

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

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# **Taunton's College**

**February 1996**

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**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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**THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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## **GRADE DESCRIPTORS**

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

*The descriptors for the grades are:*

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

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

### **College grade profiles 1993-95**

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

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# FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 27/96

## TAUNTON'S COLLEGE

### SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected May-November 1995

#### Summary

Taunton's College is a sixth form college near the centre of Southampton. It was formed by the merger of two earlier sixth form colleges in 1989, and it moved to a single site only two years ago. It is strongly committed to open access for students, it works effectively to promote equality of educational opportunity and it is active in seeking ways to serve the minority ethnic communities of the city. Standards of teaching and learning are high. Examination results are improving in most subjects; the college is in the top third of further education institutions for both GCE A levels and vocational courses. Nevertheless, the average achievement at GCE A level at Taunton's College is marginally below the average for sixth form colleges nationally. The college is well governed and well managed with a notable regard for openness and consultation. Its staff are well qualified and enthusiastic. Life for the college community is enhanced by excellent new buildings. Equipment is generally good, and there is a particularly good array of modern computers. To continue the commendable progress made since its formation, the college should: refine its quality assurance system and pursue regular staff appraisal; enhance its market intelligence in order to extend its services further; strengthen its management information; and improve the quality of its library.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	2	Health and social care	2
Mathematics	2	Art and design	1
Business studies	2	English	2
Leisure and tourism	2	Social studies	2
		Modern languages	2

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1 Taunton's College was inspected during the period May to November 1995. The curriculum was inspected in May and October and aspects of cross-college provision in November. Enrolment and induction were inspected in September, at the beginning of the academic year. The inspection team of three full-time and seven part-time inspectors spent a total of 48 days in the college. Inspectors observed 127 sessions, examined samples of students' work, and held discussions with students, staff and members of the college corporation. They also met parents, employers, head teachers of local schools and a representative of the Hampshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including the college's strategic plan, its self-assessment report, policy statements and a variety of committee records.

## **THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS**

2 Taunton's College was formed in 1989 by the merger of two sixth form colleges. After a major building programme, the college was established on a single site two miles from the centre of Southampton in July 1993. The college is one of seven further education colleges in Southampton and its immediate area. Five are sixth form colleges. The college attracts students from the inner city and its suburbs. Thirteen per cent of students are from minority ethnic communities, compared with 5 per cent of the population of the city. Before incorporation, the college had eight designated partner schools. Close links have been maintained with these schools and 60 per cent of students come from them. Apart from one Catholic grant-maintained school, no other state school in Southampton has a sixth form. The number of students in the city continuing in education after the age of 16 rose from 43 per cent in 1989, to 66 per cent in 1994. The comparative figures for the rest of Hampshire are 52 per cent and 72 per cent, respectively.

3 Most full-time students at Taunton's College are between 16 and 18 years of age, following General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses. In 1992, the range of courses was extended to include vocational programmes and these have grown steadily. At the time of the inspection there were 1,063 full-time students, and 591 part-time and adult education students. Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The college has met its target growth of 17 per cent for the last two years, but has so far failed to achieve its target this year. It has 78 full-time teachers and seven full-time equivalent part-time teachers, supported by 35 full-time equivalent administrative and technical staff. The college is organised in three divisions: mathematics, science and technology; creative and communication studies; and business and social studies. In each division there are five or six departments.

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4 The city of Southampton has a population of 210,000. It is a large industrial and commercial centre, with major industries including shipping, an oil refinery, vehicle manufacture, a broad range of light industry, and retail, leisure and media companies. It is also an important centre for financial services. The city has a university, and two other higher education establishments. Cultural facilities include two art galleries, two theatres and a concert hall. Unemployment has fallen from a high point of 14.7 per cent at the beginning of 1993 to 7 per cent in June 1995.

5 Taunton's College aims to be an open-access institution. Its objectives are:

- to increase participation, particularly among the 16-19 age group, by providing a wide range of vocational and academic courses
- to establish clear criteria for success
- to demonstrate commitment to equal opportunities through the effective implementation of its policies
- to achieve standards of excellence in every area.

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

6 Forty-two subjects are offered at GCE A level, 14 of which may also be studied for the GCE advanced supplementary (AS) qualification, and 18 at GCSE level. These account for three-quarters of the college's students. In a number of GCE A level subjects, there is a choice of syllabuses to cater for students from different school backgrounds. Vocational courses now include National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) levels 1 to 3; General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels; Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) first and national diplomas; and National Nursery Examinations Board (NNEB) courses. Adult education courses and an access to higher education course are also available. The college is well equipped to support students with physical disabilities. It has established close links with a local special school.

7 The college's programme of additional studies offers students a good opportunity to broaden their interests. A wide range of subjects includes desktop publishing, photography, self-defence, theatre, youth leadership, the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, and sports. Sports teams take part in league, county and national competitions. The additional studies programme is revised regularly to take account of students' interests. All courses are internally certificated and contribute to students' records of achievement. Students also have the opportunity to extend their musical talents. A number of them took part in a successful series of concerts in France during the summer holiday. Eleven students are members of the Southampton Youth Orchestra or the Southampton Brass Band.

8 The college does not offer a discrete course for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but it does provide individual in-class

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support for those who require it. It also works closely with a local centre that provides training for young people with learning difficulties. They visit the college regularly to participate in its courses. In turn, the centre provides work experience for some of the college's students.

