college has an extensive range of student support services which are delivered by committed teams of staff. The student services unit provides: counselling and welfare advice; careers education and guidance; leisure and recreation programmes; and an accommodation service. There is an effective partnership with Suffolk Careers which provide careers guidance to students. The multi-faith chaplaincy service which is partly funded by the Anglican Church and supported by the Ipswich Council of Churches provides pastoral support. A sexual health service is provided by the Suffolk Health Alliance. The counselling and welfare service is well used and highly regarded. Subsidised childcare facilities are available in a 45-place nursery.

34 The college has an open access policy. Course tutors have prime responsibility for recruiting students. They are helped by support staff who receive applications and process and track admissions. Prospective students are interviewed by subject area staff who follow centrally specified guidelines. Whilst the college's schools provide advice and guidance about their own courses, prospective students are not always provided with sufficient information about the range of programmes which the college offers. There is no cross-college co-ordination or monitoring of the guidance provided by course teams. Where applicants are unsure about their choices, or the course they wish to study is unsuitable, they are

referred to student services for further guidance. Student services staff provide effective and impartial advice which applicants value. The national record of achievement is not used as an integral part of the admissions process and there is no common use of it on a college-wide basis.

35 Induction is centrally co-ordinated and systematically reviewed. Course leaders are responsible for devising course-specific induction programmes within a framework common to the college. During induction, students complete their learning agreement and are introduced to the college charter and course handbook. The content of some course handbooks is not well matched to the level of the course. Induction programmes vary in quality. The most effective programmes help students to get to know one another and imaginatively combine information on courses with information about the college. However, a significant number of induction sessions were not effectively managed and provided few opportunities for students to do other than listen to their teachers. The college is aware of the need to facilitate transfer between courses. It operates a central transfer system during the first weeks of the year when careers education, admissions and subject area staff are available in a central location to offer guidance.

36 All full-time students are assessed on entry to the college to identify needs they may have for support in numeracy and literacy. This initial screening of students is co-ordinated by the additional support co-ordinator and is well planned. The choice of assessment methods and analysis of the assessment is carried out by course leaders. The results of the screening tests are passed to the additional support team which is responsible for further diagnostic assessment and for arranging the support for students. In some cases, these procedures work effectively. However, the response from course leaders is variable. Some do not recognise the value of such tests and fail to administer them properly. Where students transfer between courses, or join courses late, they may miss the screening process altogether.

37 Additional support, both for individuals and for groups, is provided in a number of ways. It is of high quality, well matched to individual requirements, and carefully planned and recorded. For example, the tutor responsible for supported learning worked in partnership with the course tutor to deliver a highly effective, accredited communications programme for a group of NVQ levels 1 and 2 motor vehicle students. There is particularly notable language support and individual support for dyslexia. Students who take up support are appreciative of the service they receive.

38 A college-wide approach has been introduced for tutorial work and there is a tutorial policy which defines what full-time and part-time students can expect to receive as an entitlement. A useful tutorial handbook for tutors offers guidance and a non-prescriptive framework. The implementation of the tutorial system was supported by a staff-development programme, but significant numbers of staff did not

attend the training sessions and some staff remain uncomfortable with the personal tutorial role. Implementation of the tutorial policy is uneven. Some tutorials are well organised. Tutors are caring, monitor students' progress thoroughly and keep clear records. However, there is no common approach to recording students' achievements or monitoring their overall performance. In the best tutorials, there is a well-designed programme of activities which draws on specialist inputs from careers advisers and others.

39 There is effective support for students applying for higher education courses. Careers staff also offer workshops where students can acquire relevant job-seeking skills. There is a job vacancy service for those who seek to progress to employment. Course tutors do not always make use of this service to provide advice to their students.

40 The approach to monitoring attendance varies. Some course teams and schools have set up effective systems for checking attendance registers. On some courses, staff follow up unexplained absence. Where there is effective practice, students are made aware that attendance will be monitored and that procedures may include contacting parents/guardians or employers.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

41 Strengths outweighed weaknesses in 45 per cent of the sessions inspected. This compares with a national figure of 63 per cent for colleges inspected during 1995-96, according to figures published in the *Chief Inspectors's Annual Report 1995-96*. Weaknesses outweighed strengths in 14 per cent of sessions. This is higher than the average of 8 per cent for the further education sector identified in the same report. The average rate of attendance at classes was 77 per cent. There was an average of 12 students present in each of the classes inspected. 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 AS/A level	2	15	12	6	0	35
GCSE	1	4	7	1	0	13
GNVQ	1	11	20	4	1	37
NVQ	1	10	22	10	0	43
Other vocational	11	41	31	9	0	92
Higher education and access to higher education	3	11	9	1	0	24
Other	1	11	10	4	1	27
Total	20	103	111	35	2	271

42 In science, mathematics and computing there was generally a good balance between theory and practical work. Teachers explained topics clearly. However, they often failed to provide an appropriate variety of learning activities for students. In the better practical classes, students were encouraged to discuss the results of experiments and to present their conclusions to the whole group. There were good relationships between staff and students, particularly on part-time courses, which encouraged purposeful learning. In some computing lessons, teachers made effective use of questions to motivate students and maintain their interest. Handouts and overhead transparencies were of good quality and used effectively. In a number of practical lessons, teachers were assisted by instructors, to extend the support available to students. Group work was used effectively for the sharing of ideas and to develop students' interpersonal skills. In classes with low numbers, teachers did not always adapt their methods to ensure that all students were involved in the work. As a result, students lost concentration. There was insufficient planning and co-ordination of GNVQ assessment. Assignment submission dates were not always adhered to and this resulted in delays in returning marked work.

