

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

West Thames College

March 1995

**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 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.

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.*

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 31/95

WEST THAMES COLLEGE

LONDON REGION

Inspected October - November 1994

Summary

West Thames College is an effectively-managed institution which has productive links with employers and local external agencies. It is a major provider of full-time and part-time further education courses to a wide variety of clients in the west of London, including school leavers, employers, adults returning to education and refugees. Students on these courses have a good record of progression to other courses in further and higher education, or to employment. On most courses, the quality of teaching is good. In a few areas, it could be improved substantially. Poor attendance and lack of punctuality amongst students are significant issues. The role of computers in storing, analysing and presenting data is explored on many courses. Students' achievements are generally satisfactory and sometimes good. There are good examination results on most vocational courses. Some courses have low retention rates. Recruitment, enrolment and induction procedures are effective, and students benefit from well-organised support and guidance. Although there are well-documented procedures for the review and evaluation of courses, the rigour with which they are applied varies across the college. There is a good record of staff development, particularly in relation to curricular developments. Most of the teaching accommodation is good. The new resource-based learning centre provides an attractive learning environment but its facilities should be made more readily available to students. The quality of specialist equipment is good in most areas. The library is too small to support the number of students wanting to use it.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Computing	2	Health and social care	3
Other sciences	3	Hairdressing and beauty	3
Engineering	3	Art and design	2
		Media and performing arts	2
Business studies	3	Humanities	2
Hotel, catering, leisure and tourism	2	Basic education	2

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INTRODUCTION

1 West Thames College was inspected during the period 10 October to 24 November 1994, its recruitment and induction procedures having been inspected in September. The inspection team of 20 full-time and part-time inspectors spent a total of 66 days in the college. The team inspected courses in mathematics, science, computing, engineering, business studies, travel and leisure, catering, health and social care, art, design and media, performing arts, English, law, sociology, psychology, government and politics, and economics. Courses in English for speakers of other languages and English as a foreign language were also inspected as was the college's provision for students with moderate and severe learning difficulties. The subsequent inspection of cross-college provision drew on evidence from the specialist inspections. Inspectors visited 221 classes involving some 2,350 students and inspected a broad range of students' written work. There were meetings with governors, students, heads of school, section heads, resource managers, senior managers, employers and a representative of the West London Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). The inspectors also had access to extensive documentation relating to the college and its courses.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 West Thames College, formerly Hounslow Borough College, was formed in 1976 from the merger of Isleworth and Chiswick Polytechnics. In April 1993, the work of the former adult education centre at Spring Grove was incorporated into the college. The college is now based on three sites situated close together in Isleworth in the London Borough of Hounslow. It lies adjacent to the A4 corridor between Central London and Heathrow airport and is well served by public transport. At the time of the inspection there were approximately 5,600 students enrolled at the college of whom almost 70 per cent were over 19 years of age. Enrolments by age and level of study are given in figures 1 and 2. The college's enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are given in figure 3. The college achieved its planned 8 per cent increase in enrolments in 1993-94. An 8.5 per cent increase is planned for 1994-95. The college has a total of 387 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 243 are teachers, and the remainder support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

3 The college lies within the area covered by the West London TEC which includes the London boroughs of Richmond upon Thames, Ealing, Hillingdon and Hounslow. There are 14 secondary schools with sixth forms in Hounslow, and large tertiary colleges in Ealing and Richmond upon Thames. A further 12 further education colleges lie within eight miles of the college. Competition for students is intense. Although the population of 16 to 19 year olds in the west London region is expected to rise from 38,500 to 44,000 by the year 2000, the college anticipates that the bulk of its growth will come from students over 19 years of age.

4 Minority ethnic groups form 25 per cent of the population of Hounslow, compared with 20.2 per cent for London as a whole. Just over 50 per cent of the college's students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. An increasing number of students enrolling at the college are refugees.

5 Nine schools, organised within four faculties, provide a broad range of vocational further education programmes, General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses, English as a foreign language programmes and courses in English for speakers of other languages. The curricular areas covered by the nine schools are: art and design; hair, beauty, media and performing arts; leisure services and catering; business studies; information technology; humanities; science and technology; health care and applied social sciences; and community education and languages. In addition to its extensive further education provision, the college offers a small number of higher education programmes.

6 Heathrow airport is the largest employer in the area. Another important influence on the local labour market has been the increasing number of multi-national companies which have based their European headquarters in west London. Unemployment in Hounslow stands at 9.4 per cent compared with 8.6 per cent in west London and 10.7 per cent in Greater London as a whole. Currently, the rate of unemployment in west London is falling, with highly skilled workers being in greatest demand. Within the area there are pockets of industrial decline and deprivation where unemployment rates are high, particularly amongst minority ethnic groups. Estimates from the 1991 census show that the unemployment rate amongst such groups is more than twice that for white residents.

7 The college's mission is to meet the needs of individuals and organisations by providing high-quality education and training. In particular, it aims to play a major role in developing a highly-skilled, motivated workforce which will contribute to the growth of the west London economic community. Nationally, the college aims for market leadership in particular curricular areas, such as export management.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The college offers a good range of courses which provides education and training opportunities for a wide variety of clients, including school leavers, those in employment, refugees, and adults returning to education. The college has a clear view of itself as an institution which bridges the gap between the worlds of work and education. Accordingly, it offers vocational further and higher education courses in a diverse range of subjects, including, business studies, hairdressing and beauty therapy, engineering, health and social care, catering, leisure and tourism, art, design and media.

9 Many vocational courses have a good record of students moving on to higher education and the college is keen to ensure that such progression

routes are not jeopardised by curricular change. A cautious approach to the introduction of General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes has been adopted, particularly at advanced level. Currently, there are advanced GNVQ courses in health and social care, art and design, and science. There are plans to extend this range substantially in 1995. The college provides intermediate GNVQ courses in health and social care, art and design, leisure and travel, business, engineering and media studies. In addition, a foundation programme in business started in 1994.

10 Courses leading to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are offered in a variety of subjects, including, business administration, accounting, hairdressing, beauty, catering and childcare. The college is involved in a new venture, funded by the West London TEC through the work-related further education initiative, to introduce NVQs into media studies. The institution is a major provider of Institute of Export courses in London and the South East. Some of the college's national diploma courses in design, validated by the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), are unavailable elsewhere in London.

11 The college offers full-time and part-time GCE A level courses in 23 subjects. One-year intensive programmes are offered in some areas, mainly for students who have already followed a GCE A level course and wish to improve their grades. It is a college policy to expand gradually its GCE A level provision by introducing subjects, such as philosophy, which are not widely available at other institutions and for which a demand can be demonstrated. The college does not offer any GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects.

12 The GCSE is offered in 12 subjects and students are able to combine appropriate subjects with vocational courses. Some subjects, such as travel and tourism, and electronics, are not widely available in other institutions. Students who wish simply to improve their GCSE grades are carefully counselled when they enrol to ensure that this is a sensible strategy which is likely to succeed.