9 Links have been maintained with the college's partner schools and their pupils are guaranteed a college place. Senior teachers from the college liaise with these schools to advise on further education opportunities, and to assist pupils in completing their records of achievement. The principal regularly attends meetings with local secondary school heads. In the summer term, the college was host to a primary school science challenge, attended by 500 pupils from 21 schools. Students from the college helped to run the event.

10 The college has strong links with higher education institutions. There are compacts with Portsmouth University and Southampton Institute of Higher Education. The college's deputy principal with responsibility for external links is a member of the further and higher education working group, set up by the TEC, which is researching into the factors that influence students' choice when they progress from school to further education. The chair of the college's corporation is the librarian at Southampton University and another member of the corporation is director of resources at Southampton Institute of Higher Education.

11 The college has a good relationship with the Hampshire TEC. The TEC commends the way in which the college has sought to develop its curriculum and its links with companies. College managers and teachers are aware of the national targets for education and training and these strongly influence the strategic plan. The college is an active participant in the TEC's annual conference for colleges, where issues such as the introduction of modern apprenticeships are discussed. It has responded well to TEC initiatives and has received money for market research to develop courses for adults based on learning resources they can follow independently. Six of these courses are now being piloted. There are close links with local employers. They visit the college to hold mock interviews with students and to advise them on interview techniques. They also provide work placements. Last year, students from the college took part in a project for Southern Water on the location of water leaks. All of them achieved Creativity in Science and Technology Gold Awards. The project finished with a presentation to senior managers of the company and the college. Equipment designed by students for the project is used by Southern Water for demonstrations. The college has set up employer liaison committees, and is exploring the possibility of offering courses to cater for business needs.

12 Adult education evening classes and Saturday workshops were introduced in 1994. In addition, adult education courses are franchised to a local school. The college has conducted surveys of adult education students' opinions of their courses, but the data have yet to be analysed in



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detail. If the college is to meet one of the aims of its strategic plan, to increase the range of adult education programmes, further staff development will be required to ensure that more teachers are involved and that the delivery of courses is effective. Taunton's College is a member of the Hampshire Access Validating Agency. An access to higher education course was introduced in 1994. It recruited well, but about half the students failed to complete the course. Of those who did, almost 80 per cent obtained places in higher education. The college has also developed open learning programmes. The 12 students involved in these are provided with resource packs and attend college for tutorials at times convenient to them. The college plans to expand this provision.

13 The college recognises the need to improve its marketing. A detailed marketing plan has been prepared that sets out objectives, targets, a timetable for implementation and the additional resources needed. The college promotes itself by advertising in local libraries and in the press, by open days, and by visits to local schools and careers fairs. It has made a video about college life for use at open evenings. A second video has been made specially for the international market in response to enquiries from Japan and Thailand. The college newsletter, prospectus and course leaflets are of a high standard. Market research to identify customer requirements is at an early stage of development.

14 Taunton's College has a strong commitment to promote equal opportunities. Its policy sets out standards for all aspects of the college's work. Each department is expected to establish, implement and monitor an equal opportunities plan which is consistent with the central policy. An equal opportunities bulletin is issued regularly, and this provides a useful means of raising awareness. The equal opportunities committee meets twice each term. Its meetings are open to staff and students, and its minutes are widely circulated. Staff development has raised awareness of the rich diversity of cultures in the college.

## **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

15 The corporation board has 18 members. There are nine independent members, including the TEC nominee, two are co-opted, two are parents, two are members of staff, and one is a student. The principal is also a governor. At the time of the inspection there was one vacancy. Five of the governors are women, and two are from minority ethnic communities. Members have particular expertise in estates, personnel, legal and financial management, as well as knowledge of equal opportunity issues. Vacancies on the board are advertised in both the local press and in professional journals. In addition to the statutory finance, audit and remuneration committees, there are committees for employment, premises, curriculum, the community, and student services.

16 Board members respect the distinction between governance and management. They consider that their responsibility is to support and guide college managers in achieving the aims set out in the strategic plan.

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The chairs of committees meet the principal regularly. The board is conscious of the tensions associated with the changing character of Taunton's College as it seeks to become more responsive to the needs of the community. As part of the college's quality policy, the board has reviewed its own activities.

17 The college benefits from effective leadership and there is a strong team spirit within the college. Three deputy principals, the principal senior tutor, the bursar, the administration manager and the three heads of division comprise the college management team. They meet twice a week, once to discuss strategic matters and once to discuss operational matters. The roles of chair and clerk of the team rotate among all members. The forthcoming retirement of one of the deputy principals has promoted a review of the college management team. As a result, the three heads of division and the principal senior tutor have become assistant principals designate and job descriptions have been revised. Members of the college management team chair the committees responsible for each area of the college's work, including curriculum development, marketing and liaison, equal opportunities, and staff development. These committees have clear terms of reference and meet according to a published calendar. Working parties are established for specific purposes such as developing a new academic staffing policy, or revising the length and organisation of the college day.

18 The college's strategic plan is well written. It includes clear objectives, associated targets, timescales, performance indicators and review dates. The management team and corporation board use the plan to guide the development of the college. At each meeting of the corporation, one section of the strategic plan is updated. All members of staff receive a summary of the strategic plan, which includes objectives, information about funding, the college calendar, and factors critical to success.