43 In construction, teaching was carefully planned to cover the requirements of awarding bodies. In the more successful lessons, there was comprehensive coverage of the topic and students worked on their own without close supervision. Most practical classes were well managed. Some workshops were too small for the number of students using them and their learning was adversely affected. Well-prepared handouts were used to extend the coverage of topics, but students did not always have sufficient time to read their contents and, occasionally, handouts were not discussed in class. There was an appropriate mix of assessments, including assignments, project work and written tests. Students were informed regularly of their progress and appropriate records were maintained. In a few lessons, teachers talked excessively while students made notes. In some lessons, the pace of work was too slow and activities lacked purpose. Students were often unable to demonstrate understanding of topics they had already covered.

44 In the most successful engineering lessons, teachers drew on students' industrial experience to relate theory to its application in the workplace. Classroom activities were suitably varied and teachers successfully maintained students' interest. Most handouts were of a high standard. In practical sessions, students worked diligently from instructive task sheets. Teachers circulated giving advice and demonstrating techniques which students were then able to practise. For example, in a session where students worked in pairs preparing vehicle bodywork for painting, they could explain the reasons for carrying out the procedures and were developing their skills and acquiring technical expertise with the guidance of teachers. Assignment briefs were well presented using a standard format that included assessment criteria. In marking students' work teachers gave constructive written comments on how the work might

be improved. Effective monitoring systems were used to record students' performance and progress. Information technology was seldom used. In a few theory sessions, teachers inappropriately required students laboriously to copy badly written notes and diagrams from a whiteboard.

45 Teaching on business studies, administration, management and professional courses was generally good. Most sessions were carefully planned and students worked purposefully. The tasks and activities set for students were interesting and suitably challenging. On professional courses, realistic case studies were used effectively to develop and apply business expertise. There were some excellent examples of the use of role-play to enable students to experience and respond to situations. For example, students in a national diploma public services class were engaged in an exercise on interview techniques where each role-play was recorded on video and assessed by fellow students and the teacher. Students showed a high level of maturity in their responses and used the activity to improve their interpersonal skills. Students' portfolios of work were marked regularly and teachers wrote helpful comments. GNVQ business studies students used action plans to chart their own progress and meet deadlines. Students on part-time programmes were encouraged to use and share their experience of work in employment. On GNVQ courses, the development and assessment of students' key skills were not sufficiently integrated with other aspects of their work. Many handouts and overhead transparencies were of poor quality and difficult to read. Students' learning was not routinely checked and on a number of occasions teachers missed appropriate opportunities to involve students in class discussion.

46 In hospitality and catering, and leisure and tourism, teachers provided a variety of learning activities for students which helped their personal development. Students were made aware of the environmental impacts of tourism as they researched local attractions. Appropriate teamwork and time management skills were developed. Many of the NVQ kitchen and restaurant sessions included levels 1, 2 and 3 students and they worked well together. The majority of catering students had gained useful experience working at events such as Newmarket races and mayoral functions, and some had gained practical experience in Sweden and Finland. Students at level 3 were not always engaged in tasks which were at the required level for the award. In some restaurant sessions, there were periods when students were not productively occupied. In theory classes for NVQ catering, insufficient consideration was given to the wide ability range of the students. Students were not always clear about what was required of them or what the criteria for successful completion of assessments were. Teachers' written comments about students' work sometimes failed to provide them with sufficient guidance on the areas which required improvement. Students frequently arrived late for lessons, especially for theory sessions.

47 In the better sessions in health and social care there was some innovative teaching which kept students' interest. In a nursery nursing class, group work was used effectively to explore the social psychology of roles and stereotyping. Adult students on the housing wardens and counselling courses were encouraged to draw on their professional experiences to relate theory to practice. On beauty therapy courses, schemes of work were carefully planned. Well-designed learning packs were used to enable students to work on their own. Hairdressing and beauty therapy students benefited from working with clients in the college salons and from work experience placements. In the less successful sessions, topics were superficially covered and students were not fully engaged in the work. The aims of the sessions which took place in hairdressing salons were not always defined; students were not challenged by the work and their progress was inadequately recorded.

48 In performing arts, music, and art and design there was some dynamic teaching and students were set some stimulating projects. A group of drama students performed their work in preparation for 'theatre in education' visits to schools. The production of a murder trial was particularly notable as the audience became the jury and were asked to determine the punishment of a convicted murderer. There was some effective teaching of specialist information technology skills on print production and music technology courses. Art and design students were encouraged to use local facilities as a source of ideas. For example, students working on a three-dimensional animation set visited docks and produced working drawings and photographs for model building and colour referencing. A few art and design sessions were not well organised; teachers did not make clear to students what was required of them. Many teachers failed to make effective use of visual aids to reinforce learning. Project briefs in art and design did not always include assessment criteria and the development of students' key skills was not routinely integrated with other aspects of work during practical projects. There was inconsistency in the marking of students' work and teachers' written comments did not always reflect the marks awarded.