13 A modular access to higher education programme is offered across three faculties, the main provision being in humanities, which has about 70 per cent of the 115 students. One of the main objectives of the access provision is to improve the opportunities which women have to enter higher education. The programme has been extended recently by the introduction of two new pathways, in art and design, and business studies. In addition, a separate access course in information technology financed partly from the European Social Fund started in September 1990. The college feels that its access provision could be extended further to provide students with even greater choice of routes into higher education. However, better market research is required to establish more clearly the needs of potential clients.

14 The college offers modular courses in English for speakers of other languages. Generally, these effectively address the basic skills

requirements of many of the students. The provision has been developed in close consultation with local community networks, the local education authority and schools. Opportunities for the more able bilingual students to study on mainstream courses whilst receiving language support are restricted. As is the case with the access provision, courses in English as a foreign language could be improved if the varying needs of potential students were more clearly identified.

15 The college is keen to promote a more flexible approach to learning through the use of computerised packages and other audio-visual materials. There has been a substantial investment in a resource-based learning centre where students on many courses have timetabled sessions as an alternative to using more conventional learning resources. The college was a founder member of the National Resource Based Learning Consortium.

16 The college's business centre is a self-financing unit which, until recently, has concentrated on providing courses in information technology to employees of local companies. During 1993-94, approximately 80 such courses were mounted. The centre is now expanding into management training and has become an accredited centre for providing courses leading to NVQs in management at levels 3, 4 and 5. Training has been provided for a number of local employers including a large pharmaceutical company and a hospital trust.

17 Overall, links with local industry are strong and have led to a good variety of work placements for students. Approximately 90 per cent of full-time students on vocational courses undertake some form of placement, ranging from one day each week throughout the year to blocks of two to six weeks duration. The range of organisations providing such opportunities is broad and includes a major international airline, a prominent defence contractor and care agencies. There is no formal strategy on how the links with local employers are to be maintained and developed. In some areas, the relationships rely upon contacts by individual teachers and could be at risk if there were changes either in the college's or the employer's personnel.

18 Relationships with the West London TEC are strong. The college provides a range of courses funded by the TEC. For example, its training for work provision includes a diploma in export management, validated by the Institute of Export. The college is also piloting a modern apprenticeship scheme in information technology although, so far, there has been little demand for this from employers. In 1993-94, the TEC funded a project at the college to develop ways of assessing and accrediting the work experience of employees. Development funding has also been received from the TEC to assist in the establishment of a consortium of educational providers in the Thames Valley region to facilitate the validation of new courses, an initiative in which the college has played a key role.

19 Because many local schools have sixth form provision, the college is seen as a competitor, and as a result co-operation is not as strong as in some other parts of London. Despite this, there are productive links with schools. These include an arrangement with a consortium of four schools whereby pupils on an intermediate GNVQ course in business and a BTEC first diploma in technology study for two days a week at the college. There are also collaborative links with special schools in art and design, and in catering, for pupils with learning difficulties. The college provides a foundation year course in engineering for students wishing to enter to the degree programme at Kingston University. A similar course in science allows students to go on to a degree programme either at Royal Holloway College or Kingston University. The college offers BTEC higher national diploma courses in graphic design and advertising, industrial design, and export studies. It also runs a BTEC higher national diploma course in leisure studies franchised from Thames Valley University.

20 The college's marketing activity has been concerned mainly with promoting courses. A more comprehensive approach is now emerging. The marketing strategy and objectives are incorporated prominently in the strategic plan and increasing emphasis is being placed on the need to assess the potential for new courses through detailed market research. All schools in the college now have an assistant head with responsibility for marketing who works closely with the director of marketing in implementing the college's marketing strategy.

21 There is a range of courses for school leavers with mild, moderate and severe learning difficulties. A modular programme for adults with learning difficulties has vocational options in business administration, catering and the retail business. In addition, there is an extensive provision of part-time courses for adults, including those who have severe learning difficulties.

22 The equal opportunities policy is prominently featured in the staff and student handbooks. As well as defining general principles of equality, the policy recognises a need for positive action and regular review. In line with this, the college plans to mount a multi-cultural day in spring 1995.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

23 The arrangements for the governance of the college are effective. The subcommittees of the governing body cover finance and personnel, audit, and remuneration. There are 15 members of the board, including the principal, and three members elected from the teaching staff, the students and the support staff respectively. Members have a substantial range of expertise which the college has been able to draw upon. For example, a board member who has extensive engineering and personnel experience provided valuable advice to the faculty of academic studies and technology on how to address the rapidly-changing needs of engineering employers.

24 Senior managers and board members understand each others' roles. The principal and chair of governors have forged a productive

working relationship. Members expect to be kept well informed about developments in the college. As well as the principal, the two vice-principals attend the main governing body meetings. Senior managers provide the board with regular reports on a wide range of financial, staffing and other resource matters. Each head of faculty is required to present annually a review of the faculty's performance in relation to its business plan. Board members' expertise ensures that all these reports are scrutinised in a detailed and knowledgeable way. Members are being encouraged to extend their knowledge of curricular developments by visiting the faculties to talk to staff and students and, where appropriate, by attending classes. So far, only a few have responded to this initiative.

25 The college's strategic plan has been developed in consultation with its staff. The governing body was kept fully briefed as the plan was developed. As well as playing a key role in formulating the strategic plan, faculties have subsequently produced their own business plans. These reflect wide-ranging consultations within faculties, are prepared according to a common format and include objectives and targets for the coming year. Cross-college services, such as the library, students' support services and computer services would benefit from the preparation of similar business plans.

26 The senior management team of nine comprises the principal, two vice-principals, four heads of faculty and the directors of marketing, and personnel and services. The team meets each week to develop policies and monitor the implementation of the strategic plan. Each head of faculty, supported by a resources manager, ensures that the curriculum is developed and resourced in line with the college's strategic plan and the faculty's own business plan.

27 Within faculties, there is a division between those responsible for courses and those responsible for managing staff. Section managers manage groups of lecturers in defined subject areas. Heads of school, assisted by course leaders, are responsible for the development and delivery of groups of related courses. They submit bids to section managers for staff to teach their courses. Often, courses are taught by staff from more than one section. In most cases, there is good co-operation between section managers and heads of school which results in an effective deployment of teaching staff.

28 The academic board, which includes senior managers and representatives of the teaching staff and support staff, meets termly to discuss and provide advice on issues relating to courses and students. The board has three subcommittees which focus on curriculum and assessment, the management of examinations, and students' support. In addition to the board and its subcommittees, a variety of other groups has been established to advise senior managers. For example, the vice-principal responsible for operations meets regularly with heads of

school to ensure that a consistent approach to curricular development is adopted across the college. Similarly, heads of faculty meet with the vice-principal responsible for resources and planning to review resource requirements generally and in relation to specific courses. In many respects, groups such as these duplicate the work of the subcommittees of the academic board. The college has recognised that this has reduced the impact and influence of the board and is reviewing the functions and structure of the board's subcommittees with a view to improving their effectiveness.