19 There is effective communication at all levels of the institution. After meetings of the college management team its members brief the next level of management. All staff attend a weekly meeting with the deputy principal. A staff handbook contains information on college policies, targets, performance indicators and procedures. Most departments are well organised. Responsibility for courses and resources is clearly allocated and job descriptions are thorough. There are regular meetings for teachers to consider both college issues and the routine organisation of courses. Minutes of most course meetings provide an accurate summary of what has been discussed and decided.

20 Financial management is the responsibility of the bursar. The basis for allocating capital and consumable budgets is understood by heads of department. Governors and college managers are informed monthly of the financial position. The college is not yet able to calculate unit costs, but this development forms part of its long-term plans. The proportion of income spent on salaries and wages is high compared with similar colleges.

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The reasons are understood, and stem mainly from the cost of retaining teachers on protected salaries after merger of the two sixth form colleges in 1989. There has been a gradual reduction in the number of senior academic posts.

21 In 1994-95 the college's average level of funding was £20.59 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges was £19.81. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

22 Computerised management information systems are a cause of continuing concern to the college. Alternative software packages are being investigated. The college has devised its own student record system and is able to analyse the student population, enrolment patterns and examination results. Data on student destinations are collected systematically by tutors, and are used both for promotional and planning purposes. A deputy principal is responsible for academic records, including the entering of some data. This has been recognised as inappropriate and administrative staff are to take over the responsibility.

23 The college fulfils its statutory obligation under sections 44 and 45 of *The Further and Higher Education Act 1992* by providing opportunities for religious education and worship.

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

24 There is an effective system of guidance and support to assist students before, during and after their entry to the college. Staff are committed and enthusiastic, and students and their parents appreciate the advice and support which are provided.

25 The college provides comprehensive information to help prospective students choose a suitable course. Procedures for entry are carefully outlined in course leaflets, although some of the language may be difficult for some applicants. Promotional activities include open days held in November and January and information evenings. Teachers attend careers fairs and conventions; make presentations in schools; and arrange taster days in the college. The college has set targets for the time it takes to respond to enquiries and applications. These are normally achieved and procedures are efficient.

26 An introductory day is held in the summer for pupils who are coming to the college, where they meet the personal tutor who will guide them through their introductory period. For the first three weeks of the new year, students follow an induction programme designed to help them settle in, to provide them with information on the services and activities available, and to introduce them to methods of learning and assessment. Teachers check that students are taking the right course or subject, and arrange transfers where necessary.

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27 Student services provide good support for full-time students. This includes learning support, counselling, careers guidance and 'No Limits', a practical advice service. The college is to open a consolidated student services centre in January 1996. Confidential counselling is available through an arrangement with the charity Relate, an arrangement which is adequate to meet present demand. Students are aware of all these services, which are promoted through posters, leaflets, newsletters, and tutorials. The college is committed to providing more learning support. At present, 6 per cent of students receive individual or group support during lessons, or at a drop-in workshop. This is a small number for a college which has no entry restrictions. There is no systematic screening of students to identify those who need additional support. In class, teachers and learning support staff work well together. Students diagnosed as dyslexic are helped by a trained tutor. The college's policy for learning difficulties and/or disabilities is detailed, but its effectiveness is not monitored.

28 All full-time and part-time students are assigned to a tutor group. Most groups contain students from different courses but students on some vocational courses are tutored in their course groups. Teachers see advantages in both these approaches. Students receive a weekly group tutorial, which is followed by time set aside for individual interviews. They expressed satisfaction with the support provided by their tutors. Students' progress is reviewed at three points during the year and tutors produce twice-yearly reports which are sent to parents.

29 Careers education and the information available on job opportunities and higher education are good. Careers officers from the Hampshire Careers Service spend 160 days a year at the college. Teachers provide additional support for students seeking entry to Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Work experience is a requirement of some courses and an optional feature of others, and students are prepared for it thoroughly. Records of achievement are used to inform admission and enrolment, but continued updating of these while students are at college is more haphazard. Tutors help students applying to higher education with their personal statements, but they do not always recognise the value of including other evidence of work and extra-curricular experience.

30 There is a policy for the assessment and accreditation of students' prior learning but it is not understood by many teachers. It is beginning to be applied in vocational areas. One teacher holds the Training and Development Lead Body qualification in the accreditation of prior learning. More will need to acquire the award as vocational programmes grow and the number of adults increases.

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

31 The standards of teaching and learning are high. Of the 127 sessions inspected, 69 per cent had strengths which outweighed the weaknesses. Only one session was judged to have weaknesses which outweighed

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strengths. The following table summarises the grades given to the teaching sessions inspected.

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

<b>Programmes</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Totals</b>
GCE AS/A level		9	37	20	0	0	66
GCSE		6	5	2	1	0	14
GNVQ		3	12	7	0	0	22
NVQ		0	2	4	0	0	6
Access		3	1	0	0	0	4
Non-schedule 2		1	1	0	0	0	2
Other		0	8	5	0	0	13
<b>Total</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>127</b>

32 Most teachers use schemes of work, but the college has no policy on the form these should take and their quality varies. In biology, foreign languages, and sports studies, schemes of work include the lesson content, teaching methods and the resources to be used. Course handbooks containing information about the content of modules or the outline of a subject are given to students on most courses. English teachers have spent time away from the college redesigning each course, and have produced a student handbook that provides detailed course information against which students are encouraged to check their progress.

