

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Bridgwater College

January 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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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 03/97

BRIDGWATER COLLEGE
SOUTH WEST REGION
Inspected April-October 1996

Summary

Bridgwater College is a well-managed tertiary college in Somerset. It has strong links with the local community, schools, employers and external agencies. It provides a wide range of courses at a variety of levels. Students' views are given a high priority. Strong leadership is provided by the senior management team. College objectives are clear and staff have a common sense of purpose. The college has increased enrolments by an average of 19.5 per cent over each of the last three years whilst maintaining good examination results. Much of the teaching and learning is effective. Governors serve the college well. The promotion of equality of opportunity for students and staff is an important feature of the college. Teaching and support staff are well qualified and are committed to improving quality. Support services for students are effective. Tutorial arrangements are good. Most of the accommodation for teaching and learning is of a high standard. The college has recently made substantial improvements to its information technology resources. The college should improve: the quality of its less effective teaching and learning; the presentation of its data on students' achievements and retention; students' retention rates on some courses; its publicity material; and a small proportion of its accommodation. In addition, the college should strengthen its existing procedures for quality assurance, particularly by making effective use of performance indicators.

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	1
Quality assurance	2
Resources: staffing	1
equipment/learning resources	1
accommodation	1

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics, science and computing	2	Health and community care	2
Construction	2	Art, design and the performing arts	2
Engineering	2	Humanities	2
Business studies	2	Adult basic education and SLDD provision	2
Leisure and tourism	2		

INTRODUCTION

1 Bridgwater College was inspected April to October 1996. Inspectors spent 79 days in the college. They inspected 222 classes, examined students' coursework and scrutinised college documentation. They met with college governors, managers, staff and students, parents, employers and representatives from the Somerset Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), head teachers and staff from local schools, representatives from the Somerset Careers Service and other members of the local community.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 In the early 1970s, Somerset County Council reorganised its provision of secondary education and established a tertiary system in the Sedgemoor district of Bridgwater. Bridgwater College was established in 1973. The college has one main site, on the outskirts of Bridgwater, a small site in the town centre for adult basic education and a few rented units on a nearby industrial site for some aspects of foundation and nursery nursing work. The population of Bridgwater is approximately 34,000; 5.4 per cent of inhabitants are 16 to 19 years of age and 0.5 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. The college recruits students from Bridgwater and further afield in Somerset. Bridgwater is the principal town in the Sedgemoor district which has a population of approximately 98,000. The population of Somerset is 477,900, of which 4 per cent is aged 16 to 19.

3 Bridgwater is an industrial town. Its varied industries include food processing, distribution and retailing, plastic film manufacturing, fabrics and clothing, and light engineering. Sedgemoor district has a long history of manufacturing. In recent years, however, many firms have had to make large numbers of their workers redundant. The local job market is volatile and much employment is short term. Sedgemoor's unemployment rate is approximately 8.5 per cent, similar to that for the south west region as a whole. Outside Bridgwater, Sedgemoor district is made up of rural communities which are relatively isolated and without good transport links.

4 In 1995, 70 per cent of local school-leavers continued in full-time education, and 85 per cent of these were enrolled at Bridgwater College. Neighbouring colleges include Cannington College (four miles to the north-west), The Richard Huish College and Somerset College of Arts and Technology in Taunton (13 miles away), Strode College in Street (14 miles away) and Weston College in Weston-super-Mare (19 miles away). There are schools with sixth forms in Burnham-on-Sea and Cheddar, and several independent schools in Taunton, Wellington and Glastonbury.

5 In July 1996, there were 8,130 students enrolled on college programmes. Of these, 2,617 were full time. There has been a considerable growth in enrolments during the past four years. Student numbers by age, by level of study, and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The college employs 210 full-time equivalent staff who teach and provide support for

learning and 98 full-time equivalent administrative staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

6 The college's mission is to 'inspire the people of our community to achieve success' by providing the best possible opportunities for learning in a welcoming and supportive environment.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 Education and training opportunities are offered for a wide variety of clients. The college's curriculum covers all of the 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. A centrally co-ordinated foundation programme provides personal, practical and key skills for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who have no formal educational qualifications. Students can progress from foundation to intermediate and advanced levels in most curriculum areas, and to higher education courses within the college in six curriculum areas.

8 The college offers courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at intermediate and advanced level, in six and five curriculum areas, respectively. There are two intermediate level and 16 advanced level programmes for qualifications offered by the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) or City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G).

9 Courses leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) are available at levels 1, 2 and 3 in construction crafts and office administration, and at levels 2 and 3 in community care, motor vehicle and general engineering. There are arrangements for students to study on their own, at times of their choosing, for NVQs in management (level 3), training and development (levels 3 and 4), and warehousing and storekeeping (levels 1 to 4).

10 The college offers 31 subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), 21 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects and 18 general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects.

11 The college collaborates with universities and other further education sector colleges to provide a number of higher education courses. In conjunction with the University of the West of England, it offers three higher national diploma courses and three first-year degree courses in subjects such as tunnelling technology, computer studies, engineering and social sciences. A teacher training programme is validated by Bath College of Higher Education. The college works together with Cannington College and Westminster College to offer courses in equine management and sound engineering, respectively.

12 The specific provision for adults includes: courses in office administration and business studies; training for NVQ assessors; modern languages; a part-time GNVQ advanced course in leisure and tourism; and a course for lunchtime supervisors/assistants in schools. Courses to encourage women to work in technology have resulted in the successful

training of women in metal and woodcrafts, computer graphics and upholstery. In line with its mission to 'inspire the people of our community to achieve success' the college has developed effective programmes of part-time courses which may be taken in the day or the evening. The college facilitates open learning in basic education programmes and for professional qualifications such as banking and accountancy, whereby part-time students may study materials tailored to their individual needs, at times which suit them.

13 The college works closely with the four 11 to 16 schools in Bridgwater, an 11 to 16 school in Taunton and with other schools in the area. There are formal links between staff at the college and teachers in the schools who teach the same or related subjects. Link courses, which enable school pupils in year 10 or 11 to study at the college, include programmes in design and technology. The college provides work experience for year 11 pupils in, for example, its reception area and multi-media studios; in return, sports course students from the college undertake work placements in schools. The college arranges an annual Christmas lecture on science for year 11 pupils. The principal and several college managers serve as governors in local schools. The principal meets regularly with the head teachers of Bridgwater schools.

