Walsall College of Arts and Technology

***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 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

	Inspection grades				
Activity	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 96/97

WALSALL COLLEGE OF ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY
WEST MIDLANDS REGION
Inspected March 1996-April 1997

Summary

Walsall College of Arts and Technology has an extensive range of courses from foundation level to degree level. The college has good links with employers and the local community. It is responsive to local needs and provides courses in many community premises. Links with local universities and with the Walsall TEC are strong. The college offers good support services to all its students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Governors and managers are effective and strategic planning is thorough. The commitments in the college charter are monitored. A major new building project will open in 1997 as a European Design Centre. The college provides real work environments for its vocational students and has refurbished much of its accommodation to a good standard. The college should: improve its quality assurance arrangements; extend the collection and use of management information; ensure that the academic board conducts more robust reviews of academic activities; develop strategies to improve the arrangements for the overall planning and co-ordination of tutorials; improve the levels of achievement on GCSE and GCE A level programmes; improve the low retention rates on some courses; improve the recording of students' destinations; and address the underuse of some accommodation.

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	2
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	3	Health and social care and hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Computing	2		
Construction including painting and decorating	2	Art and design and performing arts	2
General engineering including motor vehicle	2	Humanities, English and modern foreign languages	2
Business, management and business administration	2	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3
Catering	2		

INTRODUCTION

1   Walsall College of Arts and Technology was inspected between March 1996 and April 1997. The college's induction procedures were inspected at the start of the autumn term 1996. Curriculum area inspections took place in March, October and November 1996, and in January 1997, followed by an inspection of aspects of cross-college provision in April 1997. Nineteen inspectors spent 78 days in the college. They observed 244 lessons and examined students' work. They met members of the corporation, college staff, students, parents, local employers, and representatives from higher education institutions. Discussions also took place with a representative of the Walsall Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Inspectors examined college policy statements, the strategic plan, minutes of committees, working papers and other documents.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2   Walsall College of Arts and Technology was established in 1992 as a result of a merger between Walsall College of Technology and Walsall College of Art. The former college of technology concentrated on meeting the needs of local industry by providing a range of vocational courses. The college of art had strong links with the local leather trade and provided courses in signwriting. Since incorporation, these traditional links have been maintained and the college has developed stronger relationships with its local community. It is organised in four faculties and offers a wide range of courses at different levels and in a variety of modes.

3   From September 1997, the college will reduce the number of sites on which it operates to four; the main site at St Paul's Street and three others. It also delivers courses in community centres.

4   Fourteen per cent of the population of Walsall are black. The student population of the college reflects the ethnic diversity of the borough. A 'community team' of college staff is working to establish and improve links with the minority ethnic community. It is doing this partly through the provision of courses in community centres. External funding has been obtained to develop ways of supporting students who are studying away from the main college sites. Unemployment rates across the borough vary from 4 per cent to 22 per cent. The average is 9.9 per cent which is higher than the average for the West Midlands as a whole. Thirty-nine per cent of the unemployed are classified as long-term unemployed. There are pockets of deprivation in the borough which are recognised as being among the worst in western Europe.

5   The college faces strong competition for students. There are several other further education colleges within a 15-mile radius. Walsall has 22 secondary schools most of which have sixth forms. In 1994-95, year 11 pupils in the borough had the second lowest achievement rate in the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) in the West Midlands.

6   Most local employers are small or medium-size enterprises. Manufacturing provides the largest category of employment, followed by service industries. The college is committed to providing vocational training to support local industries, particularly in engineering and new technologies. This commitment is reflected in the creation of a regional information technology centre at the college to be known as the European Design Centre. The project, which was nearing completion at the time of the inspection, is costing £2.4 million and has attracted a £0.7 million grant from the European Regional Development Fund.

7   In 1995-96, the college enrolled 10,569 students of whom 2,292 were full time. Enrolment continues throughout the year. Some students are partly supported by the European Social Fund. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown at figures 1, 2 and 3. There are 207 full-time and 268 part-time teaching staff and 171 technical and administrative support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

8   The college mission statement states: 'we believe a college must serve the needs of the individual, the local community and the well-being of our local and national economy. Our aim is for student success and the distinctive nature of our mission is its focus on student achievement at all levels. These principles are reflected throughout our strategic plan, which also takes account of age, gender and ethnicity'. The statement is supported by sections headed: respect; access; progression; quality; co-operation; relevance; efficiency; and entitlement.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9   The college offers an extensive programme of over 1,000 courses covering all the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) programme areas. There are courses from foundation to first degree level and good internal progression routes. Most programme areas have both a foundation and a level 1 offer. National vocational qualification (NVQ) courses are available at levels 2 and 3 in most programme areas. Accountancy and management studies are offered at level 4. There is a broad range of courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at intermediate and advanced level. Higher level courses are available in several curriculum areas, including languages, business studies, science, computing, engineering, electronics, construction, catering, health and social care, and performing arts. Other vocational programmes are offered in response to local needs and a few courses, such as signwork courses in painting and decorating, attract students from all over the country.

10   The college's sixth form centre offers 21 subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and nine GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects. Twenty GCSE subjects are available and, in 1996, sufficient students were recruited to run courses in 16 of these. Students have the choice of full-time or part-time modes of attendance on

all these courses. Full-time students can combine vocational study with GCE or GCSE subjects. There are separate specialist courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; in 1996 over 300 students participated in such courses across several programme areas. The college gained the 'Positive about Disability' kitemark in 1997. Courses developed specifically for adults include guidance and personal action planning programmes validated through the Open College Network. The college offers Saturday courses and, in a few subjects, tutorial support for students studying on their own. Eighty trainees from the Midland Electricity Board are studying on their own using college-prepared learning materials on a Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national certificate course in electrical engineering.

11   The college has close links with four local universities and offers a range of franchised higher education programmes. Progression from further to higher education is facilitated by a compact agreement between the college and the universities. A leased line to the University of Staffordshire provides college students and staff access to the Internet system and the University network. The college was a partner in a collaborative project which arose out of dialogue between employers and representatives from further and higher education institutions, and which supported progression from GNVQ engineering courses into employment.

12   Despite the fact that the college and local schools are in competition for students, there are some effective collaborative arrangements. These include: joint GNVQ provision in science and in health and social care; a full-cost course in biotechnology for biology students from local sixth forms; and the provision of work experience arrangements in areas such as hairdressing and catering. A range of imaginative approaches is used to inform school-leavers about the college's courses. A Christmas card design competition is popular with local primary school children. Years 10 and 11 pupils from two local schools have participated in technology and construction events and an electronics roadshow organised by the college.

13   The college works in partnership with a range of local agencies. For example, provision is made for adult learners in collaboration with Walsall Health Authority and Walsall City Challenge. A qualification in window manufacture and installation has been developed through collaboration with Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council. Relations with local employers are good. Faculty advisory committees were restructured in 1996. Local employers who are members of advisory committees give advice on curriculum developments. In response to requests from the local leather industry, the college teaches foundation skills in leather work, a City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) diploma in saddlery studies, and NVQ courses for women returning to industry. Full-cost courses are offered through Broadway Training Limited, a college company which responds rapidly and flexibly to the needs of local industry. It has been particularly successful in arranging language, management and technology courses.