29 Summaries of the college's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college receives approximately 73 per cent of its income from the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Its average level of funding for 1994-95 is £21.55. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £18.17 and the median for the sector is £19.02.

30 There are clearly understood procedures whereby course leaders, through their head of school, apply to the vice-principal responsible for operations for funds to develop courses. Once courses are established, bids can be made for funds which are allocated to faculties for the purchase of such items as educational materials, equipment, textbooks and educational visits. In general, heads of school and course leaders are unclear about the criteria used to decide upon the merits of such bids.

31 Once funds have been allocated to the four faculties and 13 other main cost centres across the college, actual expenditures are compared regularly with budgeted figures by the managers responsible. In addition, the vice-principal responsible for resources and planning frequently monitors spending patterns within cost centres. There is a well-established system for calculating the unit costs of all the college's courses.

32 The capacity of the college's computerised management information system to assist staff in monitoring developments and taking decisions is being improved. The system provides a good range of data and reports relating to staff, students and the finances of the college. The format of some reports has been improved recently to make them easier to use. A weakness of the system is that it is not yet fully integrated and some information is not easily available to the staff who might need it. For example, students' individual GCE and GCSE subjects are not recorded centrally, only in a local database held within the faculty of academic studies and technology.

33 Some managers do not make extensive use of the computerised management information available to them. Partly, this is due to a lack of appropriate training but it also reflects the unwieldy nature of some of the computer software used. A training programme is planned to enable heads of school to make better use of this information in their administration and decision making.

34 Enrolment targets are set for each course and in most cases these have been met for the academic year 1994-95. Data on retention and examination success rates for courses are collected as part of the course review and evaluation process. Targets for retention and examination success are set although the factors which determine these are not always clear.

35 The vice-principal for resources and planning is responsible, through the safety and environment officer, for implementing and monitoring the college's health and safety at work policy and initiating appropriate safety training programmes. All staff are introduced to health and safety issues immediately after taking up employment. Subsequently, all staff are required to complete training in first aid and fire procedures as part of the college's training day held each July.

36 The college has established an equal opportunities committee to monitor the implementation of its policy in this area. The committee, composed of staff and students, meets once each term and is chaired by the principal.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

37 Comprehensive information about courses is made available to potential students through events such as open days at the college and the institution's participation in the Careers 2000 exhibition, held annually at the Earls Court Exhibition Centre. There are information sheets for all of the college's courses, prepared according to a common format, which indicate the structure of each course, its entry qualifications, aims and objectives and the possibilities offered for progression to other courses, or to employment.

38 The college has an admissions advice service, the funding for which was initially provided by the West London TEC, but which is now the responsibility of the college. The service offers impartial guidance about training opportunities. Many people are referred to it by outside agencies, such as the careers service. The work of the advice service is carefully monitored and is a source of valuable marketing information for the college. Between November 1993 and October 1994, 744 interviews were conducted, leading to 298 enrolments. The college's capacity to offer effective pre-enrolment information and guidance has been augmented by the establishment of a summer advice service.

39 There is a centralised admissions system through which applications are processed before being referred to the faculties' schools, where specialist interviews are arranged. This system operates effectively. Enrolment procedures are well planned and managed. Knowledgeable and committed staff are on hand during enrolment to offer information and preliminary guidance. There are detailed and effective processes to ensure an early identification of the needs some students have for additional learning support. Students who wish to transfer between

courses in the college are interviewed by an admissions adviser, who has been trained in counselling skills.

40 The college has established a procedure whereby the qualifications and experience which students already have can be assessed and accredited formally. This service is available to students in hairdressing, business administration, catering and health and social care. Although the service has been well publicised the demand for it has been low. A project to develop NVQs in the area of information technology includes the possibility that the experience which students already have can be assessed and accredited in their workplace.

41 The detailed procedures to induct students into the college are implemented successfully. An induction fair is organised in the college's hall with stalls providing information and advice on the services offered by the college. External exhibitors such as local welfare groups and banks are also represented. The event held in September 1994 was enlivened by the performance of a steel band. Following consultations with the faculties' schools, and drawing upon the good practice which already existed, a new programme to induct students was introduced in September 1994. All staff were given training to prepare for its introduction. The programme was received enthusiastically by staff and students alike and, following an evaluation, improvements have been identified for next year.

42 During their induction, students receive a handbook which includes the college's policies on equal opportunities, its rules and regulations, and the complaints' procedure. The handbook also contains a learning agreement which sets out the students' entitlements and obligations whilst on their courses. In addition, students receive the college's charter and a well-designed and compact guide which provides useful information on services available in the college and the local area.

43 All full-time and many part-time students are tested to assess their literacy and numeracy skills. The results obtained in 1994 indicate that many students require additional support. The personal tutor has a key role in identifying the need for support in relation to the course the student is following. The college has made a significant investment in the development of a learning support centre. The centre is attractively furnished and contains computers and materials to provide students with language support and assist them in developing skills which are relevant to specific subject areas. The members of the learning support team are well qualified and experienced in a variety of relevant areas, including the teaching of English to speakers of other languages and basic education for adults. Students are also offered support with mathematics and numeracy, but this is less well developed. There are clearly-defined systems for referring students to the centre, devising individual programmes of learning support and monitoring and reporting on students' achievements. A three-way contract is signed by the student, the personal tutor and a member of staff from the learning support centre which establishes their respective roles in the learning process. During the 1993-94 session, the

centre provided support to 163 students. There are plans to integrate further the activities of the learning support team with the work of course teams.

44 Support is provided within the student's learning programme in a variety of other ways. For example, a hearing-impaired student on a hairdressing and beauty course is supported for 60 per cent of her lessons by a tutor for the deaf. In addition, this student receives assistance from a teacher qualified in sign language. The services of a speech therapist and an educational psychologist are also available for students. A physiotherapist from the local health authority visits the college to treat students with muscular dystrophy and cerebral palsy.

45 Students on all full-time and some part-time courses have regular group tutorials. There is a widely-used tutors' handbook and a training programme to assist teachers in acquiring relevant tutoring skills. A project is underway, funded through the technical and vocational education initiative, to develop a tutorial framework for the whole college and ensure a consistent approach to action planning, which involves students in setting their own learning objectives and evaluating their own progress, and the development of students' records of achievements across the college. A detailed survey of existing practice has shown that although the quality of tutorial support varies across courses, there is valuable work in most areas. An example of good practice is the guide for GCE A level teachers which includes a schedule of tutors' duties throughout the year, guidance on assessment and a suggested tutorial programme.

46 The majority of the tutorials inspected were successful in achieving their objectives. In one particularly effective session on the BTEC national diploma programme in business and finance, the teacher skilfully impressed upon the students the importance of developing good communications and presentational skills. The tutorials provided ample opportunities for tutors to review the progress which students were making and to address any problems. In a few cases, a defined tutorial programme was not evident and students were allowed to use the time to complete coursework.