14 Liaison with the community is a keystone of the college's mission. Community representatives from a wide range of areas confirmed that the college plays an active and valued role within the local community. The principal attends Bridgwater Forum, chaired by the mayor, which develops activities and opportunities for the residents of Bridgwater. The forum has conducted a needs survey which has been analysed by students from the college. The college provides a meeting centre for community organisations such as Mencap Gateway Club, Bridgwater Astronomical Society and Bridgwater Rugby and Football Clubs. Training is provided in health and safety and design crafts for Bridgwater Carnival, a major annual event. The college provides an advice service to the nearby Sydenham estate. Building crafts and business start-up courses have been particularly successful in attracting students from the estate.

15 The college enjoys productive relations with the Somerset Local Education Authority (LEA) and has a contract with the LEA to provide non-vocational community education in the Sedgemoor district. The LEA praised the college for effecting the smooth transition of students with learning difficulties from secondary to tertiary education. The children's centre at the college, which is jointly funded by the college and the LEA, provides nursery and playgroup places for the community. LEA staff work in the centre.

16 Representatives from the Somerset TEC describe their working relationships with the college as good. The college has contracts from the TEC to provide youth training and modern apprenticeships. It has worked with the TEC on a variety of projects including the planning of a proposed

training and education shop in the town centre. The principal is a member of the TEC's strategic education and training forum which monitors progress towards the achievement of national targets for education and training.

17 The college's links with many local employers are well established. The principal is a member of the Association of Bridgwater Industrialists. Employers told inspectors that they valued the ability of college staff to carry out skills audits and provide training of a high standard. Space in the technology area is rented to local companies for demonstrations and exhibitions. Seminars for the tunnelling industry have been held at the college. The college works well with local companies to plan and implement courses. For example, eight companies and agencies evaluated the college's submission to BTEC for a diploma course in public and emergency services. They also provided speakers for the course, arranged visits and work experience for the students and helped with the design of assignments.

18 Links with many small businesses in the area have been established in various ways. Evening events have been arranged to allow employers to visit the college to learn about the services it can offer them. In conjunction with the TEC, the college has run a two-day course to train college staff to serve as mentors to businessmen in order to help small businesses develop an understanding of how the college can help them. The college is working with small businesses to develop vocational education and training for unemployed males in the district, and for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

19 The college's marketing of courses is generally effective. Specific marketing strategies have been developed for school-leavers, adults and employers, respectively. Although publicity material is extensive and varied, it does not always succeed in conveying the broad extent of the college's courses and the wide range of the college's facilities.

20 The college aims to ensure equality of opportunity for its staff and students. A member of staff from each curriculum area serves on the college's equal opportunities committee. Specific provision which aims to promote equal opportunities includes a programme to prepare women to enter or re-enter work and collaboration with a registered charity to provide education and training for people who have difficulties with basic reading and writing.

21 Although there is no college policy on international links, students have made educational visits to countries in Europe and to the United States of America and students taking GCE A level geography have worked in schools in Zimbabwe.

22 The college has a policy to encourage the identification and accreditation of skills and knowledge which students may have acquired before coming to college. Staff from the college assess and accredit the skills of service personnel at RAF Locking in order that they may be

recognised in the form of qualifications acceptable to civilian employers. They also accredit as NVQs the prior learning and experience of care workers in residential homes. There is a checklist for tutors on good practice in the accreditation of prior learning and students and employers receive guidelines on how this accreditation is carried out.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

23 Bridgwater College is well managed. It has succeeded in growing by an average of 19.5 per cent per year over the last three years whilst continuing to achieve generally good examination results. It has high-quality accommodation and has committed considerable investments to improving information technology resources.

24 The senior management team has a clear vision for the college and provides strong leadership. Members are committed to the college's mission and have succeeded in communicating the mission and the strategic plan so that both are well understood by staff. The senior management team comprises the principal, the vice-principal, and the heads of the five curriculum areas and three cross-college service areas. The team meets frequently. Its discussions are well recorded and the records disseminated widely. Throughout the college, there are good arrangements for team and other meetings; meetings are timetabled and well planned. Curriculum area heads meet regularly with their section heads, who, in turn, hold meetings with section teams. All meetings are minuted and there is generally a high level of attendance. In the curriculum areas, teams are well developed and there is good co-ordination of activities at section and team level.

25 Communication within the college is effective. There is a twice-termly newsletter for staff and students. Roles and responsibilities, job descriptions, lines of communication and accountability are all clearly defined. Staff spoke with enthusiasm about, and displayed a high level of understanding of, the work of the college.

26 Governors serve the college well. They contribute to its work through membership of curriculum review boards and attendance at college events. They take a close interest in the running of the college and work hard to further its success. Relationships between governors and the senior management team are good. Governors are provided with much good-quality documentation, including an annual report which records the college's achievements for the year. The report includes summaries of the activities of the five curriculum areas. Improvements to the way in which the data are presented would help the governors make better judgements about students' achievements.

27 The governing body comprises 10 independent governors, a governor nominated by Somerset TEC, a governor from higher education, two staff governors, a student governor, the head teacher from a local school, a co-opted member and the principal. Several governors have particular

expertise in management at a senior level in business and industry. The board and its three subcommittees for finance, personnel and general purposes, remuneration and audit, meet regularly. Individual governors chair each of the college's seven review board meetings at which employers, students and staff meet to discuss issues relating to the quality of the work. Governors have not yet set performance indicators for their work or the work of the college. They have adopted, but not yet completed, a voluntary register of interests and a code of conduct.

28 The governors and a wide range of staff are involved in the college's strategic planning. The planning process is thorough; there is a management calendar and a schedule of meetings for staff and governors. The senior management team has a good understanding of strategic planning and works with the college's other teams to help them relate the college plan to their own areas of responsibility. There are development plans for each service and curriculum area down to section level, with appropriate operational objectives established and agreed.

29 College budgets are, in the main, controlled centrally by the senior management team. Delegation of financial responsibility to managers other than senior managers is limited to resources such as books, stationery, materials and small items of equipment. Some staff are unclear as to the mechanisms used in determining these budgets. Only senior managers can approve the movement of financial resources between budget headings. The college has considered models for measuring unit costs, but has yet to adopt such a scheme.

30 The well-developed computerised management information system includes information on student and staff records, and on finances. Information is accessible and regularly used by managers. The college has recently taken steps to improve the reliability of its information about students' enrolment and attendance. Enrolment targets for each course, and the progress towards achieving these, are closely monitored so that recruitment strategies can be adapted as required. There are no specific targets for student attendance.

31 The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college receives 84 per cent of its income from the FEFC. The total allocation from the FEFC for 1995-96 was £8,717,000 and the college's average level of funding was £16.48 per unit. The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £16.50 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges for 1996-97 is £17.97.

32 Policies for health and safety and the promotion of equality of opportunity are effectively monitored by college committees and reports are provided to governors. The health and safety committee has a subcommittee for environmental issues. Following a recommendation by this subcommittee, the college collects large amounts of paper for recycling.