33 Most sessions were thoroughly prepared. Teachers set out the aims and objectives of the session, and learning was shown to be part of a continuing process. Reference was made to past work; students' knowledge and understanding were checked; and clear directions were given for future work. In science classes, aspects of the subject were logically developed through a variety of activities designed to stimulate and maintain students' interest. In a physics session, for example, students were organised into competing teams to carry out practical work, measuring and calculating the capacitance of a sphere. There was animated discussion about the accuracy of instruments and the concepts of maximum and likely error. Answers were checked and a small prize was given to the team with the correct score.

34 In English, teachers made students aware of goals beyond the completion of the examination syllabus. They were encouraged to identify their own strengths and develop a personal interest in creative writing. The work seen in English classes was challenging, and students' written work included mature literary criticism and well-researched projects. Much of the work was emotionally demanding and teachers were not afraid to take risks in dealing with sensitive areas of experience. In mathematics, teachers used a wide range of equipment and material to

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illustrate concepts through practical activities. For the last five years, students of statistics have joined the biology field course, giving them a rich source of experimental data.

35 In most curriculum areas, teachers kept good records of students' achievements. Regular monitoring of progress enabled them to direct their efforts to those who most needed it. Students completed self-assessments for discussion with subject tutors, and half-termly reviews enabled each student to set targets for further progress. In all subjects, work was regularly set at a level appropriate to the course. It was marked fairly and returned promptly. Most teachers corrected grammatical and spelling errors and provided clear and helpful guidance on how work could be improved. In business studies, students were also given verbal feedback on their marked work, and this often led to good classroom discussion.

36 Relationships between staff and students were friendly and supportive; mutual respect and good humour were features of most classes. Students often identified this as a reason for liking their course. Teachers succeeded in creating a happy combination of informality, rigour and sensitively-delivered critical comment. There were many examples of them providing academic support for individual students outside class.

37 Teachers used a variety of teaching strategies. In art and design, technology, and leisure they assisted each other in practical sessions. Teachers had high expectations of their students and work was conducted at a lively pace. The approach to contentious issues was scholarly and balanced.

38 Teachers made good use of a range of teaching aids, including television and video equipment, computers, overhead projectors, and handouts. In humanities, there was particularly effective use of written and illustrated materials. Business studies students partially overcame the lack of office equipment by working alongside administration staff. In a minority of lessons, overhead transparencies were of poor quality.

39 Support is provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Assistance is available for students whose first language is not English. For example, a student taking a GCSE class was accompanied by a member of the college support team who explained complex vocabulary. Teachers took care to include a deaf student in a GCE A level session, by ensuring that the student could always lip-read their explanations. Some students do not receive adequate support at the beginning of their courses; for example, two students whose English was poor were still waiting for appropriate support at the end of November after enrolling in September.

## **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

40 The majority of students at the college enjoy their work and are developing good levels of skill, knowledge and understanding. In most subjects, the expectations which teachers have of students prompt high

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levels of achievement. In English, some of the written work is of an exceptionally high standard, well beyond the demands of the course. Students are well motivated. Most are keen to talk about the college and their work. They are articulate, and they demonstrate a growing ability to develop theoretical argument and apply it to practical issues. Students are able to work co-operatively in small groups. There is effective development of numeracy and communications, and information technology is incorporated into much of the course work. In practical work in science, art, technology, and care, students worked in a disciplined way and careful attention was paid to health and safety regulations.

41 The number of students taking three GCE A levels has risen over the last three years to over 200 and, in 1995, 77 per cent of them achieved passes in all three subjects. The number taking two GCE A levels has fallen, and these students have been less successful. The proportion of students completing their GCE A level programmes has increased from 80 to 88 per cent over the same period.

42 The number of GCE A level and GCE AS level entries has remained reasonably constant over the last three years, and the GCE AS subject entries remain a small part of the whole. In the last two years, 82 per cent of students have achieved A-E grades at GCE A level, and 44 per cent have gained A-C grades. These results are marginally lower than the average for all sixth form colleges. In 1995, 12 subjects had A-E pass rates over 92 per cent, including mathematics with mechanics, art, and economics. Only in Spanish and biology were the A-E pass rates less than 65 per cent. Examination results in GCE A level physics and chemistry were particularly good, with pass rates over 96 per cent in 1995. Results in sports studies have improved significantly over the past three years to reach 96 per cent in 1995, and the retention rate is also good. The number of students taking GCE A level computing has fallen by half since 1993, but results remain good. In psychology, student numbers have doubled over three years; results have generally been good but the pass rate fell to 71 per cent in 1995. In biology, results have been below the national average for the last three years, although they are in line with expectations based on students' performance in GCSE.

43 Results in GCE A level English language and literature are satisfactory. In English language, passes have improved steadily over three years to equal the national average this year at 89 per cent. Results in communication studies improved significantly in 1994 to reach the national average, and they remained satisfactory in 1995. In GCE A level technology, the pass level in 1995 was 81 per cent; the same as the national average for this subject. Three history syllabuses are offered at GCE A level; European, British and world history. World history is the most popular, and passes have exceeded 95 per cent in each of the last three years. Politics is also popular and successful. Examination pass rates in sociology have been variable in recent years but rose to 78 per cent in 1995. French GCE A level results have been consistently above the national

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average for the last three years. Spanish and German results have been good over the same period although pass rates fell below the national average in 1995.

44 GCE A level students at Taunton's College achieved an average point score per entry of 4.6 in 1995 according to the tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. This places the college in the top third of institutions in the further education sector based on this performance measure.

