

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Somerset College of Arts and Technology

July 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

College grade profiles 1993-95

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

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 90/96

SOMERSET COLLEGE OF ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY

SOUTH WEST REGION

Inspected March 1995-March 1996

Summary

Somerset College of Arts and Technology offers a very wide choice of courses. It has a supportive and experienced governing body which has recently appointed a new principal. A new management team is developing strategies to address the weaknesses which currently result in inconsistency in practice. Staff have a strong commitment to the college and its students and this is reflected in some effective teaching and learning. Satisfactory examination results are achieved by most students who complete their course. The college has a good quality assurance policy and has invested in staff and systems to support its operation. The college charter is well understood by staff and students. Other strengths include a well-established learning resources centre, some well-equipped practical teaching facilities and well-planned staff development. The college should: improve attendance and retention in many areas of the college's work; address the poor provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; improve some of the weaker examination results; and strengthen arrangements for the initial assessment and delivery of students' learning needs. The practice of setting performance targets and monitoring their achievement is not well developed. In order to improve many of the weaknesses identified, the college should: raise the standard of many middle management practices; address inconsistencies in the delivery of its tutorial system; complete the introduction of central admissions; and improve the collection and use of management information.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Health and community care	2
Construction	2	Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3
Engineering	1	Art and design	2
Business	3	Humanities	2
Hotel and catering	3	Adult education	2
		SLDD provision	4

INTRODUCTION

1 Somerset College of Arts and Technology was inspected between March 1995 and March 1996. Inspectors spent 96 days in the college. They observed 256 classes, analysed examination results, examined students' work, scrutinised the retention rates of students on courses and studied a wide range of documentation supplied by the college about its provision and operation. They also inspected the guidance, induction and enrolment procedures for students. Inspectors met governors, teaching, administrative and support staff, students, employers, parents, members of the local community, teachers from local schools, careers service staff and a representative of the Somerset Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Somerset College of Arts and Technology in Taunton was formed in 1974 by the merger of Taunton Technical College and the Somerset College of Art. It is a general further education college which serves the county town and the largely rural areas of West Somerset and the eastern part of Devon. There are seven 11 to 16 schools in the Taunton area, two 11 to 18 schools, three independent schools with sixth forms and a sixth form college in the town.

3 The majority of the college's accommodation is at its main site in Wellington Road, which was purpose built and dates from the 1960s and 1970s. There are two sports pitches, a large sports hall and a small fitness studio on this site. The college has three other sites in Taunton. These are: Bishops Hull, a former school; the Collinson Centre, a group of huts together with an adjacent modern former industrial building; and the Staplegrove Centre, which is housed in a former small grammar school and some huts.

4 The population of Taunton Deane district is approximately 98,200, of whom approximately 4 per cent are aged 16 to 18. Nineteen per cent of the population are aged 65 and above. Approximately half of 1 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups. In January 1996, unemployment in both the Taunton area and Somerset stood at 6.7 per cent. This compares with a figure for the south west region of 7.4 per cent. Somerset has a fast-growing population with a projected growth, to the end of the decade, of the 45 plus age group. Taunton is the administrative centre for Somerset County Council and has substantial employment opportunities in the public sector, manufacturing and insurance. The college itself is a significant employer in the area.

5 As at 1 November 1995, the college had enrolled 7,739 students, of whom 2,341 were full time and 5,398 were part time. Thirteen and a half per cent of the enrolments were on higher education courses provided by the college. Thirty-four per cent of the total enrolments were enrolled on courses in the humanities programme area of the Further Education

Funding Council (FEFC). Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

6 There are 366 full-time equivalent posts of which 227 are teaching posts, 39 directly support learning and 100 represent other forms of support. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7 In its mission statement, the college states its intention to be the best college of its kind, particularly in Somerset and to encourage the widest participation in high-quality education and training. This is to be achieved through creating a range of accessible education and training services, working in partnership with clients and adopting a forward looking and innovative approach in all aspects of its operations.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The college offers a wide range of provision for school leavers and adult students from foundation level through to higher education. Thirty-five subjects are offered at General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and 22 subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Substantial numbers of vocational courses are offered in nine of the FEFC's programme areas. The range of vocational courses is particularly wide in art and design, in construction and in motor vehicle engineering. The college continues to run a large number of Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma programmes. The introduction of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) has been slow.

9 The college's access to higher education courses cater for 180 adult students on the main site in Taunton and at outreach centres in Minehead and Seaton. Students can opt for one of nine combinations of subjects and the length and time of the course can be adjusted to meet individual requirements. The local authority funds a programme of adult education which includes leisure and recreational, basic skills and foreign language courses. There are 1,048 students on these courses which take place at various venues in Taunton and at 17 schools, community venues, church halls and voluntary associations across West Somerset.

10 The majority of higher education work is undertaken in partnership with the University of Plymouth. Links with the university are well developed. Programmes in higher education cover art and design, graphics, leisure, engineering, business and finance, construction, humanities and sciences. There are seven degree courses, 10 BTEC higher national diploma courses and a master of education course. All higher national diploma courses allow progression to the final year of a degree course at the university. A separate degree course in building is run in conjunction with Nottingham Trent University. Part-time higher national certificate courses, funded by the FEFC, are available in 13 areas including care, engineering and construction.

11 Approximately 50 full-time students are enrolled on courses for students with severe or moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The majority of these students follow a vocational access course which provides them with work-related options and formal work experience. The college runs link courses for approximately 40 students from two local special schools. There are strong links between the college and social services, the local authority and the Avalon Health Trust for students recovering from mental illness.

12 There is an extensive range of links overseas, co-ordinated through a European officer. In 1994-95, 267 students from the college participated in overseas visits and exchanges with continental Europe and the United States.

13 Approximately 10 per cent of the college's provision is franchised to local schools, community education centres and other commercial and voluntary organisations. Franchised work includes basic education, computer literacy, coaching and training awards and a GNVQ intermediate in leisure and tourism. Representatives of these organisations were complimentary about the support and assistance from the college.