49 On access to higher education courses there were excellent relationships between the adult students and tutors. Students enjoyed their studies and teachers made frequent checks to ensure that learning had taken place. Social sciences and humanities teaching was generally of a good standard. In the best lessons, students were engaged in appropriately varied learning activities. Work was related to what had been learned in previous sessions and to what was to be covered in the future. Teachers checked students' understanding through regular questioning and provided good challenging written assignments. Homework was set regularly and returned promptly with useful comments on how work might be improved. The small size of some of the teaching groups restricted teaching methods and made effective class discussions difficult. In some sessions, teachers were too concerned to impart knowledge at the expense of providing students with opportunities to

formulate arguments for themselves using texts. In a few cases, lessons were not well managed; some students were allowed to dominate discussions whilst others remained silent.

50 On basic education courses, there was some effective teaching and support for students. Most teachers used detailed lesson plans. In the better sessions, methods of teaching and learning were suitably varied and took good account of students' interests and abilities. For example, in a well-structured lesson on the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) numberpower course, students were undertaking individual activities which had been planned on the basis of the results of the initial assessment of their students' skills. Most learning materials were well designed and well produced, though not all took sufficient account of the different abilities of students in the various groups. Worksheets and written work was sometimes used inappropriately with students who had poor literacy skills. Learning programmes did not always challenge students sufficiently or build on their prior knowledge and skills. On some learning programmes, teachers failed to make sufficient links between the various kinds of work. For example, work done as part of the further education award scheme did not contribute to students' work for qualifications in wordpower and numberpower.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

51 The 178 students, aged 16 to 18, who entered for at least one GCE AS/A level examination in 1995-96, scored, on average 3.3 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2), according to the 1996 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). This places the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Of those students enrolled on their final year of the vocational courses included in the DfEE's 1996 tables, 47 per cent were successful at advanced level and 46 per cent at intermediate level. This places the college in the bottom 10 per cent and the bottom third, respectively, of colleges in the further education sector on these performance measures. However, these tables are of limited value in assessing the college's overall achievements because the majority of its vocational course students are over 18 years of age.

52 Science students develop good teamworking skills. GNVQ assignments were well presented and were up to the appropriate standard for the award. Most students displayed good information technology skills. Pass rates for GCE A level science subjects and mathematics were in line with the average pass rate for general further education colleges. Results on the GCE A level computing course were good. In 1996, pass rates for students completing the national certificate in computer studies were good, at 91 per cent. The higher national certificate in computer studies has had low pass rates for the last three years. A number of vocational programmes have poor retention rates.

53 Construction students displayed high levels of competence in practical activities. Students' portfolios were clearly indexed, neatly compiled and well presented. The quality of work was generally good. Technician students were developing good computing skills which were successfully applied to industry relevant projects. Examination pass rates for 1996 were about 10 per cent above the national average for construction courses. Results were very good for NVQ level 3 carpentry and joinery and electrical installation. Retention rates on one-year courses were good, averaging 88 per cent. Some one-year courses had a retention rate of 100 per cent. The retention rate for two-year courses (63 per cent) was lower than the national average of 77 per cent. On craft courses, students' communication and numeracy skills were not well developed.

54 Students on engineering courses were developing appropriate technical skills and knowledge. They carried out practical work competently and with due regard for health and safety. On one-year, part-time courses, retention rates were close to the national average. Results were good on the higher national certificate engineering (motor vehicle studies) course. The pass rate on the intermediate GNVQ course, at 38 per cent, was better than the national average of 29 per cent. On the two-year advanced programmes, retention and pass rates were low. In engineering, students' pass rates were 10 to 15 per cent below national averages on most courses. Students on a number of courses have difficulty with the mathematical aspects of their studies.

55 There were some good examination results on professional business courses. For example, in the last three years, all students completing the Institute of Personnel and Development certificate course were successful. Results on the BTEC higher national certificate business and finance have been consistently sound. Students' work on the national diploma in public services is of an exceptionally high standard. Most students were competent in information technology and produced assignments of good quality. Students were developing effective interpersonal and negotiating skills through group work. Projects on accounting technician courses were of a high standard. The solutions produced often included realistic recommendations. On full-time business administration courses, retention rates were high. Most secretarial skills courses had pass rates above the national average, especially on single subject RSA courses. However, students' portfolios of evidence for NVQ level 3 business administration contained work which was not of an appropriate standard for the award. In 1996, the pass rate on the advanced GNVQ business, at 56 per cent, was below the national average (60 per cent). Students on the intermediate GNVQ course do not have appropriate communication skills to cope with the demands of the course.

56 There were good results for hospitality and catering students completing their course of study. Sixty-four per cent of advanced GNVQ students gained the full award in 1996, compared with a national average

of 46 per cent. All students who completed their NVQ level 2 in catering in 1996 achieved a full award. NVQ portfolios were well organised and some contained additional evidence which students had gathered from their part-time employment. Students working in kitchens had a good understanding of health and safety regulations and worked effectively in teams. Leisure and tourism students were confident communicators and displayed good presentational skills. In 1996, pass rates of 69 per cent on the advanced GNVQ leisure and tourism were higher than the national average (63 per cent). Students' achievements on the intermediate GNVQ were poor, at 26 per cent, compared with the national average of 50 per cent. The retention rate on the part-time NVQ catering course dropped from 37 per cent in 1995 to 27 per cent in 1996.