14   The college meets the needs of local community groups through outreach centres. It delivers courses in community associations, health centres, places of worship, and local branches of national charities. Students value the opportunities provided in their neighbourhoods. For example, students from a local Seventh Day Adventist church plan to continue their studies having enjoyed a practical course on vegetarian cookery. Representatives of the local community welcomed the Asian women's resource centre, which has a creche.

15   Staff are aware of the government's aims and policies for further education and the national targets for education and training. The college has a good relationship with Walsall TEC and is represented on TEC sector boards. There are TEC officers on most college advisory committees. The college provides TEC-funded training for young people, unemployed persons and small businesses and is involved in modern apprentice schemes in engineering, construction and hairdressing. It co-operates in the delivery of lifetime learning targets through contracts with the TEC. It is working with Walsall Education Business Partnership to improve the image of engineering and manufacturing; a recent project led to the launch by the college and the TEC of Young Engineers Clubs in six Walsall schools.

16   The college has strong European links in several vocational areas. Students of GNVQ business have shared a common module on insurance with Dutch students. An electronics training programme developed with a major European motor manufacturer has fostered further developments in Spain and Portugal. The college has many links with Mulhouse, Walsall's twin town in France. It has organised a sixth form exchange visit and arranges work placements for students from Mulhouse. The college has been successful in obtaining European community funding for some of its initiatives, for example, a project to provide work placements for 15 students in Germany.

17   There is a comprehensive marketing policy and an extensive programme of marketing and corporate activities. These include the celebration of students' success through awards evenings, and displays of students' work, for example, in fashion shows. Some events relate to important days in the calendars of religious groups represented locally, and others involve participation in local events such as a Sunday market. The college prospectus received special commendation for its design in the 1995-96 Higher Education Information Service Trust Award. College publicity materials, which vary in quality, are available in a wide variety of local venues. The Walsall town crier is used to promote open days and college events.

18   The college has a clearly written equal opportunities policy. This policy and details of relevant legislation are available to students on the college's computer network. Course reviews include procedures to monitor some aspects of equality of opportunity, although, in some cases, this involves simply recording the gender, ethnic origin and any disabilities of the students. Informative materials on equal opportunities, including a

case study on gender, were available to tutors for use during induction. Half of the students included in a survey claimed to be unaware of the inclusion of this material in the induction programme.

19   In addition to the main curriculum, there is an enhancement programme which includes opportunities to learn a foreign language, to take courses leading to a community sports leader award or to study for a British Sign Language qualification. The sixth form centre has organised some cultural activities and has a small programme of extra-curricular activities. Some of these have been cancelled as a result of poor student response. There is a drop-in base for the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme which has some facilities for physical recreation.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20   The 14 members of the corporation provide effective governance. Seven governors were members before incorporation and their experience has contributed to the board's clear understanding of its role. The nine business members have backgrounds in professions associated with the specialist work of the college, including accountancy, business, construction, engineering, leather manufacture, and product design. Their experience contributes to the board's shared understanding and support of the college's mission. The other members are a nominee of the TEC, three who are co-opted to bring in additional expertise, and the principal. Two members in addition to the principal are women; one is from a minority ethnic group.

21   The governors concern themselves mainly with strategic and financial matters. Members have a sound evaluative overview of the college's performance and affairs. They have good working relationships with the college's managers. The principal and senior managers provide governors with a range of informative reports on strategic issues. The board reviews the college's charter and mission annually. Governors have assessed their own performance and set themselves targets, including attendance targets. There is no record of the board or any of its committees having been inquorate. The board has developed a standard induction procedure and a mentor system to support new members. The corporation makes arrangements to broaden members' knowledge of further education. Business members chair college advisory panels and governors attend college functions.

22   The corporation has the following committees: finance; audit; remuneration; personnel; estates; community liaison; students' affairs; and membership. The expertise and experience of individual members is well deployed. Each member attends two or three of the board's committees. The remits of the committees are clearly and simply described through their terms of reference. The corporation has approved the co-option of a person with relevant financial experience onto the audit committee. The board reviews the membership of the committees and encourages governors to broaden their experience by changing their

membership roles. The clerk provides independent guidance and clear summaries of committee business for the corporation. The corporation board has clear agendas which are drawn up by the chairman and the clerk. The meetings of the board and its committees are well recorded in concise board minutes which are available in the college library. The chairman and the principal hold regular meetings. The principal has been appraised by the chairman. Governors have adopted a code of conduct and compile a register of members' interests annually.

23   When the college was reorganised in 1996, the aim was to improve efficiency and define responsibilities more clearly. As a result of the reorganisation, the college's management structure has been changed and the number of support staff has been reduced.

24   The senior postholders are the principal, the deputy principal, the financial controller, and the personnel manager. Together with the faculty heads they make up the senior management team which meets weekly. The roles and responsibilities of the senior managers are clearly defined and known to college staff. The deputy principal has responsibilities for strategic planning, estates, and marketing. One of the faculty heads also has responsibility for quality assurance. Senior management team meetings are minuted, but completed actions are not always clearly recorded. The minutes of meetings are not widely available.

25   Strategic planning is thorough. Staff at all levels adhere to a common planning cycle and the strategic planning process is used to establish targets at faculty level. Enrolment targets are set and progress towards them is monitored. Curriculum areas were regrouped as part of the reorganisation and, in some cases, the new arrangements are working well. In some other areas, lines of communication and responsibility are unclear, and there have been delays in decision making. Some of these problems have been exacerbated by the fact that the college operates on several sites. An external agency has been used to good effect to provide staff training in communication methods.

26   Membership of the academic board was broadened in 1995 but the average attendance has been low. The board has three committees: staff development; students' services; and learning resources and information technology strategy. The board does not do enough to monitor the college's academic performance.

27   The college is well served by a small but efficient team of finance staff. Detailed accounts are made available for each meeting of the finance committee and the corporation receives regular financial reports. The college's finances have been prudently managed through strong central controls. Following the restructuring of the college, all income and expenditure budgets were devolved to managers. This has been welcomed by middle managers. The arrangements for allocation of budgets to the academic departments are based on a formula related to funding units. Clear financial reports are available to budget holders who are provided with monthly accounts of income and expenditure. Budget holders have

been given an introduction to funding and financial management. A unit costing exercise is being piloted in the 1996-97 academic year.

28   The college exceeded its targets for FEFC-funded units of activity in 1995-96. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 was £17.84 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges was £18.13 per unit and the median for all sector colleges was £18.99 per unit. The strategic aim of reducing payroll costs from 74 per cent of the total revenue in 1994-95 to below 70 per cent has been partially achieved.

29   Access to management information is being improved. The college's efforts to develop its management information systems have focused on the reliability of financial reporting, on budgetary controls and on responding to requests for information from the FEFC. More recently, other data have been collected and the resultant reports can be accessed directly by programme managers. These reports include information on enrolment numbers set against targets. Reports on attendance and retention rates are too infrequent. Changes in the process of initial registration have resulted in a few staff complaints about the unreliability of data. There is a need for further staff development on the use of management information and for more direct access to a wider range of data for staff at all levels of management. Data on students' destinations are not collected or monitored effectively.