45 Courses in business and related subjects started in 1992. In the BTEC national diploma in business and finance, results have been good in each of the first two years of operation, although the pass rate fell from 95 to 70 per cent last year. In the first two years of the BTEC first diploma in business and finance, passes exceeded 72 per cent of those who started the course. Last year when the course was replaced by the GNVQ in business, the pass rate continued satisfactorily at 70 per cent. Results in the first diploma in information technology applications, which has also been running for three years, have been less good but they improved to 64 per cent last year. The college has a small but growing range of courses in health and social care. Results of the GNVQ intermediate in health and social care were not good in its first two years; there were pass rates of 21 and 25 per cent respectively. Students on the first advanced GNVQ course in health and social care will complete their course this year.

46 Eighty-five per cent of students at Taunton's College achieved the vocational awards they were seeking according to the tables published in 1995 by the Department for Education and Employment. This places the college in the top third of institutions in the sector on this performance measure.

47 The results achieved by GCSE students, who are mostly retaking subjects, are variable. In physical education, media studies and languages they are above the national average, but in mathematics they are below. In a number of subjects, results are poor. These include biology, psychology, English and design. Alternative language programmes, such as foreign languages at work courses, have been successful in French. Courses in Spanish and German have now been added.

48 The college records the destinations of all students who gain awards at the college and publishes summaries of them with its examination results. Of the 537 students who gained awards in 1995, 40 per cent went into higher education, 25 per cent continued in further education, 22 per cent entered employment and 13 per cent either took up other opportunities or had unknown destinations.

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

49 The college has a tradition of review and evaluation that has included consideration of students' achievements, and feedback from students about their perception of their courses. However, the quality assurance



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process was not well organised and, in 1994, it was replaced. Members of the corporation who have experience of quality systems have helped in drawing up and implementing a new policy for quality assurance.

50 The deputy principal (curriculum and quality) is responsible for quality assurance. He works with teams of staff established to review aspects of the college's work, including the quality of teaching and learning, and cross-college activities such as student recruitment and support, learning resources, finance, and staff development. Each quality team is managed by a leader responsible for setting standards, identifying targets, monitoring and evaluating performance, making recommendations for quality improvements, and producing a report. Students are represented on some of these teams, and all staff are aware of their share in the responsibility for improving quality. A college quality review group that includes student representation, advises the management team on quality assurance.

51 Quality reports are written to the headings of the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Each section contains description, evaluation and action. Each completed report goes to the manager of the quality team, to members of the college management team, and to the chair of the quality review group. Each manager responds in writing to the quality team leader and the college management team within four weeks, giving an indication of the action to be taken. Each team produced its first annual report on time. Reports were generally well written, and followed the guidelines the college had set. They included reports from examining bodies, but not all included student opinion. Few of the targets set were precise enough to be measured, although performance indicators such as students' examination results were considered in relation to national averages. The college uses data from the national Advanced Level Information System and from its own system to measure the extent to which students have fared better or worse at GCE A level than was predicted on the basis of GCSE results, but few targets for improvement were set. Retention and recruitment figures were considered but no targets were set. Responses to quality teams from line managers varied in their usefulness.

52 Staff appraisal is at a critical stage of development. A procedure that includes classroom observation has been agreed since 1993, but less than half the teachers have been appraised. The college is now moving from a view of appraisal as solely an aid to personal development, to one in which teachers are reviewed by their line managers in the context of the strategic aims of the college. The new system links appraisal more closely to staff development, and is part of Taunton's College progress towards the Investors in People award. Support staff are now included in the appraisal system but none have yet completed the process. The principal is appraised by his peers from two similar institutions, and has found the experience useful in leading him to introduce some new management strategies.

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53 The college has a staff-development policy that embraces teaching and support staff. There is a range of activities including three one-day closures, when all staff take part. A staff-development plan is part of the strategic plan but there is no overview of all that takes place. Not only does this limit the effectiveness of the plan, but it also makes costing and evaluation difficult. There is an effective induction programme for all new staff.

54 The college has developed two charters. One is for students and the other for employers and community clients. Students receive a copy of their charter as part of a combined handbook and diary. Employers are familiar with the charter and expressed satisfaction with the college's performance against its commitments.

55 The college self-assessment report is written to the headings used in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. It identifies strengths and weaknesses, and was derived from the quality reviews. Judgements in the report are clear and concise, and it provides a realistic assessment of the work of the college.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Staffing**

56 Teachers are well qualified, and appropriately experienced for the courses they teach. Eighty-six per cent have a first degree, and 16 per cent have a higher degree. A quarter of teachers have Training and Development Lead Body qualifications and a further 15 per cent are working towards them. The college is on course to meet the 40 per cent target it set for itself for 1996. A quarter of teachers have industrial or commercial experience. The recent development of vocational courses has been accompanied by the recruitment of teachers with experience in care, business, leisure, and travel and tourism. Teachers are supported by enthusiastic, qualified technicians and administrative staff. Recent appointments have been made to strengthen staffing in finance, information technology, learning resources and adult education.

57 Half the teachers and 61 per cent of support staff are female. Four of the 10 college managers, and half the curriculum leaders are female; a balance that has been consciously improved since the formation of Taunton's College. In areas where sex stereotyping is often most obvious, the college has been able to appoint for example, a female teacher in technology, and a male carer in health and social care. The proportion of teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds is similar to the proportion of those from minority ethnic backgrounds in the population of Southampton.