57 There is wide variation in students' achievements on health and social care courses. In 1996, the pass rate on the GNVQ foundation course in health and social care (69 per cent) was well above the national average of 34 per cent. There have been consistently good pass rates on the part-time Institute of Housing Wardens certificate and counselling courses. Full-time students develop confidence and the social skills essential for their work during their work experience. Written work was of a good standard and students displayed relevant vocational knowledge. On intermediate and advanced GNVQ health and social care and National Nursery Examinations Board (NNEB) diploma courses pass rates were significantly below the national average. Beauty therapy students demonstrate high standards in their practical work. There were some good pass rates on beauty therapy courses. Some NVQ level 3 hairdressing students had failed to develop appropriate technical skills. Over the last three years, pass rates on the full-time NVQ level 3 hairdressing course have been poor, ranging from 25 to 45 per cent.

58 Performing arts students had developed co-operative working practices. Media students had developed good technical skills, using a range of specialist equipment for poster design and advertising layouts. BTEC national diploma performing arts students achieved pass rates which were above national averages. Most art and design students had acquired appropriate skills and knowledge. Examination results for students who complete their course were generally good. For example in 1996, the pass rate on intermediate GNVQ art and design was 80 per cent; on the BTEC national diploma foundation studies course in art and design it was 83 per cent. In 1996, results were poor on the intermediate GNVQ media course; only two of the 17 students enrolled achieved the award within the academic year. A further five students subsequently completed and gained the full award. Retention rates on some two-year courses were low. For example, on the BTEC media national diploma course, 1994-96, it was 41 per cent.

59 English language and literature students displayed confidence, the ability to respond to questions, and to express ideas effectively. Written

work was generally of an appropriate standard and included appropriate analysis and critical evaluation of text. Students on access to higher education courses develop computing skills and study skills to a level which enables them to cope with the demands of higher education. In social sciences, students showed a good understanding of key concepts. Adult students studying modern foreign languages had made good progress and developed confidence and self-esteem. Some modern foreign language students experienced problems with grammar. Pass rates for GCSE and GCE A level courses in modern foreign languages were near to the national average for general further education colleges. GCSE results were above the national average in psychology and sociology but below in human biology and mathematics. In 1996, pass rates were above the national average in a number of GCE A level subjects, including business studies, law and politics.

60 Students on basic education programmes had access to a wide range of options for which there is some form of national accreditation. The majority of students also undertook key skills awards in number and wordpower. Students who were studying on mainstream courses with additional support responded well to the challenges set by teachers. Sixty-four per cent of students on the further education access course in 1996 gained their award and 74 per cent progressed to further study. Some students were studying for awards at too low a level for their ability.

61 Information on students' destinations and progression is collected for most courses but it is not aggregated to provide college-wide information. The college produced a summary of full-time students' destinations for those completing courses in 1996. Half of the 797 students who followed courses leading to entry qualifications for higher education progressed to higher national or degree programmes. Of these 188 remained at Suffolk College to take a higher education course. Ninety-one per cent of students successfully completing the access to higher education course also progressed to higher education, more than half continuing their studies at the college. Several students have gained national recognition for outstanding performance in sports. For example, a student was voted the national junior player of the year by the English Basketball Association and another was selected to play for the England students women's rugby team.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

62 The college has a comprehensive range of quality assurance mechanisms. These were primarily developed in the context of higher education. They are not fully effective in dealing with further education. The quality assurance committee is responsible to the academic board for the quality of processes which have a direct impact on students' learning experiences. It has three subcommittees: the audit committee, which evaluates the implementation and effectiveness of quality policies and procedures; the standards committee, which is responsible for establishing

new quality standards; and the enhancement committee, which is responsible for identifying good practice both in and outside the college. The college has been slow to introduce performance targets and quality standards for all areas of its work. Enrolment targets are set and, for the current session, course teams are required to specify targets for students' retention, success and progression. The targets set are expected to be realistic and achievable and to take into account the previous year's results, and national and regional norms.

63 There is a well-established and effective system of internal validation for new course proposals and periodic review of existing courses. These procedures also apply to the small number of courses provided through off-site collaborative arrangements. Validation panels comprise college staff, usually from an academic group not associated with the proposal, and external representation with relevant subject expertise. The college has delegated authority for the validation of BTEC courses.

64 There is effective monitoring and review of courses. Course teams are required to produce an annual report, which includes a self-assessment report, using the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Most programme area self-assessment reports were comprehensive, although in a few instances they were insufficiently self-critical. These reports are reviewed by staff at school and/or faculty level during review days, when strengths and issues are identified. Whilst there is evidence of effective action planning at course level, some faculty action plans are too imprecise, an issue which has been identified by the quality audit subcommittee. The system of quality assurance does not extend to the college's support units; they are not required to undertake formal reviews or to produce an annual report. However, the student services unit has produced a thorough and self-critical report in which it has identified the need to set clearer targets.