30   The college has a wide range of policies which influence strategic planning: they include a marketing policy, an equal opportunities policy, an environmental policy and an accommodation strategy. Health, safety and welfare matters are generally well managed through a committee which meets twice each term to discuss issues and to provide guidance. The governors review health, safety and welfare in the college and receive frequent reports from the committee. The control of substances hazardous to health is audited and related regulations are observed. College-wide risk and hazard assessments have yet to be completed.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

31   The provision of support and guidance for students is strongly emphasised in the college's strategic and operational plans. There is a well-established and comprehensive students' services policy which covers all aspects of the advice, guidance and support offered to students. Students' services were brought together into a single faculty as a result of the recent reorganisation.

32   The college offers a wide range of services to all its students. The services include pre-entry advice and guidance, academic and personal support, support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, careers guidance, and support for students who need to improve their key skills. A well-equipped and easily accessible student

services centre on the St Paul's Street site deals with all initial enquiries from prospective students. The centre is open five days a week, in the evenings throughout the year, and on Saturday mornings in term time. Staff who work in the centre receive training. Students on other sites who do not wish to visit the main student services centre can talk to staff through a video conferencing link, although as yet few have chosen to do so. Staff from the main centre also provide a partial service at the other sites. Students confirmed that they found these arrangements satisfactory.

33   The college successfully recruits students from all sections of the community. It carefully adapts its methods of recruitment to the groups it is hoping to attract. For example, staff from the college take part in open evenings and careers events at schools; they visit pre-retirement groups; and there are links with the youth service. Community education staff visit a variety of community venues including places of worship. Trained interpreters visit deaf people. Some information is available in Braille and on tape. Some has been translated into community languages. A system for accrediting students' prior learning has been developed but is, as yet, not widely used.

34   Applications and enrolments are efficiently processed. Students may enrol at any time of the year. Staff in the student services centre, and in faculties, are on hand to provide advice and guidance at all times. In the summer they provide a well-used service for young people in the borough who need help to find a place in higher education. Students are able to use a video conferencing link to talk to staff at the University of Wolverhampton about vacancies at the university. The college has set itself a target to provide an interview within 20 days of an enquiry. In most cases, the target is met. Enrolment is normally carried out quickly, though at peak times there are a few delays.

35   Faculties plan and organise their own induction programmes. The great majority take place in September, which remains the peak enrolment time for many courses. Students have a variable experience of induction, though most find the process valuable in helping them to get to know the college and their fellow students. Teachers involved in induction are generally well briefed and enthusiastic. The arrangements for transferring to another course are explained at induction. For the relatively few students who do transfer, the arrangements work well. All students receive a copy of the students' charter and their rights and responsibilities are explained to them.

36   The college provides effective support to help students improve their key skills. All students on full-time and substantial part-time courses are assessed during induction to establish whether they need additional support. Different tests have been developed to suit different areas and levels of work. The well-equipped key skills centre is vigorously promoting its work throughout the college, and increasing numbers of students are using its services. Each student has an individual work plan. Attendance and progress are carefully monitored. Support for students with learning

difficulties and/or disabilities is strong. The college makes particularly good provision for its growing number of deaf students through a team of 11 staff who both teach and interpret.

37   All students who study for more than six hours a week are allocated a tutor and have a weekly timetabled tutorial. There is no effective co-ordination or monitoring of tutorials. Tutorial curricula have been developed to meet the needs of different programmes. Most students find their tutors helpful and supportive. The quality of tutorial sessions inspected was variable. Tutorials for individual students were helpful, but group sessions were less effective. Tutorial programmes include careers education. The guidance and advice centre also provides information on careers and further and higher education. It houses a large collection of paper-based and computerised materials. There is a service-level agreement with the careers service which has premises on the college campus. Two professional careers officers work in the students' services centre on a part-time basis. The take-up of their services is low. The college offers some encouragement to students to maintain their records of achievement. Estimates of the numbers of students who do so suggest that in some sections the record of achievement is not vigorously promoted.

38   A small team of counsellors working in the student services centre provides an effective and well-used service. One member specialises in the provision of financial advice and is consulted by large numbers of students. There are three funds to support students experiencing financial hardship, one of which is a loan fund. The funds are well publicised and oversubscribed. They are allocated in accordance with clear guidelines. The college provides short-term personal counselling. Students needing an extended period of counselling are referred to outside agencies. There is a nursery on the main site but there are insufficient places to meet demand.

39   'Student focus' teams play an important and well-established role in supporting students. The teams meet regularly to discuss students' progress, and to determine the action that may be needed if, for example, a student is not working or attending satisfactorily. The parents of students aged 16 to 19 are informed at an early stage of any causes for concern. They also receive regular reports on the progress of their children and have the opportunity to attend parents' evenings. Parents consulted during the inspection spoke approvingly of the college's efforts to involve them.

40   There are well-developed formal mechanisms through which students can communicate their views to governors and staff. There is a students' council for the new sixth form centre and a general students' council.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

41   Inspectors observed 244 lessons. Sixty-six per cent had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. This compares with an average of 63 per cent for all lessons observed during the 1995-96 inspection programme according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. Six per cent of the lessons had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. Attendance at the lessons observed ranged from 70 per cent to 98 per cent with an average of 76 per cent. The highest attendance rates were seen in construction and basic education, and the lowest in business administration, and hairdressing and beauty therapy. The average class size was 10. The following table shows the grades given to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	0	6	8	1	1	16
GNVQ	7	19	16	4	1	47
NVQ	13	20	12	0	1	46
Other vocational	20	38	16	2	0	76
Access to higher education	0	10	5	0	0	15
Higher education	1	6	2	0	0	9
Basic education	3	4	4	4	0	15
Other*	5	9	6	0	0	20
Total	**49**	**112**	**69**	**11**	**3**	**244**

includes GCSE courses.

42   Most lessons were effectively planned. Schemes of work were well structured and, in most programme areas, they included assessment criteria and learning objectives. In the best lessons, teachers put new work into context by reviewing previous learning which helped to reinforce students' understanding. There were good working relationships between teachers and students which encouraged students to seek help when they needed it. The college has a commitment to place students with specific needs on mainstream programmes of study providing them with appropriate support. For example, educational interpreters provided good support for deaf students. However, there were several examples of teachers using methods which did not take account of the learning needs of students with different abilities.

43   The teaching of science was generally effective, although less so on higher education courses. Most teachers introduced a range of activities, including individual and group work, in both practical and theory classes. In several lessons, the equipment or books available were inadequate. Teachers in computing are enthusiastic. Course handbooks are of a high

standard. However, in some lessons, teachers provided insufficient opportunities for students to participate in discussions. Many teachers make helpful written comments on assignments but, in some cases, students' errors were not corrected.

44   In construction, all courses have carefully documented records of students' achievements. In craft areas, schemes of work and students' progress are displayed on noticeboards. Most teaching was good; teachers used a variety of methods to promote learning and sustain students' interest. Teachers put appropriate questions to students to confirm that learning had taken place. Students were able to work effectively on their own. A link with industry enables teachers of signmaking to work with industrial-standard computer applications and helps students to produce work of commercial standards. Links with electrical suppliers provided good-quality electrical installation equipment. Construction science theory was not supported by practical work.