14 The college is working hard to improve its links with schools. Liaison tutors from the college each visit schools several times a year. They give interviews to pupils and arrange for them to visit the college. Marketing activities are co-ordinated centrally. These include open evenings and a programme of three 'taster days' when prospective students may sample the college's provision. The taster programme in June 1995 attracted 850 pupils from schools.

15 A marketing officer is responsible for publicity and communications within the college. There is a marketing plan. Most of the budget for marketing, of approximately £125,000, is spent on publications and advertising. The college does not review the effectiveness of these. The main college prospectuses for higher education and further education have recently been revised. They are well presented. However, the college's marketing publications do not contain specific information for some groups in the local community such as employers and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college makes some use of labour market intelligence to inform its strategic planning but its own market research is at an early stage of development.

16 A wide range of open learning courses is offered. Courses are flexibly arranged to allow students to study materials, suited to their individual needs, on their own and at times convenient to them. A small 'drop-in' workshop for open learning in information technology at the Collinson Centre has attracted 350 enrolments since September. A similar workshop for basic education on the Staplegrove site operates on two days and evenings a week. Two hundred students also come into college on Saturday mornings for a range of courses including basic skills, computing and leisure courses.

17 Links with Somerset TEC are generally satisfactory. The chairman of Somerset TEC is a college governor. The college, in conjunction with two other colleges in Somerset, runs a company, Wessex Vehicle Training, which contracts with the TEC to provide training in motor vehicle work. The college currently provides training for a total of 240 young people on youth training programmes, with just under half of these working towards motor vehicle engineering qualifications.

18 The college has links with employers who sit on its advisory committees, for which clear terms of reference have now been established. The attendance of employers at some of these advisory committees is, however, poor.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

19 There are 15 members of the governing body, 10 male and five female. Governors bring to the college a wide range of experience of working at a senior level in public and private organisations. There are eight independent members, two co-opted members, the chairman of Somerset TEC, two staff members, one student member, and the principal. The full governing body meets three times a year. Governors have adopted a code of conduct and there is a register of members' interests. The quality of agendas, minutes and reports for governors is of a high standard. Governors are well informed on key developments and the strategic plan. New governors receive an information pack and usually spend a whole day in the college to familiarise themselves with its provision.

20 There are six governing body subcommittees. These are the finance, employment, audit, remuneration and buildings committees and the recently-established search committee. All governors are members of a subcommittee. A recent FEFC audit report highlighted some concerns about the operation of the audit committee. The governors acted swiftly on these and the audit committee now has revised terms of reference.

21 At the time of the specialist inspections, practices at middle management level varied considerably. In the best examples, areas of work were well managed; there was a clear structure of responsibilities and good communications. Reports were produced and disseminated on examination results, enrolments and retention rates and action taken to secure improvements. In some areas, however, examination results were difficult to extract, enrolment targets were not met and communication was poor.

22 A new principal was appointed on 1 September 1995. A new management structure was put into place on 1 March 1996. The former departmental structure has been replaced by one based on faculties and schools. The previous structure has resulted in a number of college procedures and standards being interpreted inconsistently. The new structure aims to manage the work of the college more closely and strengthen its central services. The executive comprises the principal,

vice-principal and the director of finance. The senior management team comprises the executive, the four heads of faculties and two heads of central service functions. Each head of faculty is responsible for four schools. In addition, there are managers responsible for a range of activities and issues across the college, including admissions, tutorials, quality assurance, business developments, learning resources and information technology. There are complementary job descriptions for all managers. The new structure is already resulting in some improvements in, for example, the setting of the budget, costing of activities, projection of the numbers of students, implementation of personnel procedures and staff briefings.

23 The college's strategic plan was the product of consultation with the governors and the former heads of departments. Its central aim of providing a wide range of courses including substantial provision of higher education has been met. The college lacks performance indicators and has no clear targets for the retention of students on courses or for their achievement.

24 The college has policies on a range of issues including equal opportunities and health and safety. There is a committee for health and safety. Its agendas and minutes are well presented. The committee receives reports from the safety adviser on accidents. Health and safety reports are sent to governors and a governor is a member of the health and safety committee. The committee is being restructured to reflect the new management structure.

25 The college's comprehensive policies on equal opportunities cover issues such as sexual harassment and employment. It is unclear where, in the college, responsibility lies for monitoring the effectiveness of these policies. The college is a member of several groups promoting equality of opportunity including, for example, the Somerset racial equality network.

26 The academic board meets regularly and its discussions are well recorded. It has been reconstituted to reflect the college's new management structure. Examination results are presented to the board annually. There is no record of action proposed or taken to improve results. Links between the academic board and course teams on the evaluation and achievement of better examination results, have yet to be established.

27 The college's budget is based on historical data adjusted for known changes to student numbers. As a result of past management practices some areas of growth in the college have had insufficient resources and some areas of decline have not had their budgets reduced accordingly. The new management arrangements require heads of schools and heads of faculty to develop budgets based on an estimation of needs, and to relate this to their student enrolment and retention targets. These estimates are now complete. There is good support from the finance team to assist managers in understanding and implementing the new system.

28 The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 is £17.38 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £17.84 and the median for all sector colleges is £18.56 per unit.

29 The college experienced severe problems in meeting the deadlines for its returns to the FEFC on the individual student record. Data regarding the achievement of units of activity for 1994-95 were submitted very late. There is no central system for timetable planning. Regular reports on staff and room utilisation are not produced. The college has employed consultants to advise on the developments needed to improve its data collection systems and their use by managers.