65 Arrangements for assessing the views of students on the quality of their learning are not fully effective. Students' views are expressed in a variety of ways; they are represented on course teams, there are student forums at faculty level and there is student consultation committee. Some course teams and faculties use questionnaires to discover students' views. However, they are not designed to a common format and this limits the extent to which the college can conduct a comprehensive analysis of students' views. Some course evaluation reports do not give sufficient attention to students' opinions on the quality of teaching. There is no formal assessment of the quality of teaching.

66 The college carefully reviews and acts upon external verifiers' reports. Reports are received centrally and distributed widely. Using a standard form, course leaders are required to prepare a formal response to all issues raised by the verifier, and to produce an action plan. The quality audit subcommittee effectively monitors these responses. These procedures provide valuable mechanisms for quality improvement.

67 The college has not yet implemented staff appraisal. A teachers' appraisal scheme has been adopted and appraisers have been trained for its introduction in September 1997. Observation of teaching is not a required part of the scheme, but the college recognises that it could be a voluntary element. Currently, all teachers have a termly interview with their line manager to discuss their workload. This provides an opportunity to discuss staff development. Draft appraisal proposals have been produced for support staff but these have not yet been approved.

68 Each faculty determines its own staff-development priorities and is required to spend a minimum of at least 1 per cent of its staffing budget on staff development. The college has expressed a general view that all teachers should be qualified to at least first degree level and have assessor/verifier awards and teaching qualifications. Each faculty produces an annual staff-development report. However, these contain little effective evaluation of staff development and its impact on the further education curriculum. The Suffolk Management Development Centre, which is a self-contained unit in the college, has been accredited with Investor in People status and the whole college is now working towards the achievement of this award.

69 The college charter has recently been revised in consultation with the students' union and staff. A formal complaints procedure has been established and complaints are closely monitored. Students receive the charter during induction and, in order for it to reach a wider audience, versions are available in Bengali, Punjabi and Cantonese. The charter lacks specific standards against which performance can be measured. The fulfilment of the commitments of the charter are not systematically monitored.

70 The college prepared a thorough self-assessment report for the inspection. Many of the judgements on key issues were consistent with those of the inspection team. As part of the commitment to independent peer review, the college established a review group which included three senior staff from other colleges to assess the self-assessment process and the report. Teaching and the promotion of learning, and students' achievements were comprehensively covered in separate programme area reports. Rigorous and evaluative reports using other headings in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*, were also produced and contributed to the college's self-assessment report.

RESOURCES

Staffing

71 Most staff are well qualified and experienced in the subjects they teach. Seventy-six per cent of full-time teaching staff have a first degree, 46 per cent have higher degrees and 55 per cent have professional or technical qualifications. Approximately, 64 per cent have a teaching

qualification. In some vocational areas, especially construction and engineering, a large proportion of staff have achieved the assessor and verifier qualifications required to support GNVQ and NVQ programmes. In other vocational areas, for example science, health and social care, and art and design, staff have made slow progress in achieving appropriate assessor and verifier awards. In most areas, there are adequate numbers of technical and support staff. Support staff are well qualified; over 60 per cent of administrative support staff and 81 per cent of technicians have professional or technical qualifications.

72 There are well-developed and comprehensive personnel policies and procedures, particularly for the recruitment, promotion and redeployment of staff. There is effective central monitoring of, and control over, the replacement of full-time staff. The personnel unit provides support and expertise to managers in the recruitment and selection of staff. An occupational health service is provided for all staff, and professional counselling is available.

Equipment/learning resources

73 The college has sufficient equipment in most areas to support teaching and learning effectively. There is a wide range of specialist equipment in many vocational areas. The business administration training office is well equipped to provide a realistic work environment. Specialist equipment in science laboratories is of a high specification. In engineering, there is a comprehensive range of equipment, including electronic training equipment supplied by industry. Some manufacturing equipment is of industrial standard. On construction courses, equipment is similar to that found in industry. Motor vehicle students benefit from a range of new and nearly new vehicles; some donated by local employers.

74 The library on the college's main site provides a pleasant working environment and has a large number of books for further and higher education. There is a wide variety of over 600 journals. Students have readily available and well-controlled access to the Internet, an increasing number of compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases and an extensive video library of 6,000 titles. There is a good range of specialist resources to support partially sighted and blind students. However, the library facilities do not adequately support the further education curriculum and further education students. The number of study places is substantially below library association norms. The number of library staff is low and this restricts the service provided to students. There is a library bookstock of 88,000. There are significant numbers of out-of-date texts in some areas of further education, including business, humanities, health care and foreign languages. For catering and leisure and tourism students the number of books is inadequate. Further education students on sites other than the main site have limited access to library facilities.

75 Students have good access to computers. There are about 760 computers with industrial-standard software which are available for students' use. However, the number of high-quality printers is small. Many computers are leased and this allows the college to maintain compatibility across the college and to update equipment regularly. Computers are dispersed around the college; some are on the college network, others are on separate local networks. A significant number of computers are located in resource rooms managed by individual schools; the remainder are managed centrally by the computer unit. Technical advice and support for students and staff is provided by computer unit staff but there are not enough specialist staff to maintain these services adequately. A strategy has been developed to improve and link information technology across the college using fibre optic cabling.