45   In engineering, teaching was generally good. Teachers used a variety of teaching methods, including overhead projector and whiteboard presentations. They are active in producing new teaching material; the foundation level electronics handbook is particularly impressive. Several teachers motivated students to achieve good standards of work. They used assignments drawn from industrial contexts to engage students' interest and to extend their abilities. Marking of students' written work was fair and teachers' feedback to students helped them to improve their work. Appropriate schemes of work and records of students' progress are carefully maintained. However, teachers did not carry out checks to ensure that learning had taken place. Insufficient homework was set. Attendance in several classes was poor.

46   In business, the majority of lessons were well planned and effectively managed. Teachers made effective use of good-quality learning materials and a variety of methods, including regular questioning of students and exercises to check their progress. Teachers managed group activities well. They took opportunities to use the information technology centres to integrate computer applications with classroom activities. In some successful introductory lessons, teachers demonstrated how to use business software using video and computer images which helped to motivate students. Teachers set business assignments at an appropriate level and provided detailed feedback to students. In some higher level courses, teachers spent too much time dictating notes.

47   In most hospitality and catering lessons, teachers used a variety of appropriate teaching methods. Effective use of high-quality resources had a motivating effect. For example, on the advanced GNVQ course an accommodation planning exercise involved the use of construction workshops, three-dimensional design software and a range of furnishings. Some of the teaching on the intermediate GNVQ programme was less effective. The practical areas create a realistic work environment and

there is a strong emphasis on skills development. However, in some cases, out-of-date techniques were taught which are inappropriate for current industrial requirements. Students at three levels were successfully taught together in practical areas to promote teamwork and the acceptance of responsibility.

48   In hairdressing and beauty therapy, teachers planned and organised their lessons well. They defined the aims and objectives at the start of the lesson, reviewed students' previous learning and gave clear summaries at the end. In practical sessions, teachers gave effective demonstrations and used searching questions to check students' understanding. Most teachers used a variety of teaching methods. These included the use of learning packages specially designed for particular topics. The college provides a realistic simulated working environment but work placements are not built into any programmes. Students are encouraged to find their own work placements but some second-year students had no employment experience in industry. Teachers in health and social care, organised appropriate group work exercises in most lessons. Students participate in well-organised work placements. The coursework set for GNVQ foundation and intermediate levels was stimulating and effective. Although the content of the lessons on other courses was appropriate to the curriculum, some of the teaching was unimaginative. Teachers often used badly designed handwritten overhead transparencies which students simply copied into their notes. There were few well-presented handouts of good quality.

49   Teachers in performing arts managed learning effectively. They employed a variety of teaching methods. Their enthusiasm was infectious and they consistently encouraged students to practise their individual skills. The quality of handouts and support material was good. Written work was appropriately assessed. However, some theory lessons did not require students to think for themselves. Most teaching in art and design was effective and had clear vocational relevance. Teachers were thorough in their attention to detail and were keen to develop students' practical skills and encourage their intellectual development. Students are required to work hard in most classes. Teachers used imaginative means to engage students with learning difficulties in the task of making three-dimensional forms. These students developed their practical skills by making three-dimensional objects from papier maché. There was ample evidence of good drawing tuition on most courses. In some lessons, learning objectives were not clearly defined, students were not encouraged to discuss their work and poor use was made of reference material.

50   English teachers used well-prepared materials to encourage students to learn. The majority of lessons were well taught. Courses are thoroughly documented and each lesson has its own lesson plan. Some group work was not well managed. In most modern languages lessons, teachers and their students made appropriate use of the language being learned. Teachers used a variety of resources and learning activities to maintain

students' interest. There were schemes of work for all courses and teachers prepared detailed lesson plans, some of which included clearly specified learning outcomes. Assessment tasks were set at an appropriate level and were usually marked helpfully and corrected conscientiously. However, there were examples of uncorrected errors and overgenerous grading. Attendance in the classes was low.

51 Staff keep good records of the progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and set targets for future lessons. In some cases, teachers were effective in encouraging students to learn and in developing their confidence. Some practical sessions were particularly effective. In other lessons, teaching materials were poorly used and students were not acquiring new skills or gaining knowledge.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

52 Most students were highly motivated and enjoyed their studies. In most curriculum areas students were able to demonstrate appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills. In construction and engineering, students enjoyed their practical activities and took pride in what they achieved. Business students at elementary level developed a high level of shorthand skills. Students of hairdressing and beauty therapy acquired good practical skills and had satisfied clients. Students on leatherwork courses developed high level skills and obtained employment. Some electrical installation students did not achieve the required industrial standards in their practical work.

53 On most programmes, students' written work was of a good standard. In English, written work was consistently of a high quality. The writing standards of access students were particularly good. GCSE English students produce outstanding creative writing. Students' responses to assignment work on the higher level engineering courses, and in catering, were of a high standard. Assignment work in the engineering intermediate and foundation courses was more variable. In modern languages, some students' speech was lively and fluent; others struggled to express their ideas.

54 Students undertook practical work competently and safely. In engineering, students displayed a responsible attitude to health and safety and this was particularly evident when they operated machinery. Students in art and design used equipment competently and returned tools and other items after use to the member of staff responsible for equipment. In catering, a few students lacked basic practical skills and there were some unsafe working practices, such as the use of inappropriate footwear and outdoor clothing left in kitchens. Motor vehicle students took pride in working on customers' cars and enjoyed dealing directly with the public.

55 Sixty-five per cent of the 173 students in their final year of study on the advanced vocational courses included in the Department for Education and Employment's (DfEE's) 1996 performance tables were successful. This places the college among the bottom third of colleges in the further

education sector based on this performance measure. However, 71 per cent of the 147 students studying intermediate vocational courses included in the tables achieved success, placing the college in the top third of colleges on this performance measure. These tables cover only a small proportion of the vocational work in the college.

56   About 3,500 of the college's students achieve vocational awards each year. These awards include BTEC national diplomas and certificates. Good results were achieved in science, computing, building studies, engineering, leisure and tourism, business and finance. In BTEC higher national awards, good results were obtained in engineering, business and finance. Achievements in motor vehicle management were poor. Pass rates at NVQ levels 2 and 3 in hairdressing and beauty therapy were good. Achievements on the NVQ construction courses were similar to national averages. All the 55 students in 1996 on the C&G courses in electrical and electronics construction craft studies achieved a pass. Good pass rates, including numerous distinctions and merits were achieved on most RSA Examinations Board (RSA) typing and wordprocessing courses. Results in information technology, leisure and tourism, and art and design were variable.

57   Pass rates at or above the national average were achieved on many GNVQ courses. These included: foundation level business, health and social care; intermediate level art and design, business, catering, construction, engineering, health and social care, and science; and advanced level health and social care, leisure and tourism, media, communication and production, and science. Pass rates were below the national average on intermediate level leisure and tourism and advanced level art and design courses.

58   Students taking GCE A level courses make up only about 2 per cent of enrolments. In recent years, approximately 30 per cent of all candidates achieved grade A to C passes. The 56 students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE A level examinations in 1996 scored, on average, 3.1 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2), according to the data in the performance tables published by the DfEE. This places the college in the bottom third of colleges on this performance measure.