58 Personnel policies and procedures are in place, and a new approach to staffing is being piloted this session to recognise the varying demands of different types of teaching and management roles. This trial may result in differing teaching hours for each member of academic staff. It is being

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monitored by a group of three managers and three union representatives. Personnel matters for teachers and support staff are dealt with separately by two senior managers. The college has retained a link with Hampshire County Council to secure personnel advice, but additional personnel training for senior managers is needed. All staff records are on the college's management information system, but it cannot produce comprehensive reports, because there is no link between personnel and staff-development records, which are still maintained manually.

### **Equipment/learning resources**

59 All curriculum areas are well equipped. There is a wide range of teaching aids including whiteboards, overhead projectors and video-replay equipment, an adequate number of textbooks, and plentiful supplies of good handouts and leaflets. There is also a good range of specialist equipment. Design and technology has a well-equipped workshop, with good facilities for computer-aided design. In addition to a wide range of instruments, the music department has modern computer equipment for music technology, and is seeking sponsorship to complete equipping its recording studio. The science department is unique in having a technical museum. There is a particularly good slide and book collection to support the teaching of history of art. Some minor equipment limitations include the lack of adequate commercial software in leisure and tourism, and modern data-logging facilities in science.

60 The ratio of modern, networked computers to students is excellent at just over 1:4, although students' access to computers is limited outside timetabled periods. There are problems of incompatibility with the printers used in some classrooms; students have to print their work on machines some distance away. There is good modern software in most areas. Although there is an information technology policy, there would be benefits from making it more explicit. An Internet link has been installed recently.

61 The library is a major weakness in the college's resources. It is inadequately housed and has a limited collection of books, many of which are outdated. The range of periodicals is good in some areas but poor in others. There are six computers, only one of which will accept a compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database. The library and its staffing have been reviewed by the college, and a director of learning resources and a part-time librarian have been appointed recently. Departmental book collections have increased in history, science, English, and business studies. A decision is required about where these books should best be located. They should be included in a central catalogue which is open to all students. There has been poor liaison between library staff and teachers; a full-time librarian will be needed if the library is to become an effective resource for students.

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### **Accommodation**

62 The total refurbishment of an old school building of character, and the sympathetic design of new buildings and extensions have resulted in a pleasing educational environment. Distinctive features are an attractive entrance set back from the road, well-landscaped grounds, and playing fields. The college is entered through a bright and welcoming reception area, beyond which the library and the refectory are grouped around quadrangles.

63 Rooms and corridors are well maintained and furnished. Teaching rooms are grouped together in curriculum areas, and many have attractive resource and display areas. The college has some excellent specialist accommodation, including a spacious sports hall, and a music suite. Design technology has a well-equipped workshop, a graphic design and computer-aided design facility, and comfortable formal and informal teaching spaces. The art department has large open-plan studios, ideally suited to painting, drawing, and crafts. In almost every subject area there are good wall displays which celebrate students' work and achievements.

64 Some rooms are too small for the groups using them and the science laboratories are uncomfortable for extended theory work. There are problems with storage, particularly in art, and sports studies. In care, noise from the nearby music department causes problems. The college has two temporary classrooms used for history, law and religious education. They are in reasonable external condition, they are well decorated, carpeted and adequate for their purpose. The temporary planning permission for these expires in 1997, when the work they house will have to move into the main buildings.

65 The college has an accommodation strategy which concentrates on the need to remodel spaces to meet the requirements of the changing curriculum, and increased group sizes. It includes plans to improve the library and student support services, and to provide more study and social space. Room allocation is planned and controlled centrally. Room occupancy, based on the college's own timetable analyses for 1994-95, is low at 66 per cent. In planning for growth, the college has extended its working day by 20 per cent. A comprehensive space utilisation study is being carried out.

66 There is excellent access for wheelchair users to all parts of the college, hindered only by numerous corridor fire doors. The college is tackling this problem as funds allow.

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## **CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

67 The main strengths of the college are:

- effective governance and management
- well-qualified and committed staff
- high standards of teaching and learning
- good student support and pastoral care
- excellent accommodation
- a strong commitment to equal opportunities.

68 If it is to improve the quality of its provision the college should address the following:

- market research
- the need to make significant improvement in the library provision
- the continued development of quality review and target setting
- the full implementation of staff appraisal
- improved management information systems.

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## FIGURES

1	Percentage enrolments by age (as at November 1995)
2	Percentage enrolments by level of study (as at November 1995)
3	Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)
4	Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1995)
5	Income (for 12 months to July 1995)
6	Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

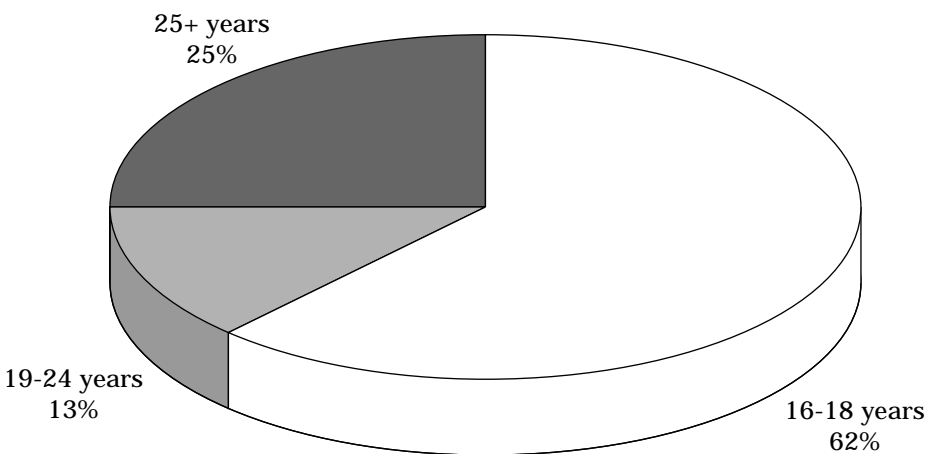
**Note:** the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