30 The college collects the destinations of its students in some detail. The former departments collected information on destinations in different ways. As a result, data are not in a consistent form. The college produces an informative booklet showing the destinations of individual students from specific courses. The booklet is distributed during visits to schools and at other marketing events.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

31 The college is developing a centralised applications and admissions system. Prospective students receive a swift acknowledgement of their applications from customer and student services and they are then invited for an interview with the academic staff. Adult students receive initial guidance from the adult guidance service before an interview is arranged. There are guidelines for interviewing and a staff checklist for students. In most cases, this checklist is sent out to applicants beforehand with an information pack. Customer and student services arrange 'advice days' in the summer when prospective students can receive guidance from academic staff. The centralised admissions system is not yet fully developed. The roles of staff in college reception, customer and student services and the faculties are not clearly defined.

32 Induction is provided for all students in the first two weeks of the academic year. Induction sessions were well structured and students generally found them useful. There is no standard induction programme across the college.

33 There is little accreditation of prior learning whereby new students can have skills and knowledge, acquired before coming to college, tested and recognised for the purposes of qualification. Heads of faculty are aware of the need to develop effective systems to accredit prior learning.

34 All full-time and part-time students who attend in the daytime have a personal tutor and a weekly tutorial period. Tutorial practice is variable across the college. There are no guidelines for tutors or objectives for tutorials. Tutorials are not subject to quality assurance procedures. As a result, careers guidance which is implicit in the tutorial system is not

effectively monitored. Tutors do not meet regularly or with the staff of customer and student services. The senior management team is aware of the need to address a number of issues in relation to tutorials and a new post of tutorial manager has been externally advertised.

35 The learning support unit is responsible for providing help, largely on a one-to-one basis, to students who have problems with literacy and numeracy. Such help is currently offered to about 50 students who asked for it on their original application form. The support service is confidential and reports on students seeking help is not given to their tutors. Students can also be referred, or refer themselves, for personal counselling to the college chaplain, the counselling service or the college's welfare advice services. A clear distinction is made between counselling and more general forms of advice and information giving.

36 Students' attendance was low in several of the classes inspected. This varied from 49 per cent in science and 55 per cent in classes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to 88 per cent in the performing arts. The average attendance at classes during the inspection was 72 per cent. There is a computerised attendance monitoring system for the whole college. Some tutors use this regularly to present information on attendance at course team meetings. Many tutors, however, run a duplicate manual system as they regard the college system as insufficiently accurate or too slow to meet their needs. In some areas, effective action is taken to follow-up students' absence; in other areas, completion of registers and monitoring of attendance is weak. There is wide variation in the students' rates of attendance across the college.

37 Twenty-two sporting and fitness activities, including outdoor pursuits, are available to students. Team sports take place on Wednesday afternoon, but some students are unable to take part in these because they have classes at that time.

38 The college funds a full-time officer of the students' union who arranges social events, manages the students' union budget and takes forward complaints from students to the senior management team. This officer is usually a full-time student on a sabbatical from his or her course.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

39 Of the 256 classes observed, 61 per cent had strengths which outweighed the weaknesses. The weaknesses outweighed the strengths in 11 per cent of classes. The grades awarded to the classes inspected are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		13	16	10	3	0	42
GCSE		1	6	3	1	0	11
GNVQ		6	13	10	8	0	37
NVQ		4	14	17	4	1	40
Other vocational		17	30	17	4	0	68
Access to higher education		2	7	7	1	0	17
Higher education		1	6	3	0	0	10
Basic education		2	4	2	3	1	12
Other		7	7	3	2	0	19
Total		53	103	72	26	2	256

40 Most of the teaching and assessment is well planned and supported by appropriate schemes of work. In humanities subjects for example, the schemes provide detailed information which frequently included descriptions of the teaching and learning methods to be used in classes. Course handbooks contain useful information on the aims of the course, the course content and methods of study and assessment. Schemes of work for courses in catering vary in quality. Engineering teachers carefully plan their schedule of assignments for students in order to provide them with an even spread of work.

41 Most teachers marked their students' work thoroughly and conscientiously, but some did not provide them with sufficiently detailed comments in writing. Many teachers failed to correct grammatical and spelling errors in students' written work.

42 Some science lessons were challenging and the teachers had high expectations of their students. They made good use of visual aids and provided the students with a variety of demanding tasks. By contrast, some science lessons lacked a sense of urgency and failed to excite or hold the students' interest. Technical support for practical classes was good. When required to for reasons of health and safety, the students and the teacher wore safety glasses. Often, students' bags and coats were strewn around laboratories thereby creating an untidy environment for practical work.

43 There were some examples of good practical activities in mathematics and computing. Students studying GCE A level mechanics were involved in some lively discussions regarding experimental design and how they could limit errors in their experiment. A group of students studying for the BTEC national diploma in computer studies worked well in small

groups to produce a solution to a software problem which necessitated their taking on the roles of commercial computer specialists.

44 In construction, teaching on the technician courses was of a high standard. Tasks and assignments were well designed. Students made good use of the college's computer centres where they worked on their assignments, assisted by learning materials of high quality. Teachers provided guidance as it was required. Although there was also some good teaching on the craft courses, some lessons were too slow and the work was not challenging enough for the students.

45 Engineering teachers have high expectations of their students. Students worked well in most lessons. In a well-structured motor vehicle engineering lesson, the teacher began with a short review of previous work, gave a clear introduction to the work to be covered in the lesson and made good use of questions to monitor the students' understanding of the work being covered. In all lessons there was an excellent relationship between the teacher and the students. Students responded well to the encouragement of their teachers. Most of the practical and theory classes were well supported by clear and comprehensive handouts and lecture notes.

46 In business studies, students undertake realistic and relevant tasks in the administrative and business support centres. Most students were highly motivated and worked responsibly and with a sense of purpose. Teachers encouraged the development of the students' oral skills through discussions. They encouraged the students to draw on their own experiences of work to illustrate particular points. In a few lessons, however, teachers failed to challenge the students sufficiently. The students were required to copy notes on information they could have discovered for themselves.