59   Students' achievements in GCSE examinations have been variable. In English and mathematics there were large numbers of entries in each of the last three years. The percentage of students who achieved grade C or above was higher than the national average in English in each year. In mathematics, pass rates at grades A to C were above the national average for students under the age of 19 in 1994 and 1996 but below for such students in 1995, and for students aged 19 and over in each year. In 1996, pass rates at or above the national average were achieved in psychology, sociology, French, German, Greek, Punjabi, and Spanish. Results fell well short of national averages in biology, law and photography. Student numbers on some of these courses were low.

60   Retention rates in several programme areas are low. For example, on one course in engineering, only 25 per cent of students completed the course.

61   Key skills are well developed in business studies, catering and leisure, health and social care, art and design, and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In science, students had weaknesses in communication skills, information technology skills and mathematics. Students studying hairdressing and beauty therapy also had poor information technology skills.

62   In the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, there were good achievements in C&G practical cookery, independent living skills and work preparation courses. Many students gained secondary awards such as wordpower, food hygiene certification and the English speaking board qualifications. Some students progressed to mainstream further education programmes, such as the NVQ level 2 in catering, but only a few students successfully gained the NVQ award. Few students obtained employment.

63   College students have won a number of national prizes in recent years. Students in painting and decorating have been particularly successful. They were winners of the C&G bronze and silver medals in 1994 and 1996, respectively. One student was the national skill build competition winner in 1995. In 1997, two students won the best young decorators of the year award sponsored by a leading paint manufacturer. An engineering student won the C&G silver medal in 1995 for electronics.

64   The destinations of students who left the college in 1995-96 are largely unknown. The college has information on only 22 per cent of students. Of these, 15 per cent progressed to higher education, 16 per cent to other further education courses, 66 per cent to employment, and 3 per cent to other destinations. The college needs to improve its arrangements for collecting data on students' destinations.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

65   The college's mission statement makes a commitment to improving the quality of its provision. The quality assurance policy and procedures focus on continuous improvement in the quality of students' learning. The quality assurance system is known and understood by staff throughout the college. The development and improvement of quality assurance is the responsibility of the quality assurance unit, led by a member of the senior management team. All college managers have quality assurance responsibilities as part of their job descriptions. The annual monitoring and review cycle incorporates standards which are set out in the college's manual of quality assurance procedures and in the team manuals used by staff in curriculum areas. The college company, Broadway Training Limited, has achieved the International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9002 award for its work.

66   Key developments in quality assurance have taken place at course team level in accord with the college's policy of focusing on students' learning. The college has a coherent and consistent procedure for curriculum planning and review by course teams. Every team completes a termly review based on the well-established use of team manuals written to a common format. The manuals are comprehensive and include analyses of the team's performance against college-wide standards. Staff find the manuals and reviews helpful in monitoring and improving the quality of what they do. Termly reviews are informed by surveys of the views of students and other clients, and by reports from external verifiers. They lead to the preparation of action plans for improvement, which feed into quality development plans, at team, faculty and college level. Senior staff conduct audits to check that reviews and manuals have been completed. There is, however, no feedback to students or other clients on the outcomes of surveys or the action to be taken. The amount of information and analysis provided by course teams is variable. The data that course staff provide to support their analysis, for example when commenting on students' achievements, are sometimes inadequate. Some action plans lack clear timescales and targets.

67   Quality standards are well established for some support areas, including student services, learner support, and library and learning resources. Performance against the standards is regularly monitored and reported upon and this leads to action being taken to improve services to students. The college has recently published standards for other service areas, for example, finance, estates and marketing.

68   There is no systematic use of performance indicators at college level. The setting of targets for improvement at college level has begun only recently. The college has set a target of 70 per cent success for students' achievement for the academic year 1996-97. There is no system for collating course reviews to produce reports on the college's performance at faculty and college level. Quality audits and reports to governors have focused on the development of quality systems rather than the outcomes in terms of students' learning and achievements. There is little analysis of trends, even at course team level.

69   The college's charter is reviewed annually and amended following wide consultation. In December 1996, the college achieved the charter mark. The charter sets out clear standards of service offered to students, parents, employers and the community. It also states what the college expects from users of its services. Unusually, it contains a legal disclaimer which undermines the strength of its statements on standards. There are some measurable performance indicators, for example, standards relating to the time taken to respond to applications or complaints. Performance against the charter standards is monitored. There are relatively few complaints but they are all carefully analysed and acted upon.

70   The college established a staff-appraisal system in 1995 but has been slow to implement it. All staff have received appropriate training but, by October 1996, fewer than one in 10 members of staff had been appraised. A major drive to complete appraisals was subsequently undertaken and about two-thirds of staff had been appraised at the time of the inspection. The scheme applies to all full-time teachers and to all non-teaching staff. Its focus is staff development. Staff who have been appraised have found the process supportive. The scheme does not include the observation of teaching or other work, although there are plans for their future inclusion. The college is slowly working towards the achievement of recognition as an Investor in People, having made its commitment in March 1994. A target date for achievement has been set for summer 1997.

71   The college has an effective staff-development policy. It includes a clear statement of priorities, which reflect the objectives in the college's strategic plan. Individual staff-development needs are identified through the staff-appraisal system and through course team and faculty reviews. The budget for staff development in 1996-97 is £90,000. This is adequate to meet the needs identified. The budget is partly devolved to faculties for specific curriculum-related staff development. Funds held centrally pay for whole-college training days and support for staff wishing to obtain further qualifications. A wide range of staff-development activity takes place. A major initiative in information technology training in 1996 has had a significant impact on teaching and learning. More recent training days have focused on the use of information technology, disability awareness, funding issues, and key skills. Good progress has been made in training staff to achieve awards as vocational assessors and verifiers. There is a programme of 'customer care' training for appropriate support staff. A particularly effective aspect of the staff-development policy is the opportunity for teachers to spend up to two weeks of contracted time on 'scholarly activity'. This includes a wide range of activities, including development of new courses, professional skills updating and periods of study abroad. The college has recognised the need to develop more systematic training for managers. It has embarked on a useful programme of visits by groups of staff to other colleges and to industry to compare its procedures and facilities with those of other establishments and to identify and share good practice. Staff new to the college receive induction and are assigned a mentor. The procedures for staff induction are set out in the quality assurance manual.

72   In 1994-95, as part of its quality assessment procedures, the college undertook an intensive programme of classroom observation. This was supported by audits of quality manuals, analysis of data and discussions with staff. The outcome was a self-assessment report. The 1996-97 self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection was based upon further self-assessment undertaken by faculties and service areas of the college. Governors discussed the report and suggested amendments. The report was written to the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing*

Achievement. Strengths were listed under each heading as facts rather than judgements. They were broadly cross-referenced to sources of evidence. Weaknesses were not clearly identified. The grades awarded for each aspect of cross-college provision were generally in line with the findings of the inspection team.