47 The attendance of students is monitored and there are procedures for dealing with persistent absenteeism. Lack of punctuality amongst students is a serious problem on many courses. Although there is no college-wide strategy to deal with it, individual schools have introduced their own procedures. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these.

48 The college provides a good range of services for students. These include a well-used counselling and welfare service. Approximately 1,200 new clients were introduced to the service during 1993-94, most of whom required advice on financial matters. The health services, provided by trained nursing staff, are also well used. Nearly 2,300 visits were recorded during 1993-94. There is a nursery which caters for 35 children, aged two to five. Careers advice is provided by the London Borough of Hounslow

and students have access to comprehensive careers information in written and computerised forms. An adviser from the Hounslow Law Centre visits the college each week to provide guidance to refugees on employment issues. The students' union is strongly supported by a liaison officer who provides training for officers of the union and is also responsible for the students' common rooms. The staff who provide all of these services also contribute to theme events sponsored by the college including World AIDS Day, No Smoking Day and a Valentine's day promotion of safer sex. Some of the staff also contribute to students' tutorial programmes.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

49 Most courses are carefully planned and have schemes of work which cover the syllabuses. The schemes of work establish clearly the aims and objectives of the courses and enable students to understand how these will be achieved. The courses contain an appropriate balance of theory and practical exercises which are designed to reinforce and extend learning. In English courses for speakers of other languages, the students are involved in negotiating with their teachers programmes of work which will meet their own, individual requirements. In contrast, the programmes of work undertaken by students of English as a foreign language are rigidly linked to textbook material and fail to address the disparate learning needs of the students.

50 In 54 per cent of the 221 sessions which were inspected, the strengths outweighed the weaknesses. The weaknesses of the work clearly outweighed the strengths in 15 per cent of classes, which is slightly higher than the norm for sector colleges inspected so far. The following table summarises the inspection grades awarded to the lessons inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Access to HE/FE		1	5	5	1	0	12
GCE AS/A level		9	17	11	5	0	42
Basic education		3	8	7	3	0	21
GCSE		1	2	4	3	0	10
GNVQ		4	8	13	4	0	29
NVQ		2	11	4	3	2	22
Other		13	36	24	11	1	85
Total		33	87	68	30	3	221

51 The quality of the teaching is good in most subjects. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic and these are important contributory factors in the success of many lessons. Sessions are usually well planned and there is a good range of activities designed to stimulate the students and extend their learning. A GCE A level English session provided an

outstanding example of how skilful, committed teaching can bring out the best in students. After quickly establishing the focus of the lesson, the lecturer identified the key points for discussion. These were effectively reviewed by the students working in small groups. Following this, there was a well-managed, lively plenary session in which the groups' findings were discussed and interpreted in terms of literary concepts. The students were then required to tackle a series of problems which had been designed to sharpen their analytical skills, to improve the way they used literary quotations to illustrate their arguments, and to allow them to confirm their understanding of the material covered. Students in a BTEC national diploma computing session were given an equally effective opportunity to check their understanding of the subject through a short but demanding exercise which involved them using all the skills and knowledge acquired over the previous month.

52 In many sessions, the friendly rapport which existed between teachers and students was conducive to effective learning. However, in some business studies, mathematics and hairdressing lessons, learning would have improved if staff had managed the behaviour of the students more firmly. Some students viewed lessons as an opportunity to chat to their colleagues and catch up on the latest news and gossip.

53 Substantial numbers of students were either absent or arrived late at many of the classes inspected. Late arrivals often disrupted the learning of the students who were already present. In many cases, teachers accepted the situation and said little or nothing to latecomers.

54 In many classes, there was a wide range of student ability. The extent to which this was recognised by teachers and reflected in teaching strategies varied greatly. For example, the access programme sessions catered effectively for the diverse learning needs of adult students whose previous experience of education was often dated. In hairdressing practical work, leisure and tourism and English for speakers of other languages, a careful choice of activities ensured that students of all abilities were fully involved and extended. On the other hand, in mathematics, the weaker students were left to their own devices for too long, and in computing, catering and science more able individuals were not always challenged as much as they should have been.

55 Practical work in areas such as care, science, engineering, hairdressing, art and design, the performing arts and catering was usually effectively organised to reinforce the study of theory. An excellent illustration of this was observed in a GCE A level physics lesson. The session commenced with a lively presentation of the theory of electrolysis which allowed the students to test their knowledge and make deductions. The stimulating and well-managed practical session which followed allowed the students to test their deductions as well as improve their experimental skills. Catering and care courses make particularly good use of work placements in industry and the local community. The activities

undertaken by students, whilst out at work, are integrated closely with other aspects of their course.

56 Students on most courses are given substantial opportunities to improve their ability to work effectively in small groups. The importance of developing good communications and presentational skills is emphasised adequately on most programmes. The role of computers and information technology in storing, analysing and presenting data is explored in a wide range of subjects, including business studies, leisure and tourism, catering and hairdressing.

57 Assessed coursework is an integral feature of vocational courses and some GCE and GCSE programmes. Most of the work is of an appropriate standard and reflects course aims, although the objectives underlying some art and design project work are not clear to the students. In addition to assessed coursework, some teachers set homework regularly. This accelerates the pace at which students learn and gives them additional opportunities to test their understanding of a subject. In general, work is graded fairly and consistently. However, there are no agreed assessment criteria amongst teachers on courses for English for speakers of other languages and English as a foreign language, or on GCE A level government and politics, and economics programmes.

58 Staff in most subject areas maintain satisfactory records of students' achievements. There are thorough procedures to monitor the achievements of students on GNVQ courses and regular opportunities for teachers and students to review progress. In most cases, the logbooks of students on courses leading to NVQ qualifications give an accurate picture of the acquisition of work-based competencies.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

59 The majority of students are well motivated and enthusiastic about their work. Most value the relevance their studies have for possible careers and entry into higher education. In general, students respond well to their teachers and some achieve high standards in coursework and examinations, although in GCE and GCSE mathematics, many students do not enjoy the subject and fail to understand fully the mathematical concepts presented to them.

60 Most students acquire appropriate knowledge and skills and are able to apply their practical skills to a range of problems. In science subjects, students confidently employ theoretical concepts in their experimental work, and in leisure and tourism students respond effectively to a broad variety of queries from customers about travel arrangements. In computing, the students demonstrate exceptional motivation in developing sophisticated programming skills. The integration of drawing skills into assignments in many aspects of art and design is particularly successful in helping students to produce imaginative solutions to problems arising out of their project work.

61 The opportunities given to students to solve problems and work on projects in small groups enables them to develop effective team-working skills. Students on a wide range of courses have a good appreciation of the role of computers and information technology in storing, presenting and analysing data. Poor numerical and literacy skills are hampering the progress of some students on the access programme. The majority of students are acquiring organisational and note-taking skills which allow them to study effectively.