33 The college collects information on the intended and actual destinations of students. However, the final destinations of a significant percentage of students are unknown. Information on the destinations of students is not used to inform management decisions and is not analysed systematically as part of the course review process.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

34 Students play a significant role in the development of Bridgwater College. In addition to there being a student governor, students are involved in staff appointments, and the tutorial system and aspects of the quality assurance system provide further channels for considering and acting upon students' views.

35 Student services provision includes the learning centre, additional learning support, counselling, tutorial support, careers guidance, student liaison and welfare services. These services are clearly structured and well integrated. The roles of student services staff are well defined and staff and students understand them.

36 The college's strong links with its four partner schools in Bridgwater and with over 30 other schools across a wide geographical area are used to keep pupils well informed. College staff make weekly visits to the four partner schools. They also attend schools' careers advice and guidance sessions. School-leavers receive clear information about the college. Events such as 'taster' programmes and open evenings are held to inform prospective students and their parents about the college's provision. Teachers at the schools and the parents of pupils speak highly of these activities and say they help young people to make informed decisions about their programmes of study. There are effective arrangements to help students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the transition from their special schools to the college.

37 There is a well-used guidance service for adults. In 1995-96, 1,592 adults contacted the college and received advice from the adult guidance team. Of these adults, 774 had applied to the college by July 1996. The guidance team provides advice on issues such as accommodation, finance and transport and arranges interviews with the counselling team and careers adviser.

38 Staff in curriculum areas are responsible for interviewing and selecting applicants. Those applicants who are unsure about their choices are interviewed by members of the newly-established guidance team. The recruitment and selection process runs smoothly and senior managers receive regular reports on its effectiveness. Enrolment in September 1996 was well organised.

39 All students receive a programme of induction to the college and to the courses they intend to follow. They are issued with comprehensive handbooks of information about the college and guides to their programme of study. Tutors themselves receive guidance on planning induction.

By the end of their first week, most students had acquired sufficient information about the college and knew what was expected of them.

40 All full-time students have a personal tutor. Increasingly, staff are keen to take on this role. Training is provided for all tutors and each receives a pack of detailed guidance which is modified to suit the particular curriculum area. There is a senior tutor for each curriculum area and the five senior tutors together co-ordinate the tutorial system for the college. All full-time students have a weekly tutorial period and there is an established programme of activities for these. In two curriculum areas, the programme is being adapted to enable the students to receive some form of accreditation for the activities they carry out. Although most students praised the support they received from the tutors, some considered that the time spent on tutorials was not always well used. Part-time students do not have a personal tutor, but staff who teach them are expected to offer tutorial support and they receive guidance on ways of providing this.

41 Each term, full-time students review their progress with their teachers. Decisions taken at this review are recorded. They form the basis for students' planning of their work and, where appropriate, a report to their parents. Parents evenings are held twice a year. Students are encouraged to compile records of their achievements. Some of these are well maintained, but others are not kept up to date. There is a clear and effective procedure for taking action on absenteeism. When there is concern about a lack of attendance by students under 18, their parents are contacted. The college has a straightforward transfer system for students who have good reasons to change their programmes.

42 A high level of additional support is arranged for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college has used additional support funding to appoint staff to work with deaf and partially-sighted students, and with students who have significant learning difficulties. Students and parents speak highly of the support provided.

43 Senior tutors are responsible for ensuring that staff in each curriculum area test students on entry, using tests which are appropriate to their programme of study. The college has improved its systems for referring students who require additional support with their learning and for monitoring and recording the progress they subsequently make. Methods of identifying students who require additional support are more effective in some curriculum areas than in others.

44 Considerable efforts have been made to find the most effective method of providing additional support. The college has established mathematics, English and information technology workshops which are housed in good accommodation. Support is available both to individual students and to groups. Despite these efforts, the number of students taking up the opportunity for support last year failed to match the level of need identified.

45 The college has a well-established team of professional counsellors. Eight staff with counselling training are each allocated two hours a week for counselling duties. One of them acts as team leader. The boundaries between counselling and tutorial roles are clearly defined. Annual reports on counselling are produced for the principal and governors. These give a statistical breakdown on the extent to which counselling services are used and provide a commentary on the broad areas for which counselling is required.

46 Careers education is the responsibility of senior tutors. The college has an agreement with Somerset Careers Service under which it is provided with a service for 90 days a year, 60 of which are used for a careers adviser to attend the college. Careers education, which includes advice on entrance to higher education, is part of the tutorial programme. However, many students do not take advantage of the opportunity to be interviewed by careers staff. The college has a well-resourced and attractive careers library.

47 Students are advised of their rights and responsibilities at induction and through the college charter. All full-time students are required to sign a student contract and a learning agreement. The college has established several effective procedures for ensuring that the views of students are represented and heard. Each curriculum area has a student liaison group comprising representatives of each course and students are able to point to changes which have taken place as a result of the meetings of these groups. Representatives from the groups are members of the students' consultative forum, which meets once a term under the chairmanship of the principal. There are student representatives on the academic board, governing body and equal opportunities committee. Students were recently involved in the interview process for the post of vice-principal.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

48 Sixty-four per cent of the teaching sessions inspected had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses. This compares with a figure of 63 per cent for the colleges inspected during the 1995-96 academic year, according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. Just over 6 per cent of the sessions had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. This compares with 8 per cent for college inspected in the 1995-96 academic year, also according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. The following table outlines the grades awarded for the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		7	27	12	4	0	50
GCSE		2	5	2	1	0	10
GNVQ		7	11	8	1	0	27
NVQ		2	6	6	2	0	16
Higher education		2	4	1	0	0	7
Access to higher education		1	3	2	0	0	6
Basic education		0	7	4	0	0	11
Other vocational*		17	34	23	3	0	77
Other		2	5	8	3	0	18
Total		40	102	66	14	0	222

**includes BTEC certificate and diploma programmes.*

49 Mathematics, science and computing lessons have clear objectives which relate to coherent and comprehensive schemes of work. GCSE mathematics is taught in a workshop which enables students to work successfully at their own pace on materials suited to their individual needs. They receive help from the teacher when it is required. In GNVQ science lessons, learning assignments are well structured and enable the students to develop skills of enquiry and investigation. Some students on science programmes said that they would welcome a greater variety of teaching styles. Students demonstrate effective information technology skills in wordprocessing their work. Although computers are available in most classrooms, they are used insufficiently for teaching and learning.

50 In construction, much of the teaching and learning is successful, particularly in workshops and practical lessons. Programmes of work are well designed and students have a clear understanding of their learning objectives. Teachers provide individual students with help and support for their learning and monitor their progress effectively. However, some of the portfolios of work which students produce are not well organised or presented. Some of the written comments of staff on students' work are unhelpfully brief. Retention rates on some courses are low.