Accommodation

76 The college operates from nine sites, although over 80 per cent of students study on the main campus at Rope Walk, Ipswich. The accommodation on the main campus is clean and generally well maintained. There are five large well-equipped lecture theatres, which can seat between 50 and 150 students. Most teaching rooms are appropriately furnished and equipped with whiteboards and overhead projectors. There is some unimaginative use of classroom space. Accommodation has not been adapted to suit differing teaching methods. With a few exceptions, most teaching rooms lack stimulating visual displays and/or examples of students' work. Most specialist accommodation is adequate for its purpose. The restaurants and beauty salons provide realistic work environments for students. However, specialist accommodation for hairdressing is dated. The quality of accommodation on some sites is less than satisfactory and some of it is poor. For example, the space used for performing arts is inappropriate and lacks adequate changing facilities. Most art and design facilities used by further education students are shabby and untidy.

77 Responsibility for timetabling most accommodation rests with faculties and schools. This has led to some rooms being underused or used inappropriately. For example, some teaching rooms are too small for the size of the groups using them. A centralised system is being implemented to try to improve the way in which rooms are used.

78 The college has carried out an access survey. The accommodation at Rope Walk, with the exception of the second floor of the library, is generally accessible for those with restricted mobility. On the college's other sites, it is more limited. For example, at Bolton Lane there is limited access to some ground rooms and no lift to the upper floor. The college plans to dispose of most of its present annexes and to relocate provision on the main site at Rope Walk.

79 External signposting to the college is good and directional signs within the college are helpful. Car parking is adequate for the current level of demand at Rope Walk but restricted on most other sites. There is a wide choice of refectory facilities on the main campus. There are good sports facilities, including a well-used gymnasium and playing fields. The students' union has its own offices. There are proposals to improve social and recreational facilities for students but, at present, these are limited.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

80 The college's main strengths are:

- the extensive range of courses and opportunities for progression to higher education
- the effective contribution of the corporation to the development of the college
- clear strategic planning
- an effective committee structure which supports the development of policies
- wide ranging and effective student support services
- the effective teaching in some areas and the good additional support for students
- its course monitoring and review procedures
- the specialist equipment in some areas
- the well-qualified academic and support staff.

81 The college should address:

- the limited range of opportunities at entry and foundation level
- the need to develop organisational structures to support the effective management of further education
- the provision of accurate and reliable management information
- the arrangements for guidance and admissions to further education
- the need to monitor and improve the quality of teaching in some areas
- low retention and pass rates on some of its further education courses
- the use of quality standards, targets and performance indicators
- its library facilities for further education students.

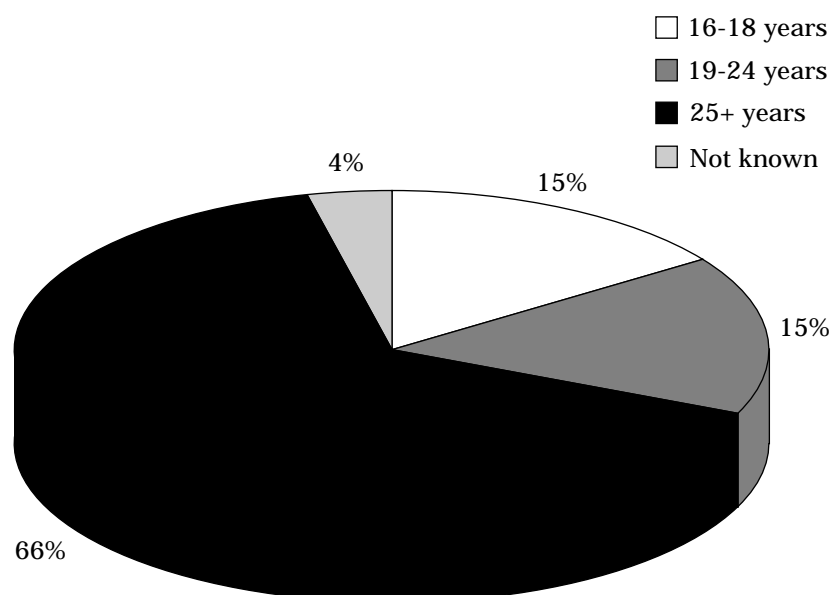
FIGURES

1	Percentage student numbers by age (as at February 1997)
2	Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at February 1997)
3	Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at February 1997)
4	Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)
5	Income (for 12 months to July 1996)
6	Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