RESOURCES

Staffing

73   Just over half of the full-time teachers have a first degree. Most of those teaching vocational subjects have other relevant qualifications. Educational interpreters who work with deaf students have exceptionally high level qualifications and expertise. The college has a policy to increase the proportion of full-time teachers who have a recognised teaching qualification. The present level is around 60 per cent. Only 40 per cent of part-time teachers have a teaching qualification. Over 70 per cent have training and development lead body assessor qualifications and others are working towards these awards. Staff in some subjects have recent industrial or commercial experience. In some others, such as science, catering, and leisure this is not the case. The college is providing opportunities for staff to update their industrial and commercial experience through the staff-development programme.

74   Teachers are appropriately deployed. Ninety-five per cent of the full-time academic staff are on flexible contracts which include specific teaching commitments. Management guidelines help to determine the workloads of staff. Personal work schedules are prepared for the year ahead. This contributes to the planning of fair and reasonable work patterns and helps faculties determine their part-time staffing requirements.

75   Technician and business support staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. The level of support is good in some programme areas such as science but is less satisfactory in other areas, including art and design, construction and engineering. Job evaluation for support staff is just being introduced.

76   A full range of college personnel procedures, including professional development and appraisal, ensures equal treatment for all full-time staff. All of the policies and procedures have been revised and developed and include new features such as an anti-harassment policy. Clear guidelines and criteria were used to help determine the procedures followed during the reorganisation in 1996. The staff handbook is outdated: a new one has been drafted and contains helpful information on conditions of service. Thirty-four per cent of full-time teaching staff are female. Fourteen per cent of students but only 6 per cent of teachers are from minority ethnic groups. Procedures relating to absence through sickness have been changed recently with the aim of reducing absence levels.

Equipment/learning resources

77   The college is generally well equipped and resources are deployed effectively to support learning. The basic equipment in classrooms is being standardised. Most teaching rooms at the main campus are adequately furnished and have whiteboards, blackboards and projectors. In a few rooms, the whiteboards are in poor condition and there are no blinds, so projectors cannot be used effectively. The quality of the furniture and audio-visual aids in some classrooms at the Shelley and Bradford Place sites are poor. The college has a policy of developing realistic, simulated working environments. It has achieved this in several specialist areas: the kitchens and restaurant facilities in catering; the travel shop in leisure and tourism; the hairdressing salons; and the industrial-standard engine analysis facilities in motor vehicle work.

78   Specialist equipment in most curriculum areas is of a good standard. Basic equipment in science is adequate. The college introduced new computer equipment and compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database facilities in all laboratories following the specialist inspection. The engineering workshops have new computer-aided equipment and good specialist computers and software. Technicians build teaching aids and models to a high standard. There are adequate supplies of handtools in construction and in electrical engineering. Some electrical engineering equipment is old and needs replacing. There is a lack of equipment for practical work in construction science. Art and design has well-equipped workshops at the Tong Street site. At the Shelley site, there is digital sound recording equipment for media and music students. The lighting in the performance studio is inadequate and the television cameras are old. There is good specialist equipment for work in leather. The language laboratory is an excellent resource. Some specialist teaching aids and worksheets for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are of poor quality. Some students with special needs have difficulty obtaining appropriate enabling equipment.

79   There are good resources for students who wish to study on their own. Policies for information technology and for the provision of learning resources are supported by strategies for their development. Staff set performance targets for the resources centres. Technical specifications, and security and maintenance procedures are standardised across the college. The provision of information technology is good and includes 455 computer workstations. The ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers is 8:1. At the main campus, there is an open access multimedia centre and an information technology centre. Both are equipped with up-to-date computers linked to the Internet. In the multimedia centre, students can book out some 100 CD-ROMs. A 'core skills centre' is furnished and equipped to a high standard. Support staff and good course materials are available to assist students in these centres. Use of the centres is monitored. The information technology centre has a swipe card booking system for drop-in students. However, the number of open access

machines available is reduced because the information technology centre is often timetabled for class teaching. Some open access facilities will be relocated in the new European Design Centre and new equipment will be purchased. There are specialist graphic design computer suites available at the Tong Street and Shelley sites. There are appropriate information technology facilities on all sites, including the neighbourhood learning and women's centres. Some of these sites are linked by video conference facilities. Only the main site is linked to the Internet.

80   The library is part of the learning resources department. At the time of the inspection, the library at the main site was in a temporary space because of the building work for the new European Design Centre. The bookstock of 32,000 items has some deficiencies and some outdated books. The library book budget is £30,000. Since the specialist inspection, the college has provided new books for GNVQ science and business and increased the number of English texts. Curriculum teams liaise regularly with library staff. The opening hours from 09.00 hours to 19.00 hours do not fully meet the needs of evening students. The computerised catalogue system is old and of limited use. The college plans to renew the system when the library is relocated to the new European Design Centre. There are small subject libraries at the Shelley and Tong Street sites. The learning resources and library staff are appropriately qualified and supported by adequate numbers of audio-visual and information technology technicians.

Accommodation

81   The college's accommodation strategy aims to reduce the number of uneconomic buildings and address the current underuse of accommodation. At the time of the inspection, three small sites had been closed and were for sale and a further site was scheduled to be closed in July 1997. A programme of refurbishment and new building was under way. The first building project at the main site was close to completion. Despite effective management by the college's estates team, there was some disruption because of the building project. Eighty-five per cent of all students attend classes at the main site which is situated in pleasant grounds in the town centre. The site is well signposted in the town. There are a group of buildings on the site which provide a good standard of accommodation. The oldest dates from the 1960s.

82   The Shelley site is two miles from the town centre and is a former secondary school building which the college has adapted for the performing arts, media and music courses. Some of the specialist spaces are below professional standard and some rooms are too small for the size of groups using them. There are four prefabricated buildings on this site, two of which are in poor condition. The Bradford Place site is in the conservation centre of the town. It is an elaborate and imposing Victorian building which was the original Walsall Arts and Science Institute. It is in a good state of external repair and there is a schedule for internal refurbishment. The building is currently used by painting, decorating and interior design

students. The Wisemore Centre, a short walk from the main site, is a Victorian factory building attached to the Walsall Leather Museum. It has been refurbished to a high standard as a management training and conference centre. The college has purchased a small building on one corner of the main site. This building, the Xtrawise Centre, provides a leisure club for students. The college has established neighbourhood learning in two centres in the town, plus a women's centre.

83   The college manages its accommodation well. Maintenance and minor works programmes relate to the strategic development plan and accommodation strategy. The programme has included a new layout for the entrance foyer, which now provides a pleasant welcoming entrance and incorporates the students' services centre, the travel shop, and the training restaurant. The oldest part of the building is the construction and engineering block where some of the workshop accommodation is substandard and some rooms are poorly decorated. There is no central system of timetabling. Rooms are allocated to subject areas and managed by faculty staff. Rooms not timetabled by faculties can be reallocated by central management.

84   Access for students with restricted mobility is variable. Improvements at the main site have made most parts of the building accessible. The coffee shop and kitchen have been adapted for wheelchair users. However, the three separate lifts to the tower block and the east wing are slow and unreliable and the buttons in some lifts are set too high. There is full access at Wisemore Centre and limited access at the Shelley site. Access to the Bradford Place site is not possible. All of the main sites have new fire warning systems which include paging devices for deaf students. Internal signposting at the main site is inadequate for the size and layout of the buildings. There are several different styles of sign and some are contradictory: the room numbering system is complex and is confusing for visitors. There are many long, bare corridors with nothing to identify which subjects are taught in adjacent rooms.