51 Schemes of work in engineering are well designed. Students are given well-structured practical activities which require them to exercise initiative and enable them to develop appropriate skills. Teachers draw effectively upon their own experience and that of their students. Instructors who serve as workshop managers make a valuable contribution in lessons. There is well-organised work experience for most full-time students, study visits to Germany and the United States of America for motor vehicle engineering students, and effective help with English and mathematics. Assessment processes for practical activities on courses leading to NVQs

are well understood by students and they are applied rigorously. A number of other assessments, however, are inadequately recorded. Some assignments are insufficiently challenging to the students.

52 Most business studies lessons are carefully planned. Teachers provide students with varied and relevant learning activities. Working relationships between staff and students are excellent. Secretarial skills lessons are lively and purposeful, and teachers provide students with individual help and support. Many business and management lessons lack momentum and the work is not challenging enough for the more able students. In some sessions teachers spend too much time presenting information to the students; there are too few opportunities for questions or discussion and too few opportunities for teachers to check that students understood what was being taught. The arrangements for assessing workplace competence in office situations are inadequate because the office environments created are not realistic enough. Sometimes, students' written work was returned to them with errors uncorrected.

53 The teaching of travel, tourism and sport studies is generally effective. Teachers show enthusiasm for their subjects. Schemes of work include residential experiences for the students, overseas visits and work placements. Teachers expect high standards from their students, especially in sport studies. Assignments are well structured and students' work is marked thoroughly. The teaching and assessment of core skills on GNVQ programmes are carefully planned. In some sessions, group work was ineffective because it was inappropriate for the tasks being undertaken. In other instances, students failed to learn effectively because the groups in which they were working were too large.

54 Health and social care teachers skilfully strengthen their students' knowledge and understanding by drawing on their existing experience. Teachers of childcare, counselling and beauty therapy expect high standards from their students, matching those found in the best professional practice. Some imaginatively-designed assignments successfully integrate theory with community care practice. In childcare, students carried out some imaginative projects, which included residential visits to inner cities in Britain and overseas. The college's children's centre provides childcare students with valuable opportunities for them to practise and develop their vocational skills. Students praised the helpful tutorial guidance and support they received from their teachers. In a minority of lessons, teachers spent much of the time dictating notes or making the students copy extensively from the board. The students found these activities dull.

55 In art and design, students undertake projects which develop their understanding of art and design concepts and also help them to organise their time effectively. Students work well together in groups and teachers provide help to individuals when this is required. Students' learning is broadened by a good programme of visits and visiting speakers. For

example, students were enabled to practise intaglio skills during a visit to an etching workshop. Assessment procedures on GNVQ courses are well structured and they are clearly understood by the students. In some instances, however, there is insufficient monitoring of students' progress across the whole course. Some teachers fail to adjust their teaching methods to suit the wide range of students' abilities. In the performing arts, teachers encourage individual contributions and teamwork. Teamwork includes, for example, co-operation in mounting a large college production. Assignments are suitably varied, but there is insufficient moderation of marked work to ensure consistency of standards across all elements of vocational courses.

56 Humanities lessons are generally well prepared and have clear objectives. In English, geography, history and religious education in particular, these objectives are carefully related to examination syllabuses. Most teachers provide students with a variety of appropriate learning activities. In many sessions, teachers had high expectations of their students, questioned them effectively and set them appropriately challenging tasks. In some sessions, however, teachers talked for too long a period of time and there were not enough opportunities for students to question or to discuss issues. The working relationships between staff and students were good. Adult students said they received valuable help and support from teachers. Students taking humanities subjects benefit from a rich programme of educational visits, lectures by outside speakers and exchanges with students overseas. Most of their written work is fully and carefully marked. In French and German, students are enabled to improve their listening and speaking skills and extend their vocabulary. There are, however, too few opportunities for them to undertake activities on their own which require them to use the foreign language as a means of communication. The number of students in many languages classes is too small for group activities to be carried out effectively.

57 Schemes of work for adult basic education and access to further education programmes are well organised, thorough and detailed. Teachers know their students well. They are committed to helping them succeed and they understand their learning needs and individual circumstances. Teachers question their students effectively and arrange activities which enable them to work together in groups or pairs. Students participate with enthusiasm in lessons. Teachers spend a great deal of time helping their students to develop study skills.

58 Most sessions for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well planned. Relationships between staff and students are positive and encourage learning. In some sessions, students learnt vocational skills in a realistic working environment. In some practical sessions, students were acquiring the skills required for everyday living. In many sessions, however, the teacher exercised too high a degree of control over students' activities and did not provide them with enough opportunities to

learn by and for themselves. In some instances, the content of lessons and the work in students' files were inappropriate. The development of individual learning programmes is at an early stage.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

59 Students work well in class, answering questions willingly and accurately. In motor vehicle classes, for example, students frequently drew on their own personal experience to illustrate points in class discussions. Performing arts students managed their learning tasks effectively on their own. For example, in a dance rehearsal run successfully by the students themselves, one student gave the group a valuable critique on its performance. Humanities students are well motivated and hard working. Modern languages students, in particular, worked well in pairs and in small groups. In practical lessons, students work to satisfactory standards with commitment and enthusiasm. In construction, and particularly in furniture studies and bricklaying, they carry out their work safely and demonstrate high levels of competence.

60 The coursework of some students is accomplished and impressive. For example, sports course students' portfolios and course files are of a high standard. Students also achieve excellent standards of work on counselling, housing wardens and nursery nursing programmes. Students on GNVQ science courses are acquiring useful skills of enquiry. Photography students produce innovative and experimental work. Some students on GNVQ art and design courses are, however, unclear about the standards expected of them. Students' notes in mathematics are well organised. They can refer to topics with ease and talk about them confidently. NVQ students' portfolios showed that most of them had acquired the requisite vocational knowledge, understanding and skills. However, the portfolios of some of the students following courses leading to an NVQ in administration are poorly presented and provide little evidence that students have carried out realistic office tasks successfully. Some students demonstrated poor communication skills in their oral presentations to the class.

61 The extent to which courses help students to develop the key skills of number, communication and information technology varies across the programme areas. There is little evidence of key skills development in construction courses. In leisure and tourism, and in most humanities subjects, students use information technology to present their work. There was insufficient use of information technology in some business courses and in mathematics. Standards of English are appropriate to the level of work and stage of the course in most programmes, and students are confident about their progress in using English effectively. Written work is of a high quality in modern foreign languages and some students have produced writing of outstanding quality about literature in the foreign language they are studying. Many adult basic education students are increasing their personal confidence as well as developing their knowledge

and understanding. Generally, students have not been so successful in developing their numeracy skills as they have been in developing their information technology and communication skills.

