

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

South Downs College

June 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 88/96

SOUTH DOWNS COLLEGE

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected September 1995-March 1996

Summary

South Downs College at Havant in Hampshire is a general further education college. It provides a broad range of courses. The quality of teaching and students' examination results are above average for the sector. The leadership of the college is strong and management at all levels is effective. Governors are well informed about the college and are committed to its mission. There is an evident determination to achieve high standards in all that is done. There are good links with schools, employers, the TEC and the local community. Students receive effective pastoral care. Course retention rates are high and improving each year. Quality assurance procedures are rigorous and comprehensive. The college's accommodation is attractive and well maintained. The college should continue to develop more consistent practice for tutorials and should: improve the quality of the separate provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; improve information technology facilities for hairdressing and beauty therapy; and update the cataloguing and stock control systems for the library and learning centre.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics, science and computing	2	Art and design	2
Engineering	2	Performing arts	1
Business and management	1	Humanities	2
Tourism, leisure and catering	2	English and modern languages	2
Hairdressing and beauty	2	SLDD provision and adult basic education	3
Health care and teacher training	1		

INTRODUCTION

1 South Downs College was inspected between September 1995 and March 1996. Inspectors were present during the induction of new students in September. The specialist subject areas were inspected in February and aspects of cross-college provision in March 1996. Eighteen inspectors spent a total of 79 days in the college. They inspected 175 lessons, examined students' work and looked at documents relating to courses and the college. Meetings were held with governors, staff, students, employers, representatives from the Hampshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), local schools and the community.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 South Downs College was opened in 1974. It occupies a single campus and the accommodation is purpose built. The college is a major provider of post-16 education and training for south east Hampshire. The majority of the full-time and part-time students are drawn from Havant and Portsmouth. The area has strong historical links with the Royal Navy. At one time, a third of the local workforce was employed directly or indirectly in defence-related industries but these have declined in recent years. Local unemployment reached a peak of almost 12 per cent in January 1993, but fell to 8 per cent by August 1995. There has been some growth of service industries and tourism in the area.

3 The college has exceeded its enrolment targets each year since incorporation. In the current year, there have been 11,454 enrolments. Of these, 2,510 were by full-time students and 8,944 by part-time students, including 3,063 adults taking leisure and recreation courses. These enrolments represent an 11.5 per cent growth in units funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) since 1994-95. Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. There are three other further education providers within a five mile radius, two of which are sixth form colleges and one a general further education college. Three local schools have sixth forms.

4 The college has 341 full-time equivalent employees, of whom 207 are teachers, 46 directly support learning and 88 have other support duties. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The college is organised into four main teaching departments and two cross-college units.

5 The college states its mission in the following way: 'The South Downs College is committed to increasing participation in, and broadening access to, lifelong education and training for the benefit of individual students, customers and clients. The pursuit of excellence and parity of esteem between all types of provision are fundamental values. The college will provide a quality service to fulfil the personal aspirations of all its users.'

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

6 The college's breadth of provision reflects its mission statement and the needs of students in its growing catchment area. Over 500 courses are offered for students with diverse backgrounds and abilities. During 1995-96, 11 new full-time and 73 new part-time courses were introduced. Recreation and leisure courses for adults are provided at the main college and at 45 local venues.

7 The college offers a wide range of vocational courses including those leading to General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 4. There is a higher national diploma course in performing arts and higher national certificate courses in engineering and business. The college offers 34 General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and 18 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects. Over 200 students are enrolled on access to higher education courses. The college is the largest provider of access courses in the Wessex Access Federation.

8 The college has an effective marketing policy which it pursues vigorously. A range of appropriate data and market intelligence information is collected, analysed and used to inform college and departmental planning. Responsibility for marketing is shared among a number of staff, including a publicity manager, who report to the vice-principal. Promotional material includes a wide range of course guides and a video about the college. The college advertises on 10 local buses, on billboards on the main routes into the city of Portsmouth, and at a football stadium. Enrolment arrangements have been broadcast on local radio. Promotional activities include open days for prospective students and advisory sessions for adults, young people and their parents. During two open evenings in 1995, the college received over 3,000 visitors.