62 Completion rates for courses vary widely across the college. In 1993-94, the rates were high in computing, hairdressing and beauty therapy, care and catering, and 100 per cent in some BTEC programmes in art, design and media. In contrast, 32 per cent of business administration students and almost 60 per cent of students enrolled on the advanced course in overseas trade failed to complete their course. Low retention rates are a significant problem on some GCE and GCSE programmes. For example, only 45 per cent of the 22 students enrolled on part-time GCE A level English courses in 1993-94 completed their course.

63 Overall, examination results for vocational courses are good. Ninety-three per cent of students aged 16-18 in the final year of courses included in the Department for Education's 1994 performance tables were successful. This places the college among the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. The results achieved in 1994 by students of all ages on the BTEC national diploma courses in media studies, business studies and industrial design were good: pass rates were in excess of 90 per cent. In a few vocational courses, the results were poor. For example, the pass rate on the BTEC first diploma in engineering was 27 per cent.

64 Some 230 students entered for GCE A level examinations in 1993-94. The 158 students aged 16-18 scored, on average, 3.3 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college amongst the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1994 performance data published by the Department for Education. The average points scored by 16-18 year old students entering two or more GCE A levels was 8.2.

65 In 1994, the pass rates in individual GCE A level subjects for students of all ages varied widely. In sociology, the pass rate was 84 per cent and 55 per cent of the students obtained grades A-C, which compares with provisional average figures of 60 per cent and 32 per cent, respectively, for the sector colleges other than sixth form colleges. There were also good results in film studies where 80 per cent of the students obtained grades A-C. In contrast, the pass rate in GCE A level mathematics was only 44 per cent, and in English the rate was 70 per cent with only 20 per cent obtaining grades A-C.

66 The college has done a substantial amount of work to assess how students perform at GCE A level in relation to their GCSE entry qualifications. This analysis indicates that students achieve substantial added value in some subjects, including economics and sociology.

67 In 1994, there were 466 examination entries in GCSE subjects, 57 per cent of which resulted in passes at grades A-C. This compares with a 1993 average for the sector of 50 per cent. The pass rates at grades A-C for individual GCSE subjects varied considerably: those for biology and physics were higher than the national average and those for chemistry lower. There were impressive results in English with 80 per cent of the students obtaining grades A-C. The results achieved in mathematics have improved in recent years with 43 per cent obtaining grades A-C in 1994.

68 Most students with learning difficulties achieve a good standard of work. They are proud of their achievements and can identify them clearly and accurately. Many of the students obtain nationally recognised qualifications through the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network, the Youth Award Scheme, the Towards Independence programme and the Associated Examination Board. Some young students with severe learning difficulties, however, do not achieve as much as they could because of low expectations and a lack of rigour in their course.

69 The college carries out regular, comprehensive and well-documented surveys into the destinations of students when they leave the college. These show that students have a good record of entry to higher education, other further education courses, or employment. For example, approximately 65 per cent of students who sat GCE A level examinations in 1994 entered higher education. Of the 31 students who successfully completed the foundation programme in art and design in 1994, 26 went on to higher education. In engineering, 13 of the 16 students on the national diploma entered higher education. Out of 14 students who obtained the BTEC national diploma in social care, eight went on to higher education and three took up employment. In hairdressing, 17 out of 26 students took up jobs. Four students with learning difficulties have progressed from the modular vocational programme to a course in modern office technology whilst many others have secured work placements.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

70 The college, through the strategic quality improvement group, has developed its quality assurance policy after a lengthy period of consultation, review and modification of existing practice. The policy was approved by the academic board in March 1994. It has clear objectives and the detailed procedures for reviewing and evaluating courses are set out in comprehensive guidance notes for staff.

71 Course teams, which include students' representatives, meet at least three times during the year to review the provision. At the end of the year, each team produces a report, according to a standard format, which

contains an analysis of retention rates, examination success rates, information relating to the destinations of students, the views of external moderators and verifiers, and students' perceptions. In general, the review and evaluation procedures are adhered to satisfactorily, although the depth of analysis varies across courses. A weakness of the system in relation to GCE and GCSE provision is that it applies to programmes as a whole and not to individual subjects, so that the analysis lacks depth in the case of some subjects.

72 Once a course has been reviewed, the head of school prepares a summary of the findings and an action plan for discussion by the school's quality review board. All of the boards are chaired by the vice-principal responsible for operations, to ensure that procedures are adhered to consistently across the college. The outcomes of the boards' deliberations are reported to the senior management team. There is confusion amongst some staff about the precise roles of the quality review boards and the senior management team. The academic board has no formal role in monitoring the implementation of the quality assurance process.

73 The college has introduced standardised procedures for validating new courses internally. Panels are set up to scrutinise proposals, offer appropriate suggestions and support the team responsible for developing a new programme. Overall, the system is working effectively and is encouraging a more comprehensive and systematic approach to course development.

74 Prior to the development of the quality assurance policy, some cross-college services devised their own procedures to monitor and improve performance. For example, the library canvassed the views of users through a detailed questionnaire. The results were then analysed and measures taken to address important issues arising. By building upon examples of good practice such as this, the college is seeking to instil common quality assurance principles into all of its cross-college services. As the first stage in this process, each service is being required to specify performance standards against which it can be assessed. So far, some, but not all, of the cross-college services have devised such standards.

75 Staff development has a high priority within the college. There is a clear, well-established, staff-development policy designed to ensure that all staff have access to training which allows them to respond effectively to the changing demands of further and higher education. The professional development manager has overall responsibility for preparing the college's annual staff-development plan, assisted by the staff-development committee, which includes faculty representatives and the director of personnel. However, the meetings of the staff-development committee are often poorly attended and this has diminished its impact and influence.

76 The annual budget for staff development represents approximately 1 per cent of the total budget for the college. A total of 600 staff training days are recorded for 1993-94, many of which related to the development

of new courses, particularly those leading to NVQs and GNVQs. Most staff participated in some form of training. After attendance at a staff-development event, staff are required to share their experiences and knowledge with colleagues.

77 An induction programme is provided for all new staff. New part-time staff are paid to take part, in order to encourage them to attend. The programme addresses the needs of teaching and support staff and includes sessions outlining the learning support facilities available for students, the educational resources possessed by the college, and the procedures for identifying and meeting staff-development needs.

78 In recognition of the demands placed on them, new teachers have a reduced teaching load in their first year. There is an effective mentoring scheme which operates over their first two terms. A mentor is appointed from the same faculty as the new teacher and is required to prepare a report for the head of faculty at the end of the mentoring period.

79 An appraisal scheme for all lecturers, which includes observations of their teaching, has been in place for 18 months. So far, approximately 80 per cent of the teaching staff have been appraised and most regard it as a positive experience from which further staff-development needs are identified. An analysis of the teaching observations has been conducted and workshops are planned to address some issues which have arisen, such as the need to develop techniques to control disruptive students. An appraisal scheme for support staff has been prepared and will start to be implemented in the summer of 1995.