62 At GCE A level, the pass rate in 1996 for 15 out of 22 subjects was at or above the provisional national average for schools and colleges. In 1995, the last year for which published figures are available, the 218 students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE A level examinations scored on average 4.7 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This placed the college in the top third of all further education colleges on this performance measure, according to data published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). The 1995 national average pass rate for all students gaining grades A to E at GCE A level subjects in all colleges was 69 per cent. College rates of 84 per cent for 16 to 19 year olds and 86 per cent for those over 19 compare very favourably with this figure. In nine subjects, including media studies, art and design and English literature, students have performed consistently well for the last three years, achieving average pass rates of 90 per cent or over. In nine other subjects the results achieved in 1996 were poorer than in 1995. Some of these subjects had few entrants, but business studies, geography and biology had 12, 29 and 33 entrants, respectively. The college attributes the weaker results, in part, to the smaller number of students entering the college with good GCSE grades compared with the previous year.

63 There were 289 entries for nine GCSE subjects in 1996, of which 62 were from students aged over 19. Fifty-seven per cent of candidates obtained grades A to C. This figure is above the 1995 average of 48 per cent for all students in general further education colleges, but below the national average of 60 per cent for students aged 19 years of age. All students obtained grades A to C in media studies and 83 per cent and 95 per cent did so in photography and human biology, respectively. The poorest results were in law where none of the 15 students achieved grades A to C.

64 In 1995, results for vocational programmes included in the information produced by the DfEE showed that 85 per cent of the 361 students aged 16 to 18 in their final year of study gained their qualification. This placed the college in the top third of further education colleges in England according to this performance measure. Good vocational results for 1996 include those for complementary therapies, supervisory management, office opportunities for adults and the choices (youth training) programme. Students on C&G motor vehicle repair, NVQ level 3 carpentry and craft engineering achieved 100 per cent pass rates. Retention and pass rates were low in part-time sound engineering, which the college now offers only as a full-time programme. In the single subject examinations for secretarial and administration studies, pass rates were over 80 per cent for 15 subjects, including audio-transcription and French text processing. Only shorthand achieved a poor pass rate (28 per cent).

Pass rates for some of the vocational programmes are difficult to judge, particularly for those which are modular and allow for study beyond the end of the academic year. This is because students on these courses who have not achieved the full award, but have achieved units towards an award, are shown as having failed.

65 In 1996, 80 per cent of students obtained passes on GNVQ courses in intermediate and advanced business. This represents a considerable improvement on the 63 per cent pass rate in 1995. A pass rate of 80 per cent was also achieved in GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism and GNVQ advanced health and social care. Students achieved pass rates of 80 per cent or more on 12 of the 14 BTEC courses offered by the college.

66 Whilst there were many good examination pass rates for students who completed their course, final levels of student achievement are adversely affected by retention rates on a significant proportion of courses. Over the last three years, the retention rate on two-year courses has averaged 73.5 per cent. Most of those who left early did not return for their second year. Retention on one-year courses has reduced over the last three years from 83 per cent in 1994 to 78 per cent in 1996. Retention rates were generally higher on BTEC courses than on some other vocational courses, ranging from 33 per cent to 91 per cent. Only three out of 14 BTEC courses had a retention rate above 85 per cent.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

67 Staff are committed to improving the quality of the college's provision. A well-established annual process of course reviews is central to the college's quality assurance system. The views of students are a key element in the quality assurance process. In addition to the students' liaison groups, there are twice-yearly surveys of students' opinions on the quality of teaching and learning, and of the services of the college as a whole. Students attend course team meetings. The views of employers about the college and its courses are obtained from surveys and through liaison over the arrangement of work experience for students. Employers also present their opinions about the college when they attend advisory groups and review groups. The views of parents of students under the age of 18 are sought regularly.

68 Following each course review, action plans for improving the quality of provision are drawn up. These are submitted to line managers and the senior management team. If approved, they form part of the operational plan for an area and become, in turn, part of the operational plan for the whole college. The principal, the head of staff and quality services, and the area heads are responsible for monitoring the implementation of action plans. There is much evidence that course reviews lead to improvements in provision. For example, as a result of the reviews there have been improvements in the methods of teaching and learning for GCSE mathematics, in the availability of information technology resources and in the organisation of assessment schedules. However, the extent to which

staff devise and implement effective action plans to deal with identified problems varies across the college. Some aspects of student feedback from the surveys have been omitted from the course review summary and some action planning is insufficiently specific to enable progress to be monitored effectively. In some cases, the timing of the course review is too early for achievement rates to be included.

69 Students, managers and representatives from the local community such as employers form review groups for curriculum areas. These groups meet termly and are chaired by a member of the board. Their terms of reference include a brief to review and comment on the work of the area concerned. Staff recognise the importance of review groups in the college's quality assurance process.

70 The development of the quality assurance process is the responsibility of the recently-appointed head of staff and quality services. Working groups have been established to develop college policy. These include groups on quality review, internal verification, examination results, the college charter and new course proposals. A working group is also looking at extending to vocational courses the work done on the value-added calculations of GCE A level students' results, compared with their entry qualifications. Many of these groups aim to build upon and strengthen existing good practice.

71 A new manual on quality assurance in the college lacks clarity and staff say that it has not helped them to understand how the quality assurance system operates. In particular, the relationships between the working groups on quality and course and subject teams are unclear to many staff.

72 The college has set differentiated targets for the retention of full-time, part-time and adult students, respectively. Some staff, however, do not fully understand what these targets are. There are no targets for students' achievements or attendance. The destinations of students are not thoroughly analysed. The college is currently considering a new system of course review which is intended to ensure a more consistent use of performance indicators across the college.

73 Cross-college services teams are subject to an annual review process. This takes into account the views of all staff on the quality of cross-college services. Staff in the cross-college services teams receive constructive evaluation of their performance to help them build on their existing strengths and focus on areas which need development. More recently, service teams have begun to develop service standards to which they will work. Some of these standards are complemented by targets against which performance can be measured. It is intended that quality teams in each service area will review their performance against these standards.

74 The college charter has recently been revised following a major consultation exercise involving students, staff and employers. Awareness of the charter is high amongst staff and students. Those consulted during

the inspection said the revised charter is an improvement although it contains few quantitative targets. A review group will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the charter. The complaints procedure has recently been reviewed.

75 The staff-appraisal scheme is well established. Almost all full-time staff have been appraised during the past year. They value the process and find it positive and supportive. There are plans to extend appraisal to part-time teachers. Appraisal is the main means by which the training needs of individual staff are identified. Appraisals are completed prior to annual course reviews in order to strengthen the links between appraisal, course reviews and strategic planning. The observation of teaching is a well-established practice in the college. In addition to managers' observation of teaching, staff regularly watch their colleagues teach in order that they may learn from one another. There is, however, no monitoring to ensure that these observations lead to the setting of priorities for staff development and training.