85   Generally the buildings and grounds are clean and free from graffiti and litter. Refectory services are available at the Shelley site and at the main site where there is a choice of coffee and snack bar, restaurant, refectory and bistro. These are often crowded. The common rooms provided for adult students and students with a sensory impairment are well used. The main site has a nursery building for 24 children. The car parking at the main site is restricted to staff use during the day. There is ample car parking at the Shelley site, none at Wisemore and no car parking for students at Bradford Place.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

86   The main strengths of the college are:

• a wide range of courses from foundation to degree level

• good links with employers and local communities

• effective governance and management

• thorough strategic planning

• effective support for all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

• good teaching in most curriculum areas

• pass rates above the national average on GNVQ courses

• effective monitoring of performance against the standards set in the college charter

• outstanding support for deaf students

• the provision of real work environments

• the potentially valuable European Design Centre.

87   To continue to build on its strengths the college should:

• improve its quality assurance arrangements

• ensure that the academic board undertakes robust reviews of academic activities

• improve tutorial arrangements

• increase average class sizes and improve attendance rates

• develop strategies to improve students' pass rates on some courses

• improve the low retention rates on some courses

• improve the recording of students' destinations

• address the underuse of some accommodation.

FIGURES

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

Figure 1

Walsall College of Arts and Technology: percentage student numbers by age (as at July 1996)

Under 16
1%

16-18 years
30%

25+ years
45%

19-24 years
24%
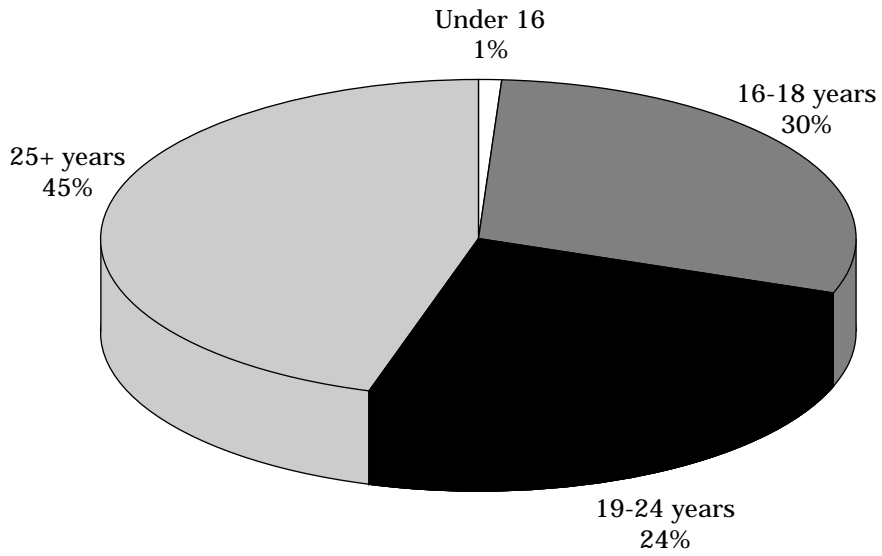
Student numbers: 10,569

Figure 2

Walsall College of Arts and Technology: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at July 1996)

☐ Foundation
▨ Intermediate
■ Advanced
▨ Higher education

4%

29%

31%

36%
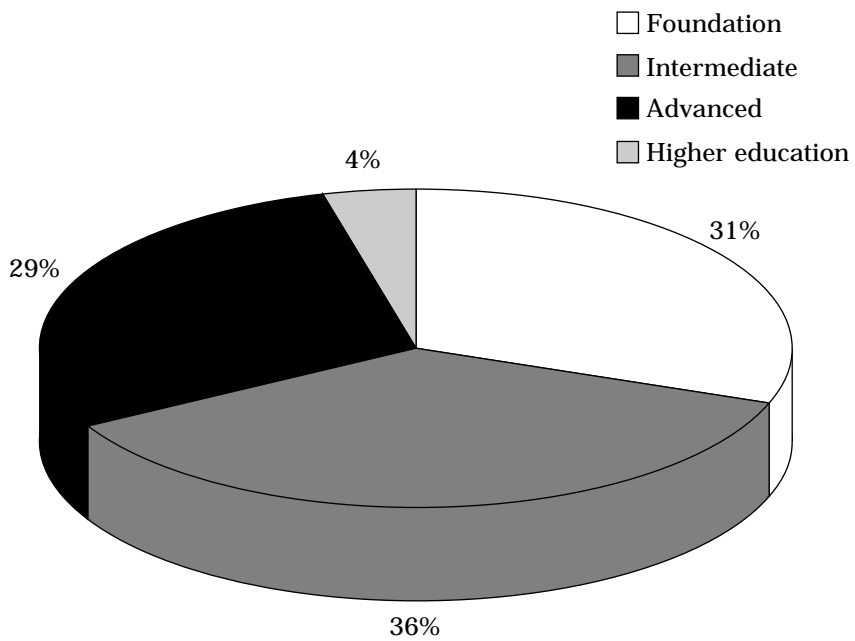
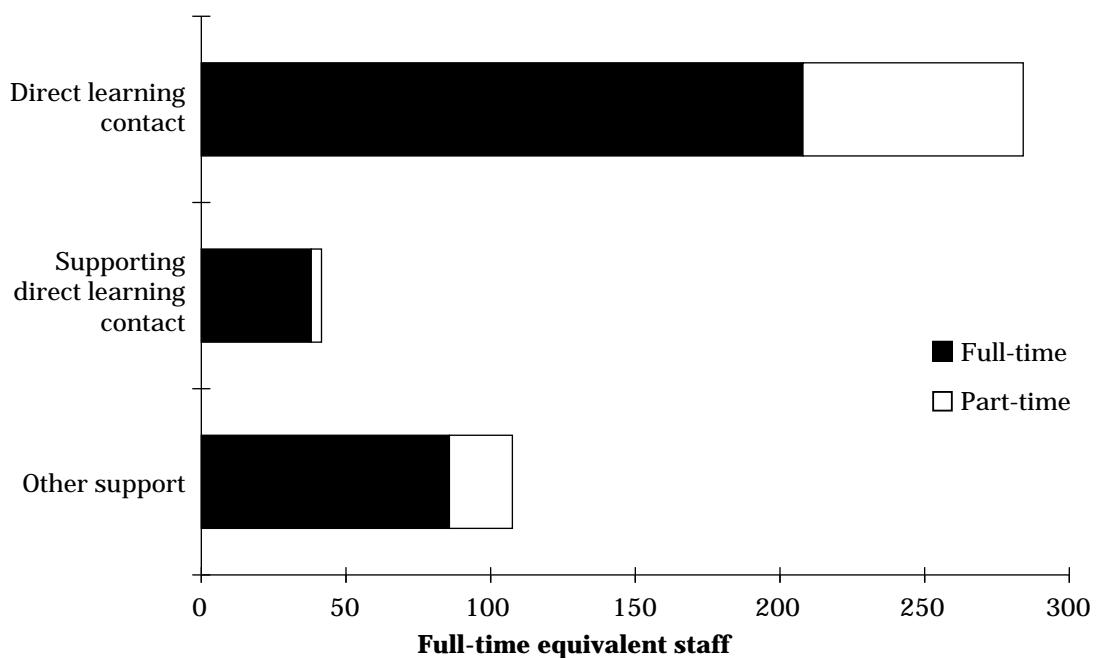Student numbers: 10,569