80 The college's charter has been prepared in line with the national charter for further education and contains realistic, achievable objectives. The college is in the process of defining detailed service standards against which its performance in relation to the charter can be measured. The charter is an attractive, easily-accessible document, prepared in the form of a passport. Copies have been distributed to all students and are readily available from the college's reception area. The commitments contained in the charter are discussed with the students during induction. Although students acknowledge having received the charter, few seem to be familiar with its contents. Nevertheless, students express general satisfaction with the services offered by the college and feel that they have adequate opportunities to express their views and concerns to staff.

81 In anticipation of the inspection, the college prepared a self-assessment report on its operations under each of the inspection framework headings. The report provided a useful analysis of some developments and activities although it was far from comprehensive and did not address important issues such as the effectiveness of faculty management, the strength of industrial links and the quality of support services for students. A reasonably self-critical stance was adopted towards those aspects of the college's work which the report covered. Weaknesses were identified along with strengths. In line with the guidelines, the report was brief.

RESOURCES

Staffing

82 Staff are appropriately qualified for the teaching which they undertake. Approximately 75 per cent of permanent teaching staff have a degree or an equivalent professional qualification and almost 80 per cent have a teaching qualification. Currently, 7 per cent of teaching staff have assessor and verifier qualifications validated by the Training and Development Lead Body and many others are working towards them. Most full-time teachers have relevant commercial or industrial experience.

83 Almost all of the college's senior managers teach. Approximately 26 per cent of the teaching is undertaken by part-time staff which is in line with the proportion envisaged in the college's strategic plan. In art and design, the use of part-time teachers means that students benefit from the skills and knowledge of practising artists and designers. Some curricular areas are more reliant on part-time staff than others and in areas such as business this places a heavy administrative burden on the full-time staff.

84 The college has shown itself to be flexible in adapting staffing arrangements to the changing nature of its provision. For example, in the light of falling demand for engineering courses, six engineering teachers took voluntary redundancy in 1993 and some science teachers have retrained in computing.

85 Technicians comprise approximately 10 per cent of the college's staff. Most are based in faculties but some, such as the computer technicians, have cross-college roles. Technician and administrative support in most areas is adequate and appropriately deployed.

Equipment/learning resources

86 The library has approximately 110 study spaces with facilities for group and individual work. In addition, there are two small tutorial rooms which adult students can book for private study. The ratio of study places to full-time equivalent students is approximately 1:28. Overall, the space available for students to study is insufficient for the number of students who need to use it. The library is particularly crowded at lunch time. Attempts are made to ensure that there are sufficient library staff available at the busiest times. In a questionnaire seeking feedback on learning resources, users were very positive about the library staff and the friendly, helpful service which they provide.

87 The 1994-95 budget for library books and periodicals amounts to £38,000, which represents a slight increase over the 1993-94 figure. The range and quantity of books is satisfactory in most subjects. The provision of periodicals is adequate and the college has taken modest steps towards using a compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database to store newspapers. Other resources include a limited collection of language and music audio-tapes, music on records and compact discs, and learning packages on video and audio-tape.

88 In general, computing facilities across the college are satisfactory, although they vary in terms of age, range of software and number of terminals. There is one computer terminal for every 10 full-time equivalent students. Approximately 50 per cent of the computers used by students are networked and provide electronic mail facilities and on-line access to a variety of databases and information services. Computing facilities provide good support for engineering, care, and business, in contrast to mathematics which has poor support.

89 The resource-based learning centre provides a pleasant learning environment which offers students the opportunity to learn how to use computer packages and other audio-visual materials. The centre has 42 computers, some with compact disk drives, and video and sound facilities. Printing facilities are good and there are 20 places for paper-based study. During the day, the centre is used by students in timetabled sessions. Any spare terminals may be booked by individuals who wish to undertake a computer-assisted learning programme. The nearby drop-in information technology facility, with only 17 terminals, is heavily used by students.

90 With a few exceptions, the quality of specialist equipment to support teaching and learning is good. The business centre provides an attractive and well-equipped facility for offering full-cost courses to employers. A new language laboratory has been provided in anticipation of an expansion of the college's modern language provision. Leisure and tourism students have access to a comprehensively-stocked travel office and science laboratories are well equipped and well maintained. Media equipment is of a high standard. It includes an electronic imaging system, video editing facilities and a television studio with vision mixing. In contrast, facilities for the performing arts are limited. The drama studio is small and there are no specialist areas to support teaching and learning in dance and music. The college has plans to extend its accommodation to address this issue.

Accommodation

91 The college has three sites, situated within 400 metres of each other. The main site, occupying 10 acres on London Road, is centred around Spring Grove House, formerly known as Pears House, an attractive and impressive Georgian and Victorian mansion owned originally by Sir Joseph Banks, founder of Kew Gardens and the botanist who accompanied Captain James Cook on his voyage around the world. The house, complete with its Adams fireplaces, has been extensively renovated and contains staff offices and some teaching accommodation. Most of the remaining buildings on the main site were built between 1967 and 1984. Heath House, opposite the main site and occupying 0.25 acres, is being leased. The Spring Grove site extends over two acres and was acquired at the time of incorporation. The buildings at Spring Grove have undergone some refurbishment recently.

92 On all sites, most classrooms and specialist rooms are of a good standard in terms of decoration and furniture. However, many of the huts on the main site and at Spring Grove are drab and uninviting and in some there are problems with the heating. Most offices and workrooms used by staff provide adequate accommodation, although a few are cramped. There are ramps and automatic doors in many parts of the college but some areas are not easily accessible for people who use wheelchairs.

93 A survey of room use, carried out by external property consultants, indicated that the college appears to have an overall surplus of space. However, some of the sessions inspected were held in rooms too small for the number of students in the class. The college should review its timetabling arrangements, to try to overcome this mismatch. The college is addressing the fact that some specialist accommodation is not suited to the current course provision. For example, an underused kitchen has been converted into computer rooms, and the contraction of the engineering provision has led to accommodation being released for use by other subject areas.

94 The students' union is fortunate in being provided with a building separate from the rest of the college. Its recreational and social facilities, including a canteen, table tennis and pool tables, are well used by students. There is a common room specifically for adult students at Heath House and also a prayer room available to all students. The main refectory provides an adequate service, but it is often crowded and the acoustics are such that, with only a few people present, it is noisy. The Griffin restaurant, staffed by students, provides well-cooked meals at competitive prices and is an excellent alternative to the refectory. In the evenings, students can use the staff's catering facilities in Spring Grove House.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

95 West Thames College is making good progress towards achieving its mission. The strengths of the college are:

- a good range of vocational courses in a wide variety of subjects
- effective links with employers, West London TEC and other local organisations
- productive relationships between governors and college managers
- efficient management of the college at all levels
- effective recruitment, admissions and induction arrangements
- sound procedures for diagnosing and addressing students' learning support needs
- comprehensive counselling and welfare services for students
- teaching which is good in most subject areas
- effective integration of computing with work in most subjects
- good examination results for most vocational courses

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- a good record of students progressing to higher education or employment
 - clear, well-documented procedures for reviewing and evaluating courses
 - good staff development, particularly for curricular development
 - appropriately-qualified teachers
 - mainly good-quality classrooms
 - good-quality specialist equipment and a well-equipped learning centre
 - a business centre which provides an attractive, well-equipped venue for full-cost courses.