9 Liaison with schools is well planned and carefully organised. A liaison manager co-ordinates links with 24 schools, including some primary schools. Individual staff have responsibility for keeping in touch with particular schools. Schools value their links with college staff and the good, unbiased advice given to their pupils. Pupils are given the opportunity to sample courses at the college and to shadow college students.

10 There are formal relationships with Portsmouth University, which include franchise agreements covering two of the college's higher education programmes. In 1995, over 400 students from the college progressed to full-time and part-time higher education; more than 80 of them went to Portsmouth University. There are partnerships with a number of colleges in mainland Europe. For example, engineering students visit Nordenham in Germany, and students taking GCE A level French and those studying catering visit Rouen.

11 The college has developed systematic connections with local industry and commerce, which are recorded on a database of 2,500 companies. Local employers praise the responsiveness and flexibility which the college shows in meeting their needs. They value their relationships with college staff. The college has carried out a number of successful projects for local firms, such as, offering basic literacy and numeracy courses for employees on company premises. This work is growing, and in 1995-96, 12 courses were mounted for 150 employees. Companies have confirmed the effectiveness of this training through customer satisfaction surveys carried out by the college. Relationships between the local TEC and the college are harmonious and productive. The TEC views the college as a significant provider of training and praises its extensive vocational provision and its relationships with commerce.

12 The college responds well to the needs of special groups of students. Flexible timetabling arrangements for adults take account of family interests during school vacations. Adult learners have termly tutorials to discuss their progress with staff. Since their introduction, more adults have stayed on at the college to complete their courses. The college's learning centre has study spaces and computer workstations reserved for adult students, which they may use at times to suit them. The centre is open in the evenings and at weekends. There are nearly 700 students over the age of 19 enrolled on full-time courses and there is a college creche for students' children.

13 The college has a well-thought-out equal opportunities policy which lays down clear standards and targets, and ways to monitor their achievement. The policy is well understood by staff and students. The policy statement is highly visible in documents, in classrooms and on noticeboards. The college has disciplinary procedures to deal with acts which are discriminatory. Responsibility for ensuring equal opportunities in the college rests with the vice-principal. Promotion of equal opportunities is a standing item on the agenda of the academic board.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

14 The college is well governed. The board has 20 members. There are nine independent members, three nominated or co-opted educational representatives, two co-opted local authority members, four members of staff including the principal and vice-principal, and an elected student member. At the time of the inspection there was a vacancy for a TEC nominee. The governors are committed to the college's mission. They have a wide range of expertise and good contacts in the community and local industry. Their decisions are soundly based on comprehensive information and detailed proposals from managers. The clerk to the corporation is the college secretary. Governors receive training for their work, including presentations on national and local developments. There is a code of conduct and a register of interests to which all governors and senior staff have made a return. Governors are developing the means of

evaluating their own performance and their contribution to the college. Relationships between the governors and senior managers are professional and fruitful.

15 The college benefits from strong leadership. There is a well-defined annual planning cycle which begins each October with the setting of targets and a review of progress in programme areas. Departmental and college operational planning follows in February, and in May and June the strategic plan is updated ready for the submission of funding proposals to the FEFC in July. There is extensive consultation with staff, governors, and with employers and external organisations. Good industrial relations assist these processes. The resulting strategic plan is lucid and realistic.

16 The management structure of the college is well defined. Middle managers understand the scope of their duties. There is some lack of consistency in the job titles of middle managers and their roles are not always obvious to other staff. Communication is good at all levels. Senior managers create a climate in which both formal and informal meetings are used to good effect. Much of the detailed curriculum development is carried out by task groups. The academic board considers the wider curricular issues.

17 Policies for health and safety, personnel management, budgetary control, staffing, student relations, environmental management, equal opportunities and the use of information systems are clearly presented and properly disseminated across the college. All policies are monitored and reviewed to ensure that they are up to date and relevant. The college's charter has been drawn up following consultation throughout the college. Students are made aware of their entitlements at tutorials and in course handbooks. The charter, too, is monitored to assess its effectiveness.