76 The college is committed to obtaining the Investor in People award and has introduced a development programme for all line managers. This builds on a successful middle managers' training programme. All staff have a personal portfolio in which they record details of their professional development, their particular achievements, their appraisal interviews and outcomes of the reviews of their areas of work.

77 There is a substantial budget for staff development. Recent staff development has focused on teamwork, training in customer care and information technology. Staff-development priorities, identified through the staff-appraisal process and course reviews, are related to the strategic and operational plans of areas and sections, and to the college's strategic plan. Staff spoken to at the time of inspection said that they feel valued by college managers and that their training needs are met. There is, however, little formal evaluation of the effectiveness of staff-development activities.

78 All new full-time staff take part in an effective induction scheme which includes the appointment of a mentor. All new teachers serve a probationary period during which their teaching is formally observed. An induction manual has recently been provided for part-time teachers.

79 Each section of the college's self-assessment report has an introductory section to set the context, followed by an evaluation of successes and areas for development, using the subheadings employed in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report is detailed and thorough. In many important respects, the judgments are similar to those reached by inspectors. However, the college is not sufficiently critical about some of its weaknesses. For example, inspectors came to different conclusions about the college's use of performance indicators for students' achievements.

RESOURCES

Staffing

80 Sixty-four per cent of staff, including all members of the senior management team, have been appointed during the last five years. Most of the 140 full-time equivalent teachers are between 20 and 40 years of age. Almost half the senior management team are women. The principalship interviews applicants for all substantive teaching and support posts in the college.

81 Teaching and learning support staff are well qualified. Eighty-eight per cent of teachers have degrees or higher technical qualifications and, of these, 22 per cent have higher degrees. Ninety-four per cent of full-time teachers have qualified teacher status. Almost 50 per cent of teachers have vocational assessor or verifier awards. In a few areas, such as construction and business studies, a low proportion of staff have these awards, but many are currently working towards them. Some learning support staff are particularly well qualified or experienced for their roles.

82 Twenty-seven per cent of teaching staff are part time, and this proportion is relatively evenly distributed across the college. Students in some programme areas benefit from being taught by part-time staff who have valuable and up-to-date industrial experience. Some part-time staff, however, have no qualifications. A high proportion of learning support staff (43 per cent) are employed part time, either on a fractional full-time or hourly-paid basis.

83 During the last two years, the college has increased the number of support staff. The shift in the balance between the numbers of teaching staff and other staff who help students to learn, reflects the emphasis the college has given to assisting students to work on their own. The college has appointed co-ordinators for work placements, support for learning and assessment. Co-ordinators and support staff are members of teaching teams. For example, instructors in engineering perform a useful management role in the workshops. Well-qualified technical and administrative staff provide valuable support to curriculum areas, take part in staff training activities and work closely with teachers.

84 The deployment of staff across the college is controlled by an effective computerised management system. Staff records are comprehensive. They include information which staff provided during an audit of their teaching skills. There is a well-presented staff handbook for all employees of the college.

Equipment/learning resources

85 Classrooms, workshops and resources areas are, with few exceptions, equipped to a high standard. There is a well-resourced multi-media centre where staff can make teaching materials such as overhead transparencies. The science laboratories and workshops are well equipped and contain an

extensive range of learning materials which students can study on their own. There is modern equipment for the sports studies courses, for example in gymnastics. The construction section has good equipment which is well maintained. In art and design, the ceramics studio is well equipped. There are deficiencies in the equipment for printing, fashion and textiles courses.

86 The large, modern, well-stocked library and learning centre is a key resource in the college. It includes ample library and computer-based learning facilities which are well used and appreciated by students. There are 271 study spaces giving a ratio of one space to every 13 full-time equivalent students. The attractive learning centre has 53 computers with networked software, including 10 networked compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases, and access to the Internet at no charge to students. There are nearly 35,000 books, 324 periodicals and newspapers, 51 CD-ROM titles and a large collection of 4,500 video titles. There is a children's library which is used by students on childcare courses. Use of all these facilities is carefully monitored.

87 Students can borrow textbooks from the library for long-term periods. The recording system for loans is computerised. The range of books and learning materials available for most courses is wide, but more restricted for computing, mathematics and sports studies than for other subjects.

88 The college has an impressive range of computer equipment for students' use. In September 1996, new information technology equipment costing just under £500,000 was installed in a new wing on the main site. There are seven computer suites; one with 60 workstations and the others with 20 each. The business skills and computer-aided design software is of commercial standard and appropriate for courses designed for industrial firms. Information technology resources for use by students and teaching staff are managed by a central computer department. There are 421 networked computers for students' use, giving a ratio of one computer to every 8.5 students. Over half of these machines and the accompanying software are of current commercial specification. There are several large monitors suitable for presentations to groups of students. Some of the computers used by art and design students are out of date. It is college policy to provide open access to its equipment. Students may work with any machine in the college. They gain access to the college's network with their own personal identity code. Students confirm that they have little difficulty in finding a machine to use. Information technology equipment is replaced every four years.

Accommodation

89 The college has buildings of high quality, most of which are interconnected on a single site. The campus is attractive. A series of extensions have been constructed in red clay brick to match the main buildings. Most accommodation is suitable for the purposes for which it is

used. It is also efficient in terms of heating and lighting costs. Pleasant communal areas contain plants and displays of students' work. The reception area, however, is not well laid out and the college plans to redesign it.

90 Teaching accommodation is generally of high quality. Classrooms and information technology rooms are light and well maintained. A main hall provides a useful resource for the performing arts. A new wing has been built to high environmental standards. It provides additional staff workrooms and small meeting rooms, general classrooms and a 'drop-in' workshop for developing students' key skills. In addition to the teaching accommodation on the main site, there is an open learning centre for adults in the town centre and a spacious, adaptable workshop for students with learning difficulties on an industrial site adjacent to the college. The number of temporary buildings has been reduced as space in the new wing has become available. A few temporary buildings are still in use which have defective heating and ventilation. Some have leaking roofs and poor sound insulation.

91 There is a well-resourced nursery and creche, known as the children's centre, which can accommodate 60 children. The facility is valued by students, staff and the local community. It also provides work placements for students on childcare courses. There are not enough places to meet demand.