47 Teaching and learning on courses in the school of health and social care were generally of a high standard. Some lessons were excellent and the teachers demonstrated high levels of skill in the classroom. For instance, a class of adults on a course leading to a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 3 were studying the relative risk of HIV infection from different types of sexual contact. The teacher handled the lesson with sensitivity and led a stimulating discussion which involved the whole class. In a few classes, the teacher failed to challenge the students sufficiently and hold their interest. As a result, the students began to talk amongst themselves and little or no learning took place.

48 A good range of teaching and learning methods was used in art and design classes. Projects were well organised with themes which suited the aptitudes and abilities of individual students. In the best lessons, students were fully challenged by the work they had been set. In some lessons there was a lack of urgency and instances of poor timekeeping which were not effectively dealt with by teachers. Students' interest and motivation were high in the performing arts. High standards were expected of them and

they responded well to this. In one particularly effective lesson in which students were exploring themes and characters from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the teacher varied the pace of the session well, used lighting to create mood and atmosphere and brought the group together at appropriate points in the session to discuss and reinforce aspects of the work they were undertaking.

49 There was challenging practical work in hairdressing. In one lesson, students on a course leading to NVQ level 3 were completing permanent wave winding for high fashion styles. The teacher's guidance was well judged and unobtrusive. The students achieved good results within a realistic timescale to standards comparable to those expected of a professional salon. In some beauty therapy classes, students were not working at a commercially realistic speed. Unlike hairdressing, there is a lack of clients for beauty therapy.

50 Teaching in the humanities was of a high standard. Preparation and planning of teaching was thorough and well documented. Good use was made of visual aids. Course handbooks contained useful information on the aims and objectives of courses, study skills and assessments that the students could expect to undertake. Students carried out some well-planned assignments in the learning resources centre. A group of GCE A level students were using computers and a range of source materials to complete a practical assignment linked to the design and content of a magazine. A French language assistant was working well with GCE A level French students. In a few language classes, however, teachers did not always teach through the language being studied.

51 The quality of teaching for adults is generally sound. Most teachers have clear schemes of work, good lesson plans and detailed records of work. Teachers displayed an awareness and understanding of the needs of adult learners and those who had returned to study. Many teachers devised learning methods and tasks which would suit the differing levels of ability among the students. Some teachers, however, failed to draw on the experiences of their students sufficiently to enrich and enliven discussion. Lessons in basic skills were well managed. Teachers ensured that all students had individual aims and targets. There was a suitable balance between group work and individual tuition.

52 The quality of teaching and learning for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities varies widely. In one successful lesson, students were practising the skills of food preparation and service in one of the college's training restaurants. The students responded well to their teacher's expectation of high standards and their work reflected this. Some teachers, however, did not have full understanding of the wide range of abilities in the class and failed to identify and build upon skills and knowledge the students already had. There was insufficient use of appropriate audio-visual aids to help individual students to learn. Students frequently arrived late for their classes. For example, one mathematics

class began with only two students present. Students joined the class up to 15 minutes late. The teacher did not ask the students for any explanation of their lateness nor make any allowance for the fact they had missed an important introduction to the concepts of volume and capacity. In some classes, poor or inappropriate behaviour by the students went unchecked.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

53 In 1995, there were 562 entries for GCSE subjects of which 361 came from students aged 16 to 19. Of students aged 16 to 19, 49 per cent gained grades A to C in English and 25 per cent in mathematics. Of students aged over 19, the proportions were 85 per cent and 61 per cent, respectively.

54 There were 457 entries for GCE A levels in 1995, covering approximately 28 subjects. There were 329 entries from students aged 16 to 19 and each student scored, on average, 4.7 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). These results place the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1995 tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. Particularly good results were achieved in mathematics, where all 16 to 19 year olds passed, and archaeology, where all students over the age of 19 passed, many of them with grades A to C. Other subjects with pass rates of 90 per cent or over were psychology, history, sociology, English literature and physical education. Subjects with lower pass rates included physics (62.5 per cent) and communication studies (67 per cent). There were only 36 entries for GCE advanced supplementary (AS) examinations and results were variable. For example, all six students who entered for mathematics passed but only six out of 20 candidates did so in psychology.

55 There were some good examination results in vocational courses. In 1995, 249 students aged 16 to 18 were entered for BTEC national diplomas or certificates. Ninety-six per cent achieved the full BTEC qualification, placing the college in the top 10 per cent of further education sector colleges, as recorded in the 1995 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. Pass rates on the BTEC national diploma courses in information technology and beauty therapy were 100 per cent. There were poorer results on some intermediate courses. For example, only 11 per cent of students gained their BTEC first diploma in information technology and only 40 per cent, their intermediate GNVQ in business.

56 Success rates in NVQs are variable. In 1995, there were some exceptionally good results in the level 4 qualifications in architecture and construction (95 per cent), engineering subjects (94 per cent), management (94 per cent) and sports and recreation (86 per cent). Results at NVQ levels 2 and 3 ranged from 100 per cent passes in administration, design and electronic engineering to 20 per cent in construction and 31 per cent in catering and leisure and tourism.

57 Adults on the access to higher education courses achieve good results. Seventy-seven per cent of students complete their courses. Seventy-five per cent of them gain entry to higher education and 25 per cent progress to further study in further education. Adult students also perform well on the BTEC higher national certificate courses. For example, all 46 students who began their higher national certificate in business and finance completed their studies and 83 per cent achieved the qualification. Eighty-seven per cent of students on the higher national certificate course in social care also obtained the qualification.

58 The college is aware that in a significant number of subjects, students are failing to complete their course. Data on completion rates were frequently difficult to obtain and often presented a confusing picture. High rates of completion were evident in nearly all the work in engineering. For example, on the two-year BTEC national diploma course, 55 out of 60 students completed and gained their award in 1995. Sixteen of the 18 students starting the BTEC first diploma in motor vehicle engineering also completed and gained their award. These statistics compare sharply with those from the sciences, where only 50 per cent of students who began a GCSE or GCE A level course remained on it and took the examination.