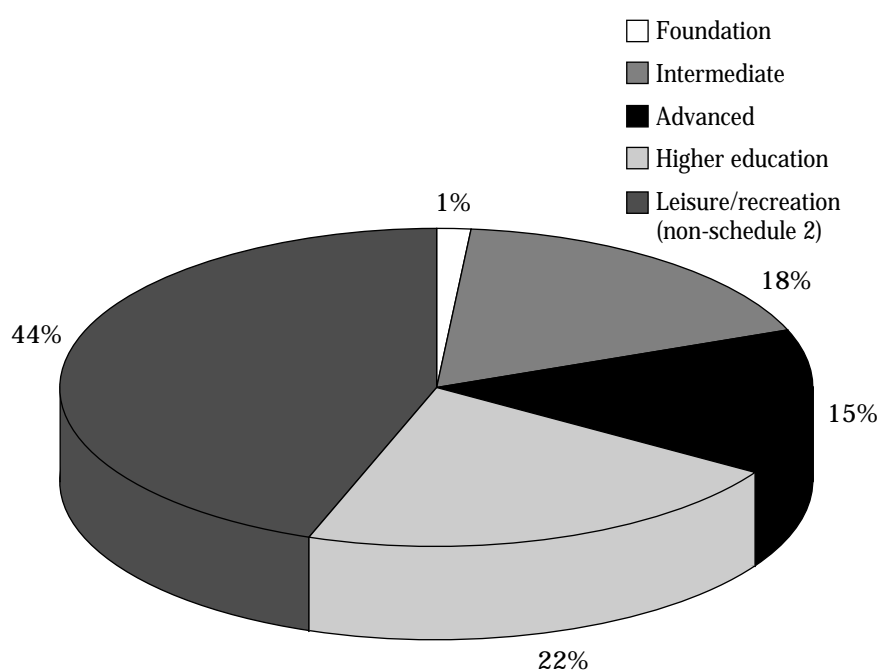
Suffolk College: percentage student numbers by age (as at February 1997)



Student numbers: 23,358

Figure 2

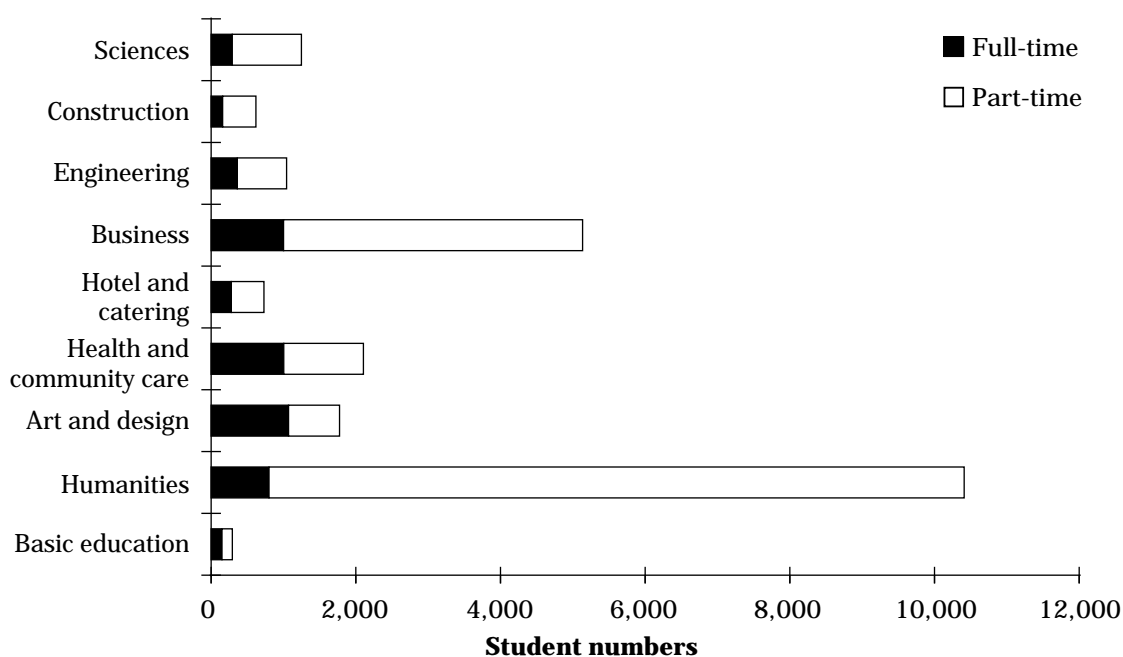
Suffolk College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at February 1997)



Student numbers: 23,358

Figure 3

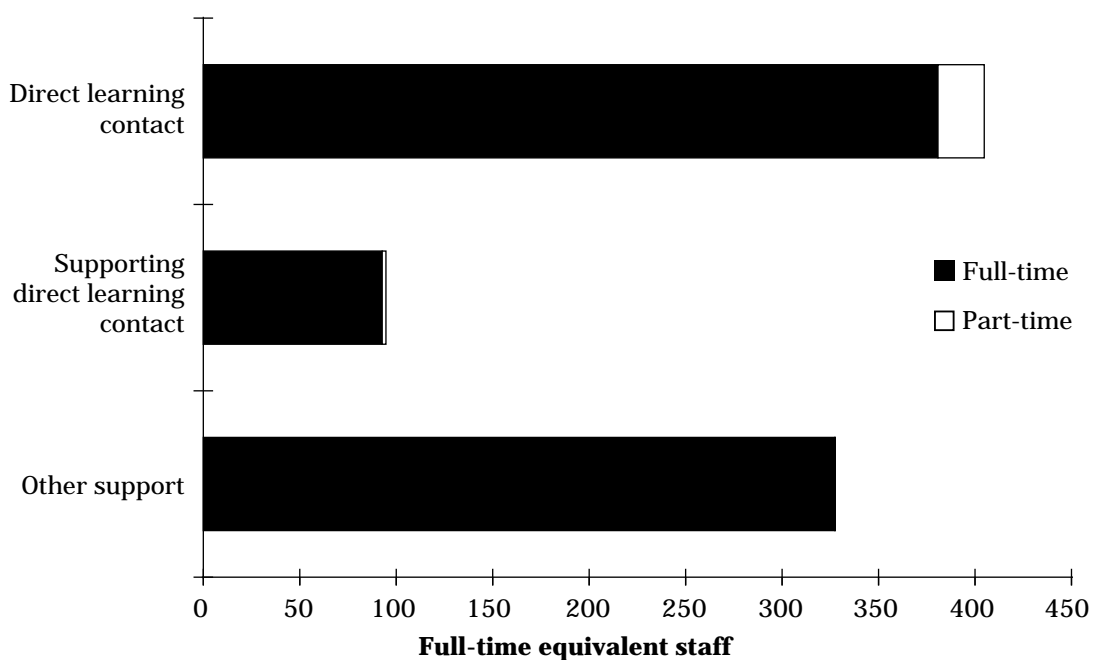
**Suffolk College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area
(as at February 1997)**