92 Student social areas are suitably furnished. At present there are two main common rooms and some smaller areas including a smokers' room. The canteen areas have 256 seats. In order that students may have time during the lunch break to take part in extra-curricular activities there has been, since September 1996, a single lunch hour for all. The drawback is that this leads to substantial queues for food at lunchtimes. The common rooms and adjacent communal areas are also congested at lunchtimes, especially in wet weather when students are unable to use the attractive patio areas outside. At these peak times, the communal and social areas become untidy and littered. However, the interior of the college is generally well maintained and clean.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

93 The strengths of Bridgwater College are:

- effective management, strong leadership and a common sense of purpose
- a wide range of courses at a variety of levels
- much effective teaching and learning
- generally good examination results
- strong links with the local community, schools, employers and other agencies

-
- considerable growth in enrolments over the last four years
 - supportive governors who use their professional and industrial experience to help the college to succeed
 - good communications within the college
 - effective student support services
 - well-qualified staff who are committed to improving the quality of provision
 - up-to-date information technology
 - high-quality accommodation for teaching and learning.

94 In order to build on these strengths, the college should address the following issues:

- some less effective teaching and learning
- low retention rates on some programmes
- the presentation of data on students' achievement and retention rates
- the lack of targets for students' achievement and retention
- shortcomings in the quality assurance system
- deficiencies in publicity material.

FIGURES

-
- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)

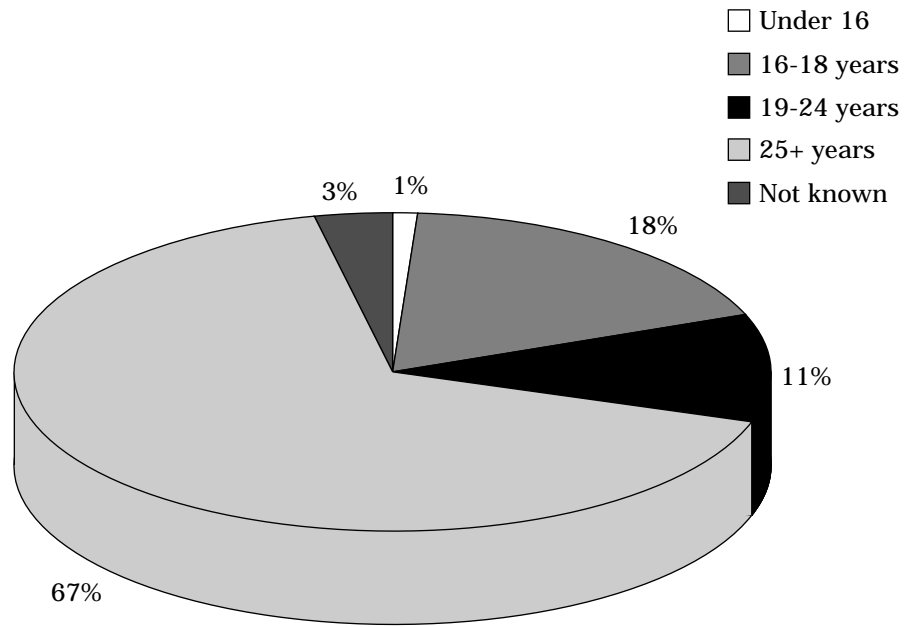
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 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

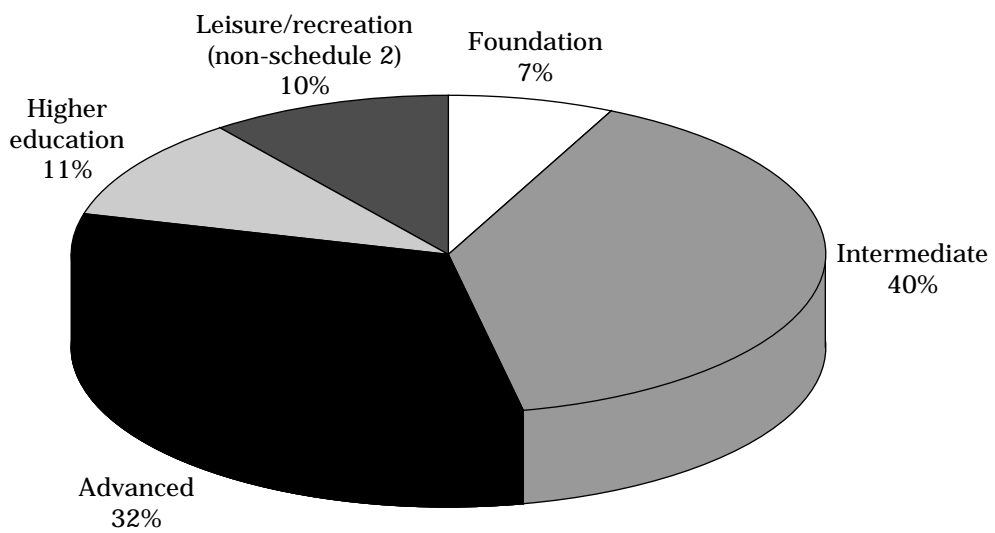
Bridgwater College: percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 8,130

Figure 2

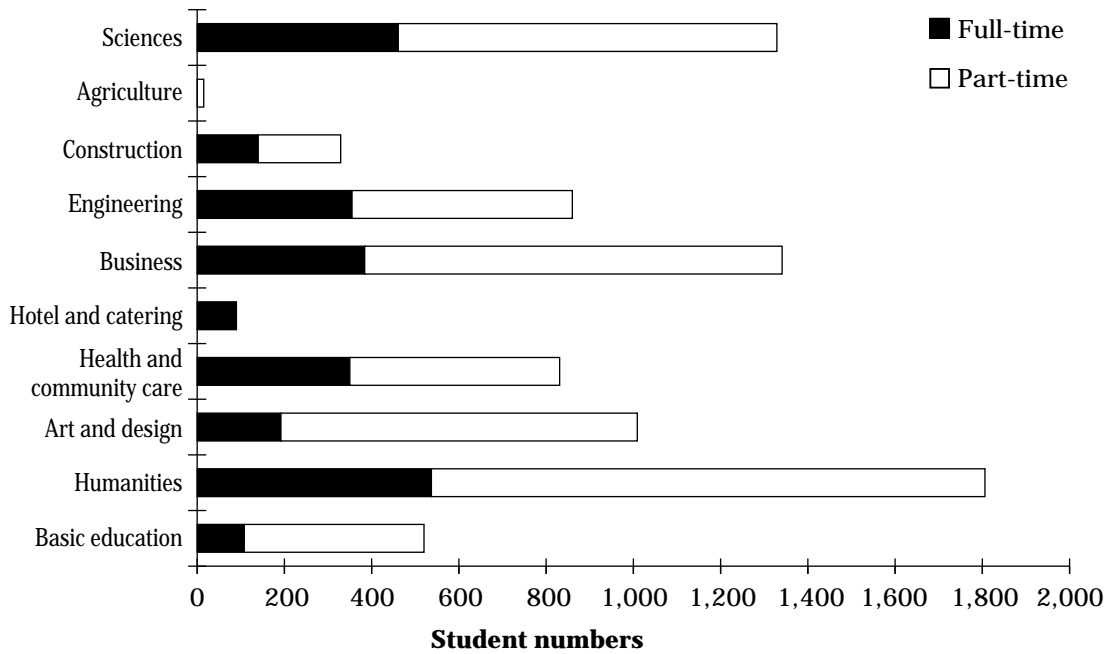
Bridgwater College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 8,130