59 Students' coursework is generally of a good standard. First-year students on the BTEC national diploma course in nursery nursing made some outstanding presentations to their group using visual aids with confidence and skill. Students on the BTEC national diploma in computing carried out impressive project work. Art students, and particularly those on foundation courses, produced inventive and imaginative work of high quality. Students' work on GNVQ intermediate art and design, is, however, more variable in quality. Students on plumbing courses demonstrated considerable dexterity and skill, but the work of some students on other courses in construction was less satisfactory. The work of some students on GNVQ business courses was not of a sufficiently high standard. The presentation of their work was often poor, contained too many errors and showed limited understanding of some basic concepts of business. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were not sufficiently challenged to reach the standards of achievement of which many were capable.

60 The college has collected and published statistics on the destinations of its students for eight years. The colleges' data for 1995 showed that of the 2,462 students for whom destinations are published, 10 per cent progressed to higher education, 12 per cent to further education and 72 per cent to employment. These data conflict, however, with other data presented by the college.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

61 The college has a quality assurance policy which has been approved by the academic board. The policy is based upon the continuous improvement of quality. There is a growing awareness at course team level of the importance of quality assurance.

62 Quality assurance is overseen by the college's quality review group. This meets termly to advise on policy and review procedures. Membership of the group is drawn from across the college. The day-to-day management of quality assurance is the responsibility of the quality manager who reports to the vice-principal. The quality manager's role is to plan, implement and evaluate the college's procedures for quality assurance and to provide guidance on them to staff.

63 A useful manual on quality assurance has been developed. Nineteen teaching and support staff are trained as quality auditors. Three thorough audits have been carried out to date to determine the effectiveness of course reviews and subsequent action planning. Audit reports are published and distributed although there is no evidence to show what action results from them at course team level.

64 Procedures for quality assurance include the use of questionnaires which are given to students shortly after they join the college, and again before they leave. The views of the students are analysed in reports. During the past three years, the responses from students have become more favourable in relation to teaching and careers advice. In response to the views of the students, photocopying facilities and access to information technology software in the learning centre have improved. There is, however, no formal mechanism whereby the findings from the questionnaires are discussed with the students.

65 The setting of standards and targets against which the quality of services can be monitored is not fully developed. Enrolment targets are set, but course teams do not have agreed targets for the retention rates and achievements of students.

66 There is a well-established system for the annual review and evaluation of courses. This is supported by a document on procedures and a standard set of forms for use by course teams. Teams are required to carry out an analysis of certain aspects of course provision and, in some cases, they are asked to give an assessment grade. Action plans are also required involving comment from the team and the head of department. The quality of course reviews has improved, but is still variable. Some of the action plans are poor and there are instances where they do not address poor retention rates. Course teams are not required to evaluate students' achievements. Course review reports are also sampled regularly by the vice-principal who provides detailed written feedback to the course teams. Reports from external award bodies are also examined in detail by the vice-principal and are forwarded to course teams with recommendations

for action. BTEC external moderator report grades are used as benchmarks to monitor the standard of BTEC courses.

67 The staff-development programme includes an induction programme for both teaching and support staff. Induction at college level is well organised, well regarded by staff and ends with a review at the end of the first three months in post.

68 Professional development and training programmes for staff, prioritised in line with the strategic plan, are arranged each year. Applications for courses are matched against the needs of the college and those of the individual members of staff. There is a staff-development plan for the college, but not all line managers produce a development plan for their own area. There is no formal system for evaluating the effectiveness of training programmes. The link between staff appraisal and professional development and training is weak. In some areas, many staff have not been appraised. Part-time staff are not included in the appraisal procedure. In February 1994, the college made a commitment to achieving Investors in People accreditation. Progress towards this has been slow and it is unlikely that accreditation will be achieved in the near future.

69 Except in construction, the provision of training for assessors and internal verifiers has been satisfactory. A system to enable internal verifiers and moderators to work to consistent standards and common procedures across the college has not yet been introduced. There is little value-added analysis of students' achievements.

70 The college's quality assurance procedures do not cover provision franchised to other providers. The college has devised criteria for the approval of franchise centres, but these are not applied consistently. Students on some franchised courses in other institutions receive a copy of the college's charter.

71 The college's charter is generally well understood by students and staff. Briefings on the charter have been provided for all members of college staff and are included in induction programmes for new staff and students. An audit of compliance carried out by the college, identified that out of 60 statements audited, a satisfactory level of compliance was achieved in relation to 51 of them. Formal complaints are reported to the quality manager who keeps a log of these and monitors action taken on them. The college was commended by the Department for Education and Employment for the quality of the charter. In July 1995, the Prime Minister's panel on the Citizens Charter gave the college a 'highly commended' report on its charter.

72 The college has produced a self-assessment report which has drawn evidence from its quality assurance system. It follows the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report is supported by a comprehensive background paper. Senior managers were consulted

during the production of the report. The report has identified some important strengths and weaknesses and is a document which will support the college through a number of improvements.

RESOURCES

Staffing

73 Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced, with relevant academic and professional qualifications for the courses that they teach. Teachers in many curriculum areas maintain good links with industry and business and with professional bodies. For example, most full-time art and design teachers are practising artists, designers or crafts people. Few staff take advantage of opportunities to update their commercial and industrial experience.

74 Staff not in possession of a teaching qualification are encouraged to begin a programme of study within the first three terms of their appointment. At present about 60 per cent of academic staff have first degrees and about 79 per cent have teaching qualifications. Part-time teachers make an important contribution to the college. Many part-time staff are practitioners in their fields.

75 Technical support is a valuable resource. Technicians are well qualified and experienced. There are adequate numbers of administrative and clerical staff who give good support to teachers and students. The learning centre has well-qualified staff.