96 If the college is to improve the quality of its provision further it should:

- develop a policy for maintaining and developing the good links it has forged within external agencies
- clarify the role of the academic board in relation to the management of the college
- improve the quality of the teaching in some areas
- take measures to deal with students' lack of punctuality and poor attendance on many courses
- improve completion rates on some courses
- improve the poor results in some GCE A level subjects
- strengthen course review and evaluation procedures for analysing performance in GCE and GCSE subjects
- improve the quality of teaching accommodation where required
- extend the space available for studying in the library
- expand the specialist accommodation for performing arts courses.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

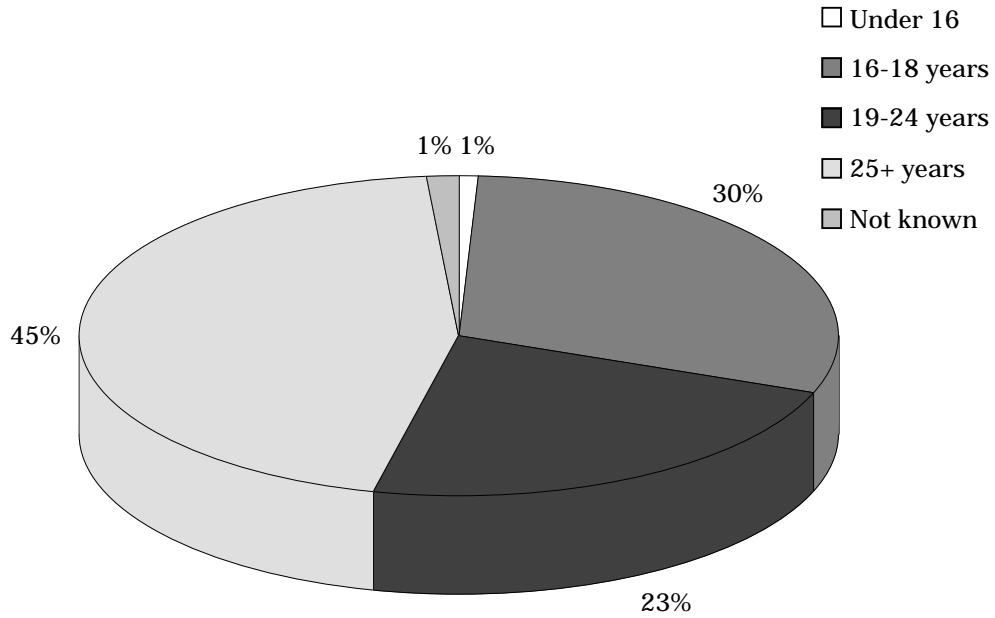
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

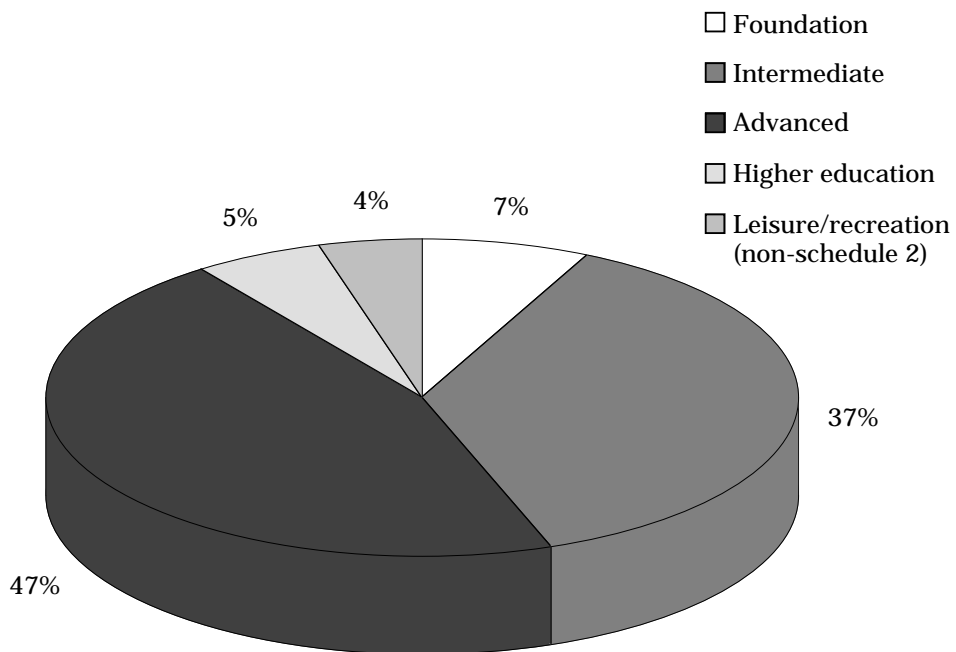
West Thames College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 5,660

Figure 2

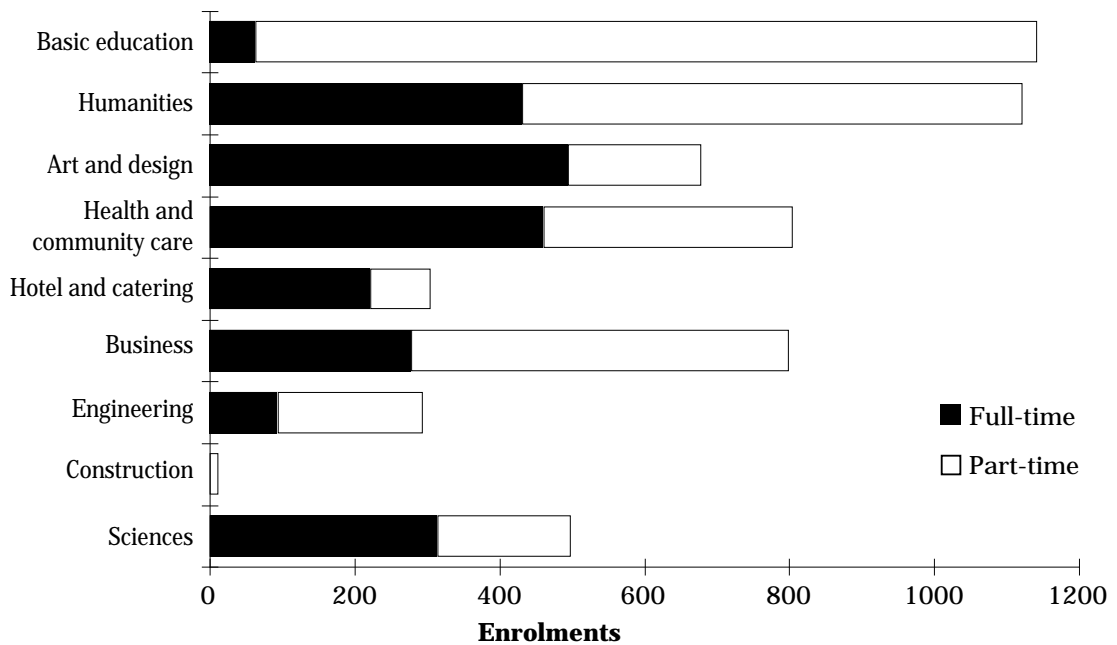
West Thames College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 5,660