Student numbers: 23,358

Figure 4

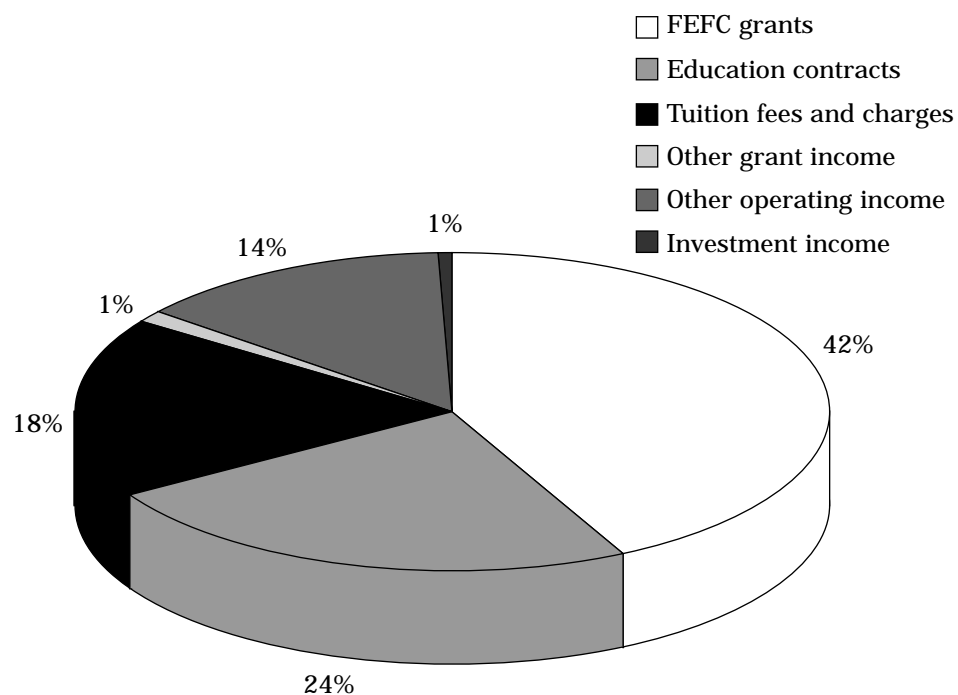
**Suffolk College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents
(as at July 1996)**



Full-time equivalent staff: 827

Figure 5

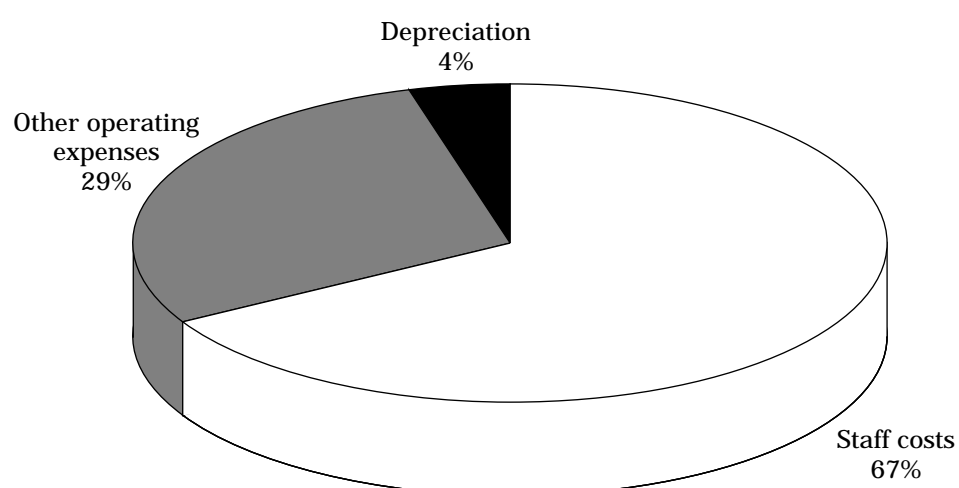
Suffolk College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £25,038,000

Figure 6

Suffolk College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)



Expenditure: £26,437,000