76 The current procedures for recording and collating details about staff are fragmented and do not work well. Data on staff are not easily available. For instance, the college was unable to supply information on the percentage of teaching by part-time staff. A new post of director of human resources has been created within the college's new management structure. Current policy and procedures in relation to personnel are under review.

Equipment/learning resources

77 There are sufficient aids to support teaching and learning, including overhead projectors, screens and boards in most rooms. Specialist equipment is adequate and sufficient in most curriculum areas. Motor vehicle facilities, including engine testing beds developed by staff, and body repair and paint spraying facilities, are good. However, there are insufficient handtools and digital readout devices in motor vehicle engineering. Students in art and design are able to use a wide range of good equipment some of which is normally only available to students on higher education courses. Print-making and fashion workshops are particularly well equipped. There are inadequate resources for photography, computer-aided design and plasterwork. Hairdressing and beauty salons are generally well resourced although there is a shortage of information technology equipment and some small electrical items in

beauty therapy. There is a lack of study material at a suitable level for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the learning centres. There are limited facilities to encourage private study in languages. Resources in performing arts are limited, particularly with respect to sound and music technology and the making of props and scenery. The college does not have an effective strategy for replacing equipment. In some areas, especially catering and engineering, equipment is out of date.

78 The learning centre is of high quality. The centre's hours of opening give students ample opportunities for study although tutor/technician support is not readily available in the evenings or on Saturday morning. There are 243 study spaces. The centre combines a library with a range of media and information technology services including compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database and associated software. This centre also provides excellent reprographic services to staff and students. A television studio provides access to video cameras, controllable sound and lighting, and an editing suite. The library at the Staplegrove site has a CD-ROM facility, photocopiers, texts, journals and periodicals. Students based at Staplegrove are timetabled for classes on the main site of the college for at least one day a week in order to use the learning centre there.

79 Students have ready access to a good range of information technology resources. The information technology unit is responsible for the central academic network and a bank of 96 laptop computers for individual use and overnight loan to staff and students. The college has developed a local area network with approximately 120 workstations. There is a good standard of hardware and software. Additional small, local area networks are centred in construction, technology and the business support centre.

Accommodation

80 Almost half of the college's general-purpose classrooms are in the main buildings and are of appropriate size, well appointed and in good decorative order. The remainder are in huts and temporary accommodation and are barely adequate for the purposes of teaching and learning. Some are not properly heated. Many are in need of refurbishment and decoration and have no blinds at the windows. Most have shabby furnishings.

81 The purpose-designed engineering and construction buildings contain spacious, clean and well-appointed practical workshops and laboratories. The specialist areas in the sciences, engineering and construction are complemented by an open-access information technology facility nearby. The engineering computer-aided design suite is particularly well appointed. In sharp contrast, those classrooms used for engineering and construction courses which are in mobile units are some of the most poorly furnished and decorated in the college. Studios and workshops in the purpose-built art and design block are large, light and

pleasant to work in, though many are disorganised and untidy. Theatre studies and performing arts students lack space for prop making and other three-dimensional practical work. The drama studio is subject to noise from the adjacent corridor and the small music room. Accommodation for hair and beauty is excellent: salons have attractive colour schemes, are light, airy and exceptionally well maintained. There are good preparation and laundry facilities and ample storage space. Facilities for catering courses at the main site are clean and well maintained but are somewhat limited. The kitchen and cafe at the Staplegrove Centre are an effective learning environment for students and also provide good service for customers.

82 Facilities to support people with physical disabilities are poor throughout the college. There is no provision of audio loops for students with hearing aids. Only the ground floor areas in the permanent buildings at Wellington Road are fully accessible to students with disabilities. The lifts are too small to allow a wheelchair user to be accompanied.

83 Room allocations are determined within faculties and there is no central system for recording their use and availability. Maintenance and repairs are not well co-ordinated. Furniture is likewise inadequately maintained, haphazardly allocated and sometimes inappropriately redeployed. The college has a good range of central facilities including an attractive and conveniently located main refectory, comfortably furnished student common rooms, a small stationery shop and a travel centre. Communal areas in many parts of the college are enhanced by wall displays of the work of students from the art and design faculty. In both the construction and engineering blocks, the walls of corridors and teaching areas display a wide range of relevant information and up-to-date technical news. In contrast, many of the classrooms, both in the permanent buildings and the mobile units, have bare walls, and are somewhat bleak.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

84 The strengths of the college are:

- a wide range of courses from foundation level through to higher education in most curriculum areas
- a supportive and experienced governing body
- a new management team which is developing strategies to address weaknesses
- some effective teaching and learning and some well-managed curriculum areas
- a sound quality assurance policy
- generally well-qualified staff who are committed to the college and its students
- well-planned staff-training programmes linked to the strategic plan
- a well-established learning centre

-
- some well-equipped accommodation for practical work
 - the college charter which is understood by staff and students.
- 85 In order to improve its provision, the college should:
- improve the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievements in some areas
 - improve the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
 - improve the levels of attendance and retention in many areas of the college
 - introduce effective target setting and performance monitoring especially in relation to students' achievements
 - improve the reliability and use of much of the college data
 - raise the standards of middle management practices to reflect the best practice
 - improve access for people with restricted mobility
 - complete the introduction of the central admissions systems and the staff review system
 - improve the initial assessment of students' learning needs
 - continue to improve its quality assurance procedures
 - improve the quality of many of the general purpose classrooms
 - evaluate marketing activities including approaches to market research
 - increase the opportunities for accrediting students' prior learning and experience.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)

 - 2 Percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)

 - 3 Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)