Figure 3

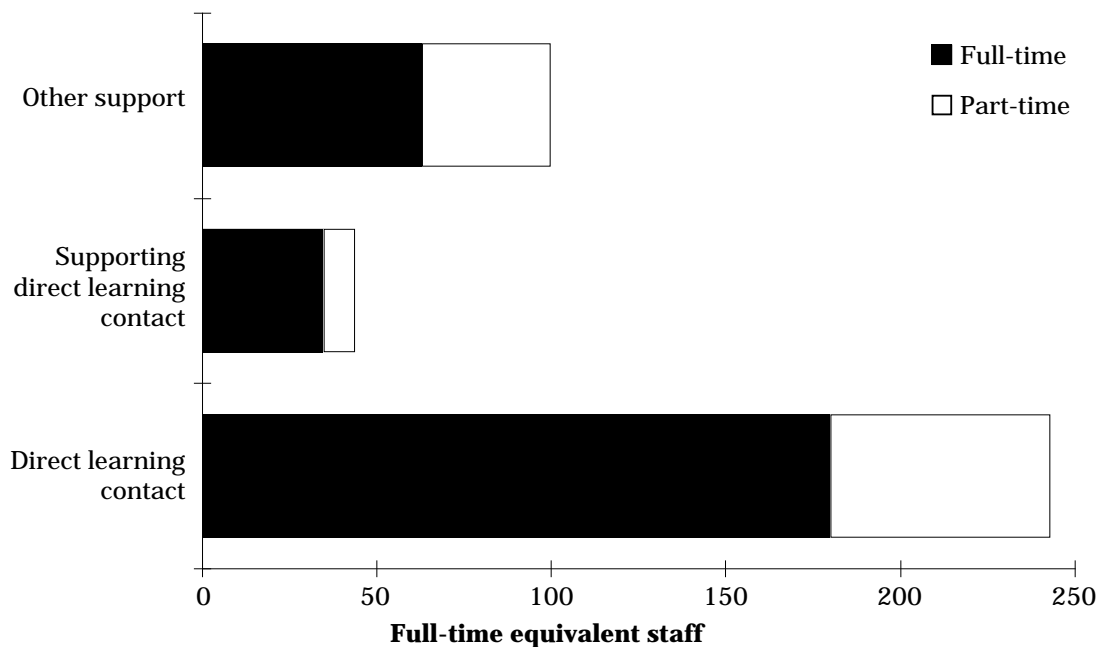
West Thames College enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 5,660

Figure 4

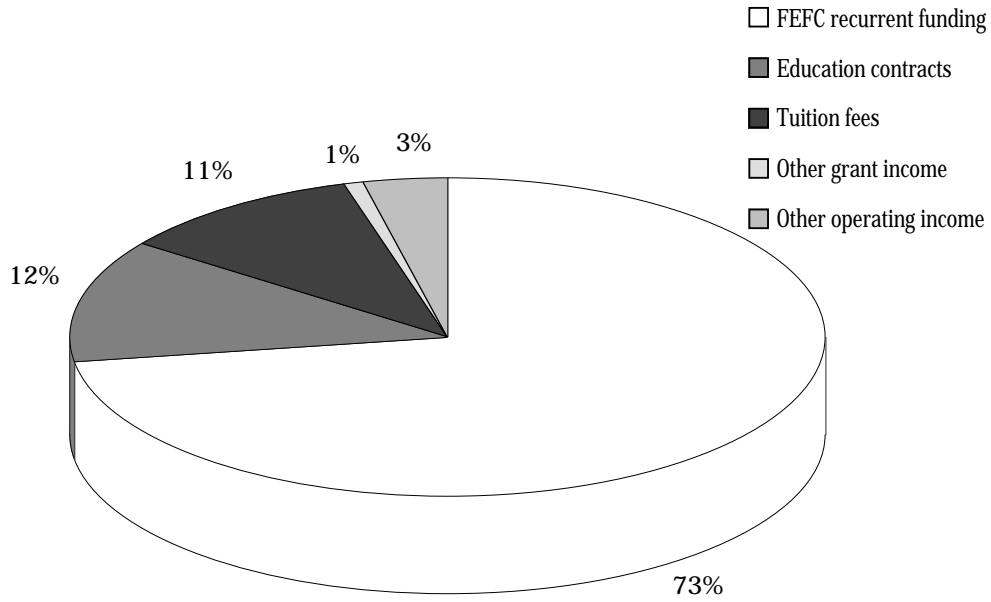
West Thames College staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 387

Figure 5

West Thames College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)

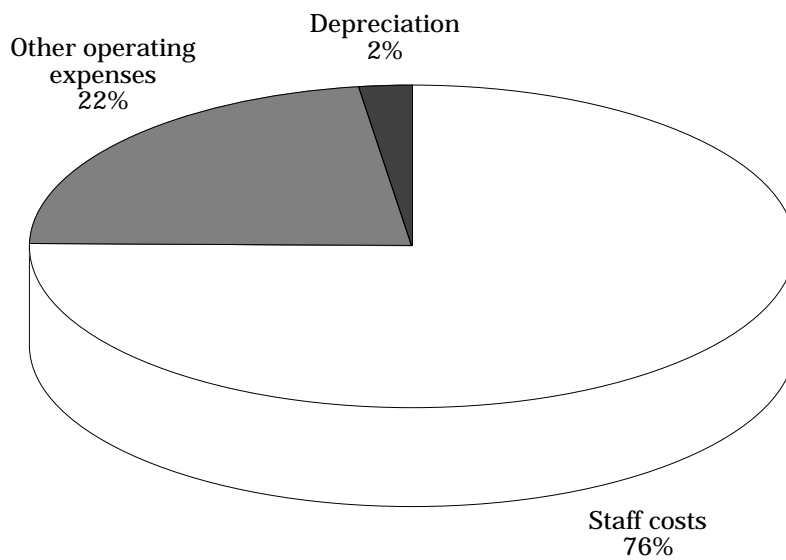


Income: £16,150,000

Note: this chart excludes £73,000 capital grants and £28,000 other income generating activities.

Figure 6

West Thames College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £15,014,000

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