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**Figure 1**

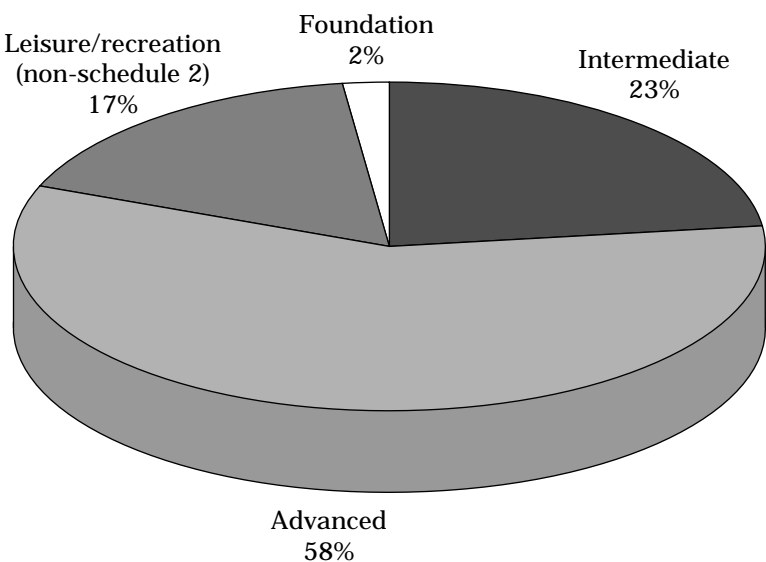
**Taunton's College: percentage enrolments by age (as at November 1995)**