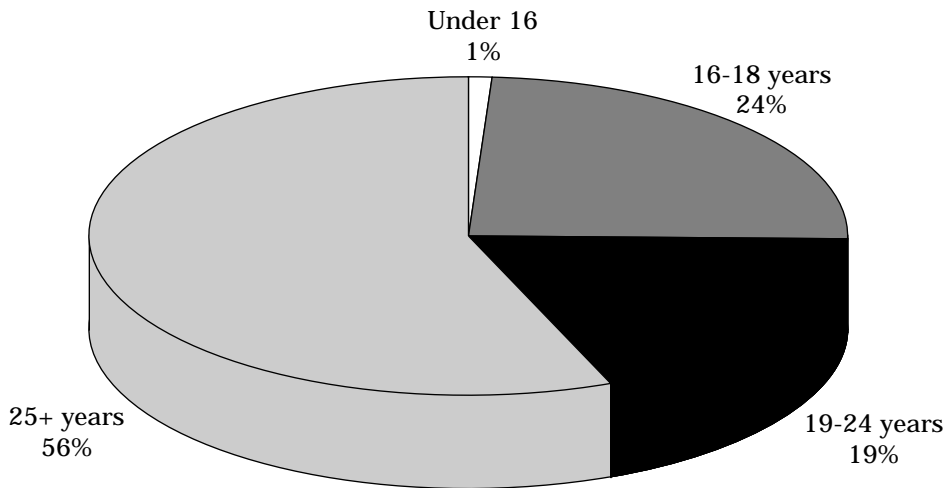
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

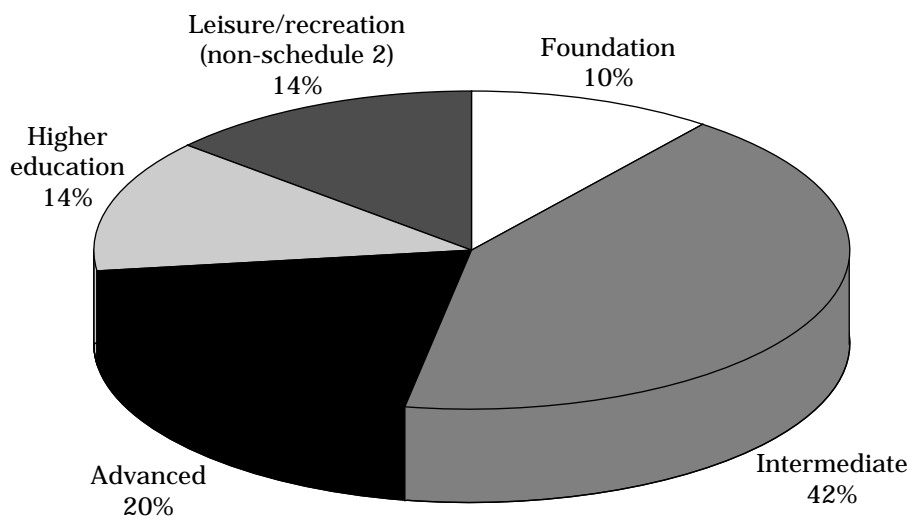
Somerset College of Arts and Technology: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 7,739

Figure 2

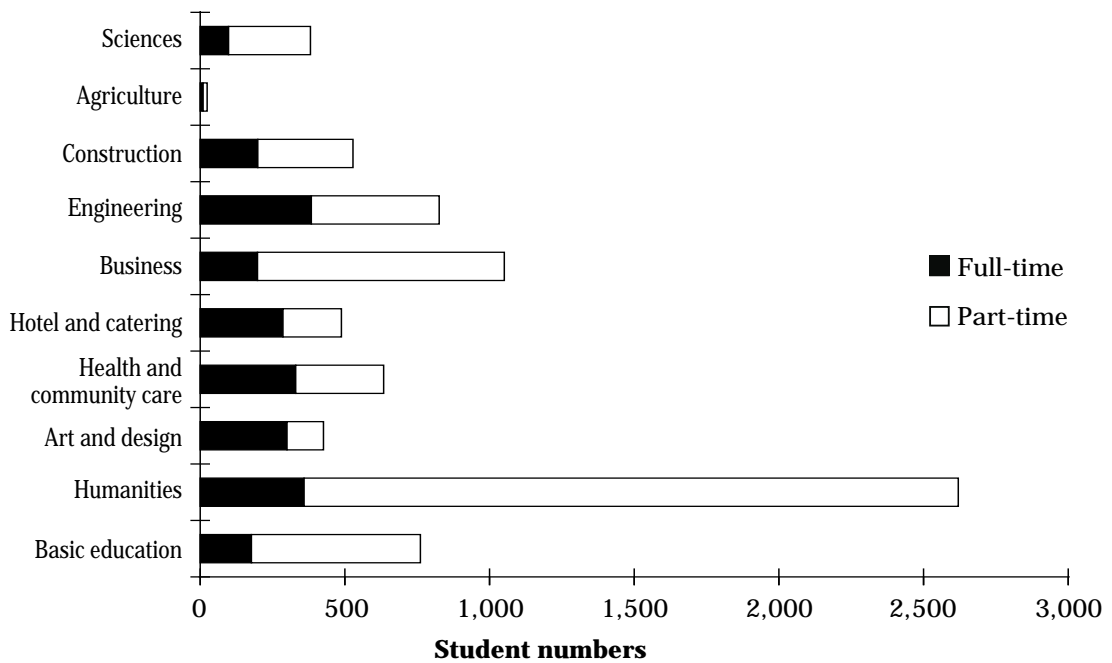
Somerset College of Arts and Technology: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 7,739