Figure 3

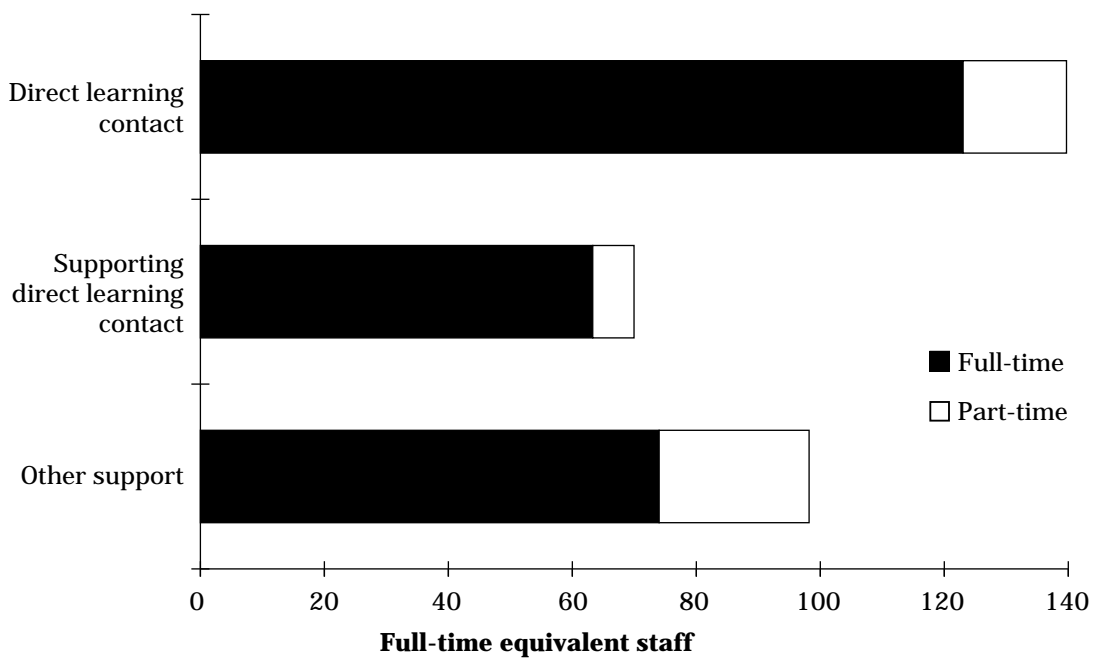
Bridgwater College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)



Student numbers: 8,130

Figure 4

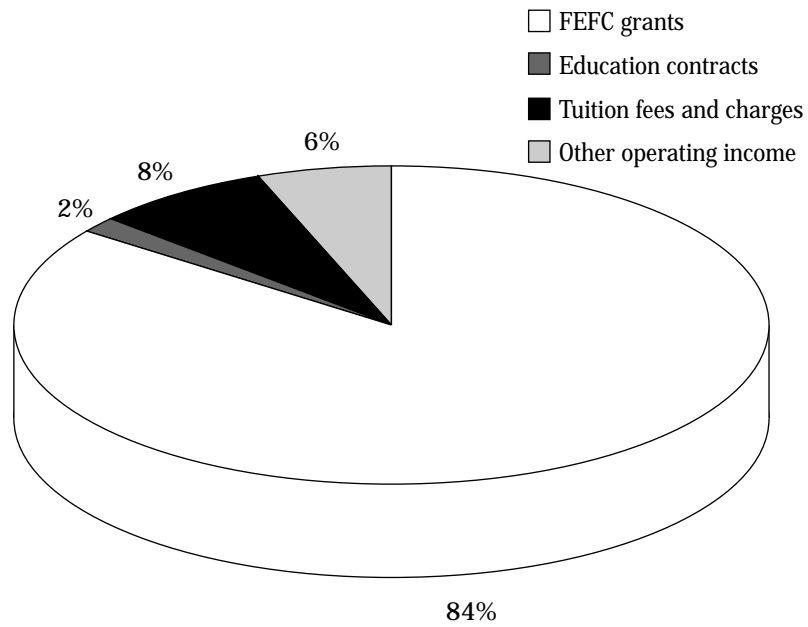
Bridgwater College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 308

Figure 5

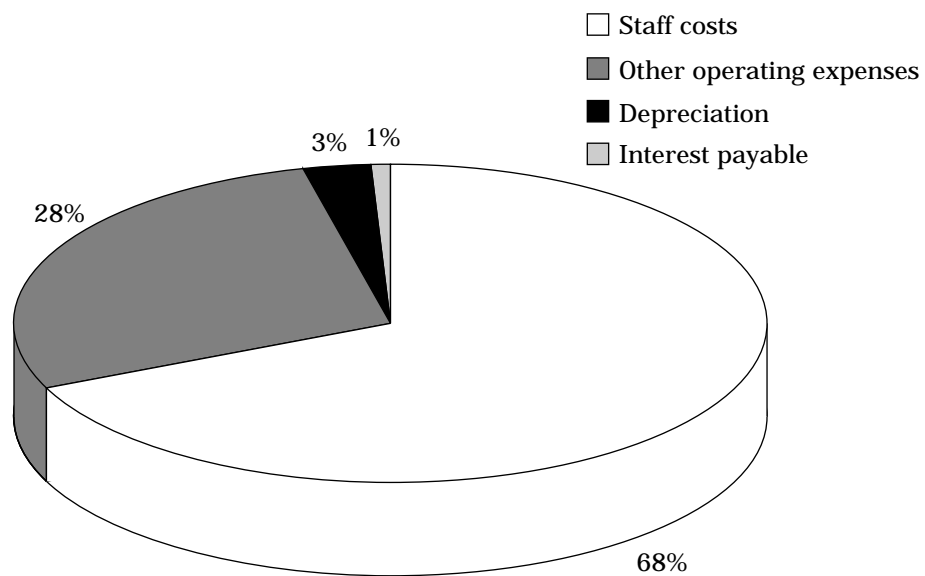
Bridgwater College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £10,330,000

Figure 6

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



Expenditure: £9,853,000

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
January 1997