Enrolments: 1,654

**Figure 2**

**Taunton's College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at November 1995)**

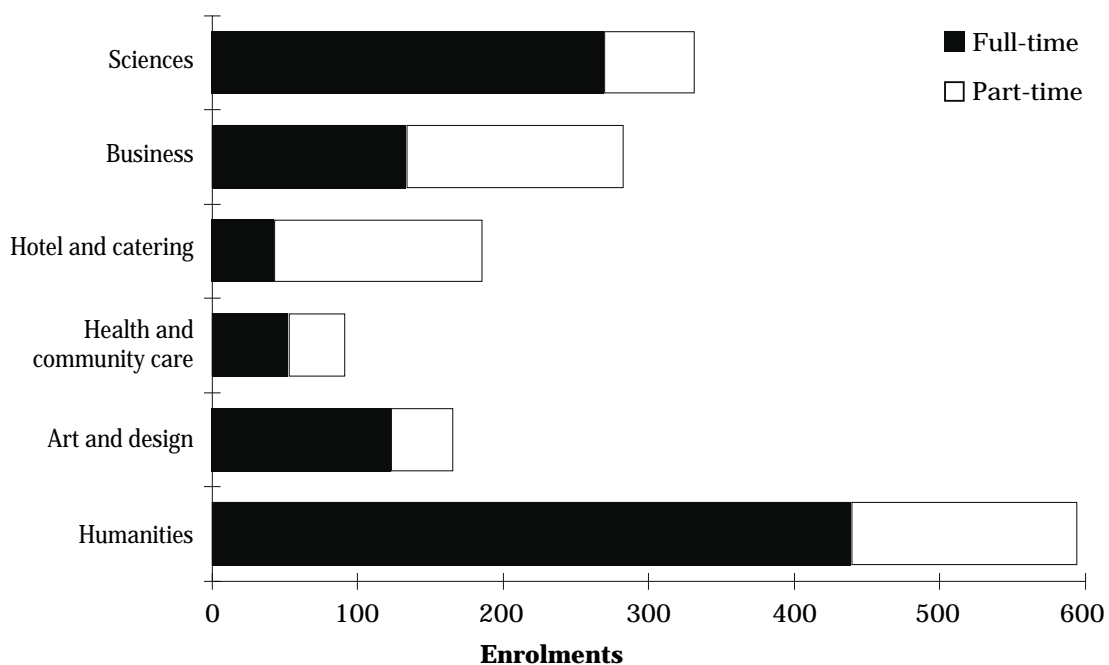


Enrolments: 1,654

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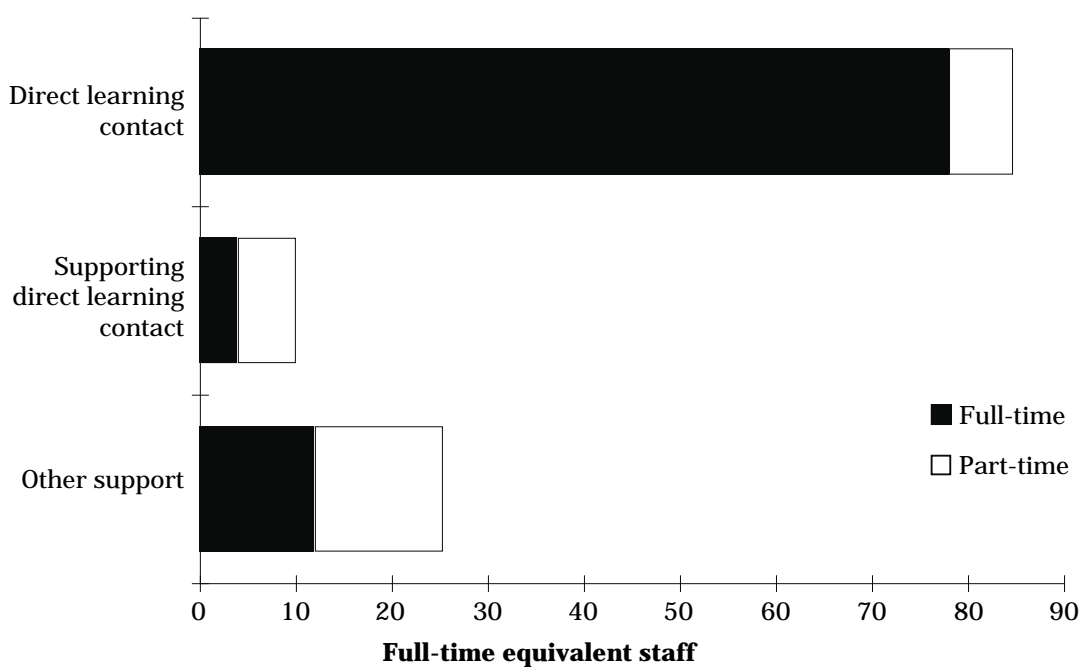
**Figure 3**

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



**Figure 4**

**Taunton's College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1995)**



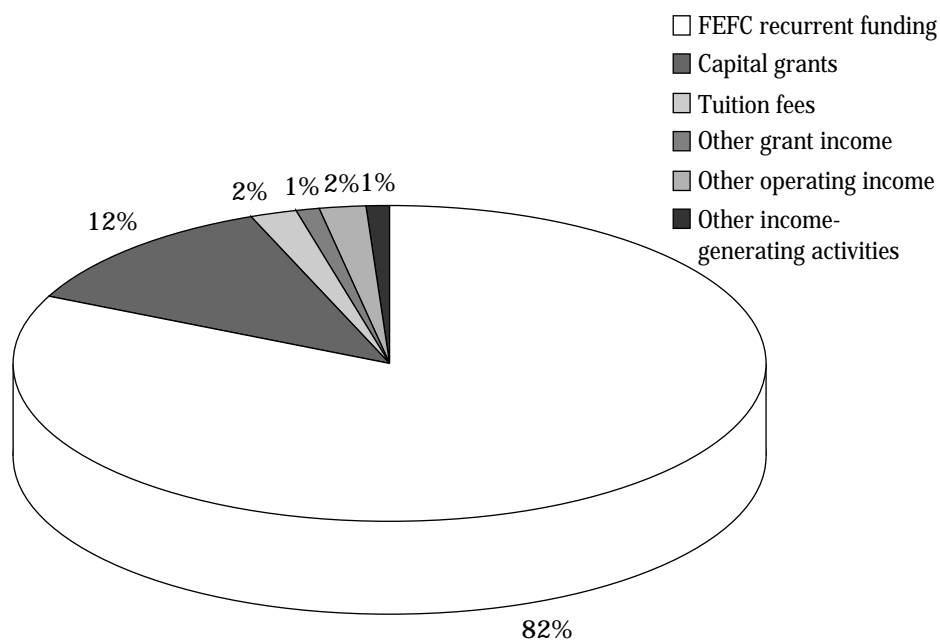


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**Figure 5**

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

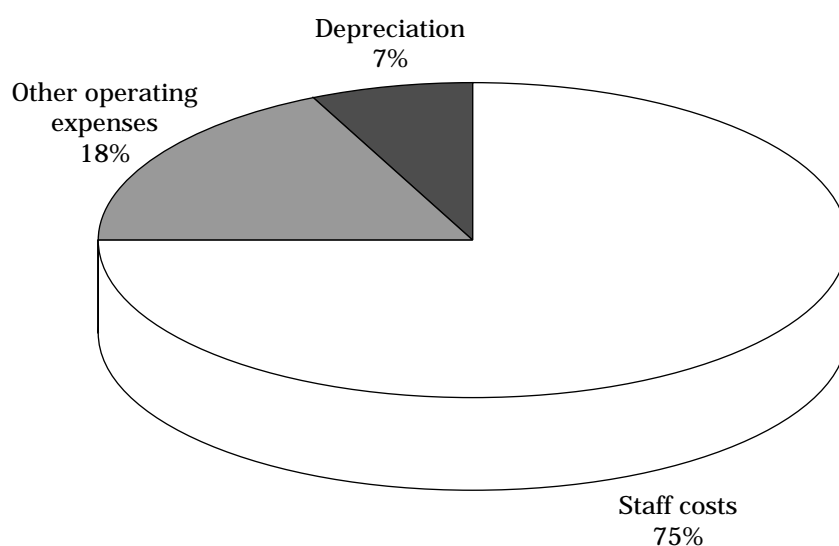


Income: £3,439,000

**Figure 6**

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



Expenditure: £3,444,000