Figure 3

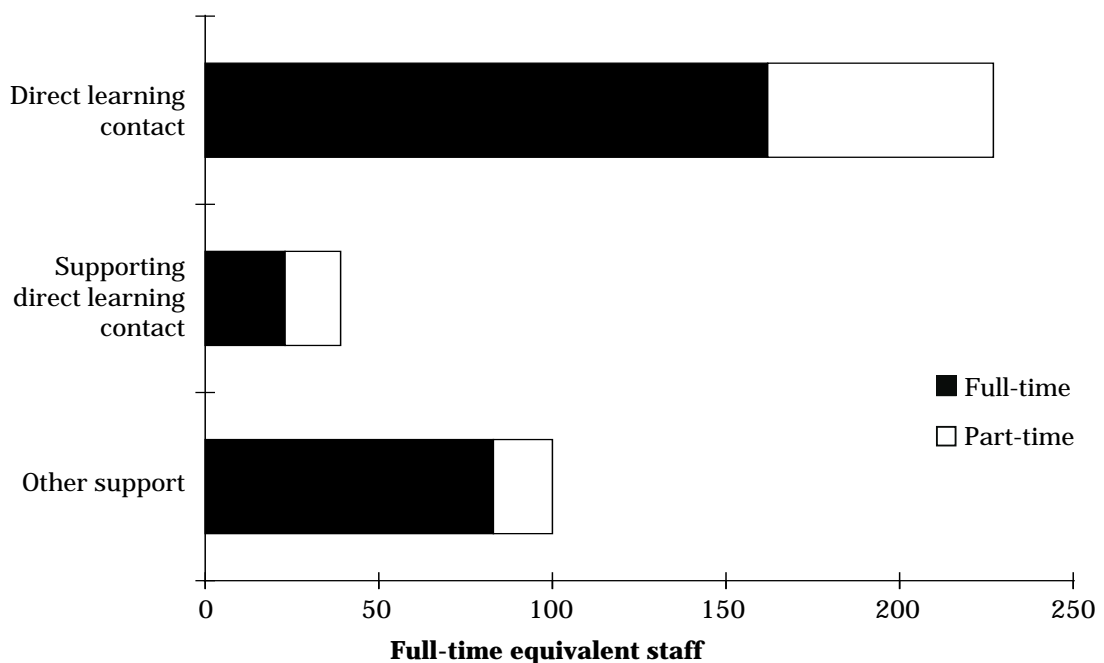
Somerset College of Arts and Technology: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)



Student numbers: 7,739

Figure 4

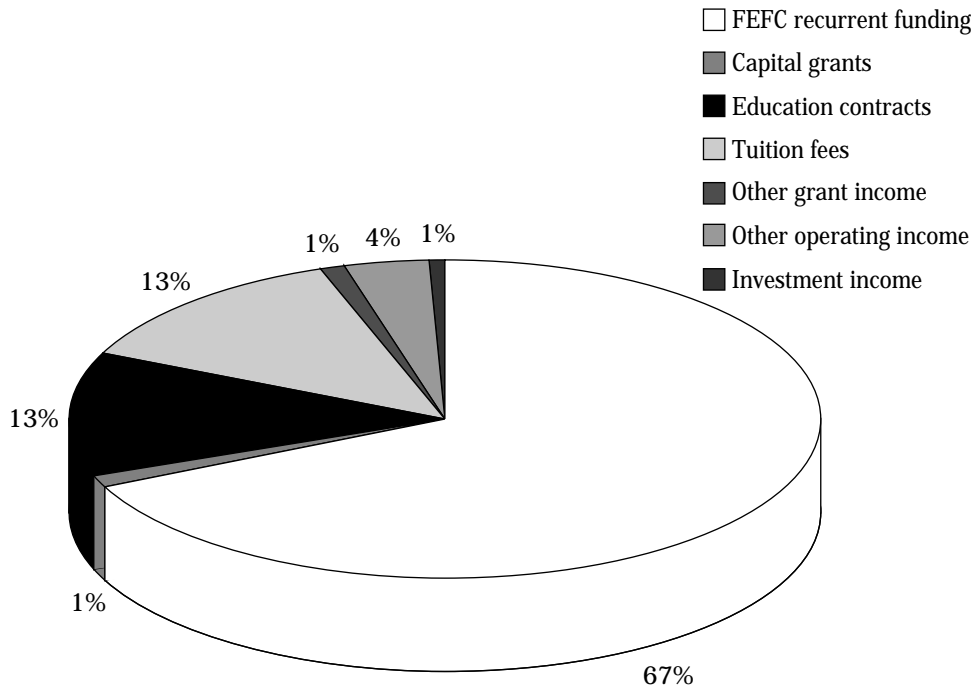
Somerset College of Arts and Technology: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 366

Figure 5

Somerset College of Arts and Technology: income (for 12 months to July 1995)

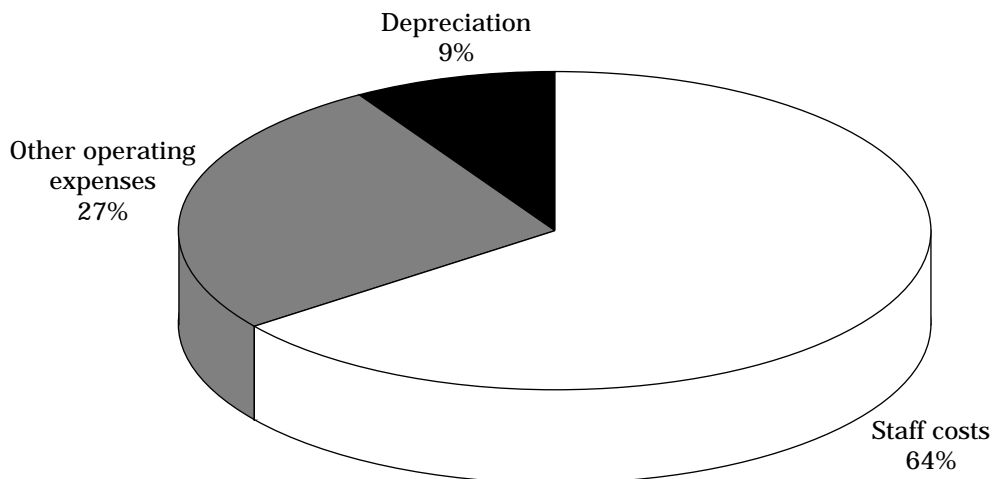


Income: £12,399,000

Note: the historic cost surplus for the period was £183,000.

Figure 6

Somerset College of Arts and Technology: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £13,166,000

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