Figure 3

Walsall College of Arts and Technology: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at July 1996)
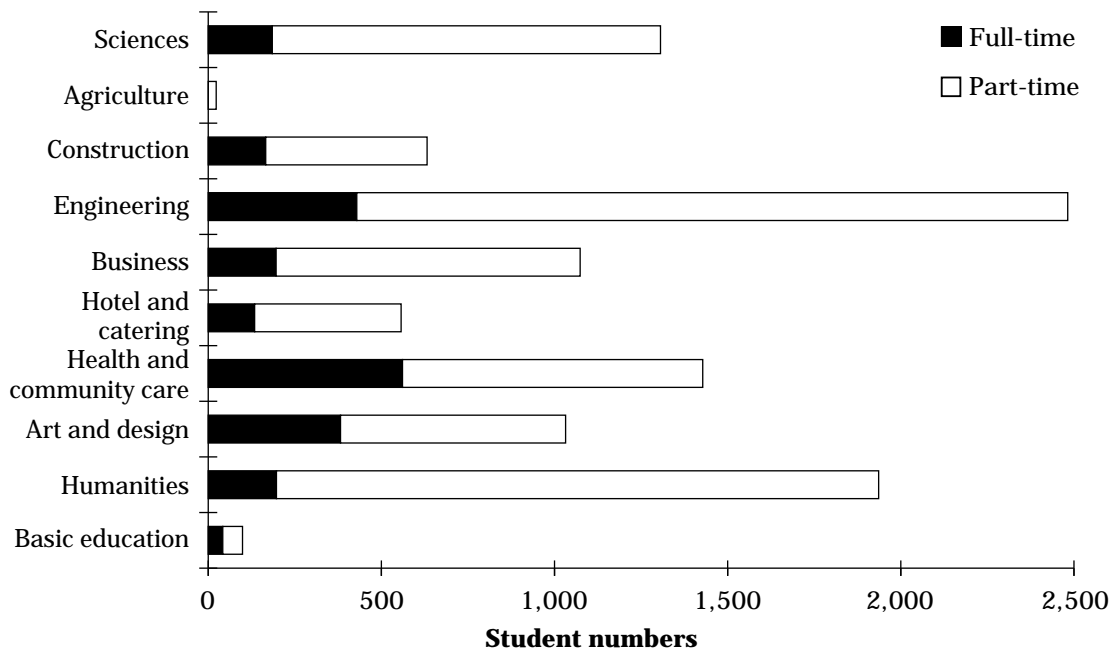
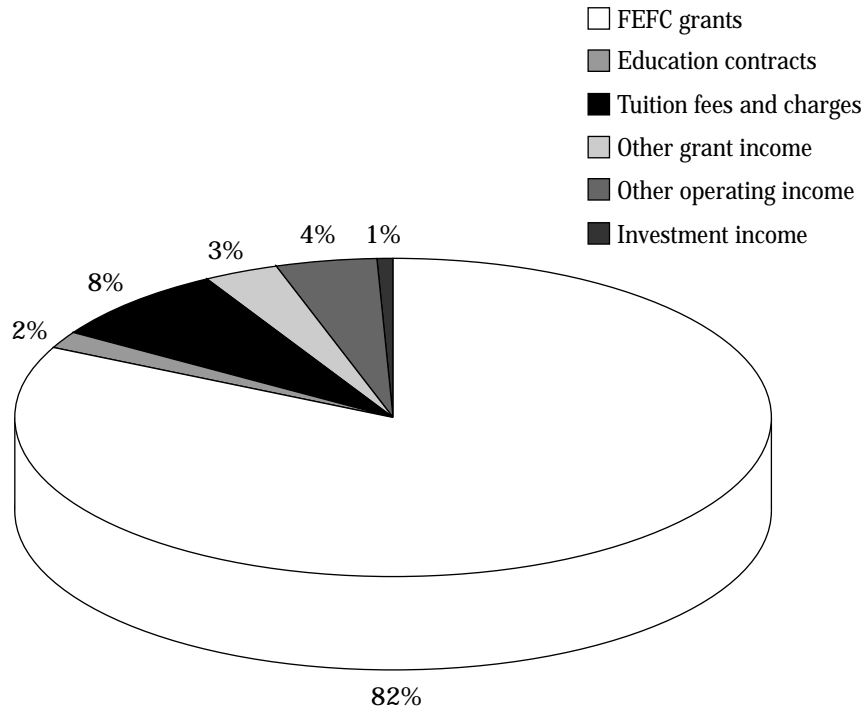Student numbers: 10,569

Figure 4

Walsall College of Arts and Technology: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at July 1996)
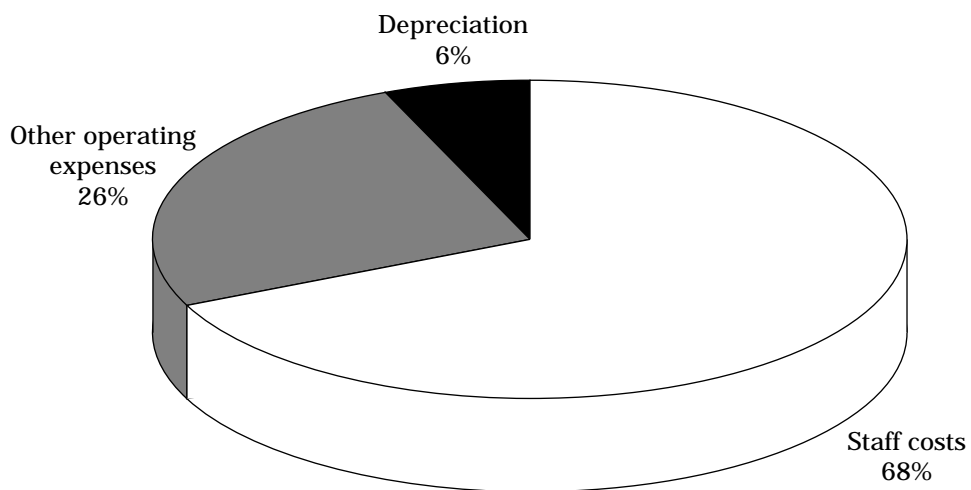

Full-time equivalent staff: 433

Figure 5

Walsall College of Arts and Technology: income (for 12 months to July 1996)

Legend:
- ☐ FEFC grants
- ☐ Education contracts
- ■ Tuition fees and charges
- ☐ Other grant income
- ▨ Other operating income
- ■ Investment income

2% 8% 3% 4% 1%

82%

Income: £13,043,000

Figure 6

Walsall College of Arts and Technology: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

Depreciation
6%

Other operating
expenses
26%

Staff costs
68%

Expenditure: £13,778,000