18 The physical, financial and human resources of the college are well managed. There are robust financial procedures, controls and reporting systems. Budget projections are based on sound principles. This year, the college receives from the FEFC an average level of funding of £18.09 per unit. The median for general further education colleges of £17.84. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

19 A student services unit is responsible for providing guidance and support. Young people who have left school and are awaiting the results of their GCSE examinations have access to advice at the college. Guidance services for adult and part-time students are particularly good. These services are evaluated regularly in extensive consultation with students.

20 The college seeks to ensure that students make informed decisions about their choice of courses. Students speak of the ambience and ethos of the college as being a prime factor in their decision to study at South Downs College. All applications are screened by the student services unit

and advisory interviews are offered wherever appropriate. In addition to this first interview, all students are interviewed after their GCSE results are published so that they can confirm their original choices or make amendments. A further check that students are following the right programmes takes place about four weeks into the first term. Induction is well designed and thorough. A short induction period is provided for second-year students to ease them into the demands of work towards examinations.

21 Pastoral care is good. There is a well-established tutorial system. Thorough documentation helps to ensure effective co-ordination of activities. Senior tutor posts have been established with the aims of increasing the consistency of tutorial support and improving retention rates. A weekly one-hour tutorial is timetabled for all full-time students and it is used to give news about important events in the college. Many tutors also use the time well for monitoring the progress of students. A number of tutors do not enquire into the absence of students swiftly enough.

22 Advice on careers and higher education is well organised and effective. A careers officer from the Hampshire Guidance and Careers Service is based in the college. There is a careers education programme for one-year students and all students have access to a range of meetings and events about careers.

23 The college's counselling service works to a high standard. The full-time counsellor not only helps individual students but also offers valuable support for tutors. Sensitive and effective help is given to students with financial difficulties or those seeking somewhere to live. Both staff and students are familiar with the services on offer.

24 Diagnostic testing of students' basic skills is the responsibility of teaching departments. Their methods for identifying those students who need help with basic numeracy and literacy vary. The difficulties of a significant minority of students are not identified early enough for them to be dealt with effectively and the college should consider the adoption of a more uniform and comprehensive approach to testing.

25 A wide variety of enrichment activities is offered to students. Whilst participation in these is voluntary, students are strongly encouraged to take part. Half the available activities are in sport. Others include photography, philosophy, first aid, jazz, choral singing and playing in the college orchestra. Activities are either accredited by the open college network or they lead to some other nationally-recognised qualification. Participation has improved since the introduction of accreditation, but only about 20 per cent of full-time students are involved in the enrichment programme. Timetabling clashes prevent some students from participating.

26 The student union is not very active. Many members of its executive do not attend meetings regularly. Most students acknowledge the need for an effective student union but too few are willing to give their time to achieve this.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

27 Sixty-seven per cent of lessons had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. This compares favourably with the average of approximately 64 per cent identified in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1994-95*. In 9 per cent of lessons the weaknesses outweighed the strengths. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 83 per cent. The lowest was in business (77 per cent) and the highest in health and social care (91 per cent). The grades given to the teaching sessions 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		12	22	6	3	0	43
GCSE		1	4	3	2	0	10
GNVQ		7	12	7	1	0	27
NVQ		7	11	8	3	0	29
Other vocational		4	10	3	0	0	17
Higher education*		1	5	2	1	1	10
Basic education		1	5	1	0	0	7
Other		5	11	11	5	0	32
Total		38	80	41	15	1	175

*includes access to higher education.

28 Most courses are well planned. Teachers have well-organised schemes of work and lesson plans. There is good teamwork among teachers aimed at identifying and spreading good practice. Students are generally energetic and attentive in class. Many teachers use a variety of activities to excite and sustain students' interest. In a minority of lessons, methods of learning or the standards of work were inappropriate; the more able students coasted while the less able struggled.

29 In sciences and mathematics, most teachers were careful to consolidate earlier work, and they regularly checked students' understanding. Lessons were relaxed but purposeful. In the more successful classes, students were given individual support and encouragement. Some teachers used visual aids well to help students grasp complex topics. For example, in a GCSE biology lesson on plant reproduction, the teacher used good illustrations to help students identify the features of plants that revealed their method of reproduction. There

was lively debate about the advantages and disadvantages of vegetative reproduction. Other teachers did not involve the students sufficiently when presenting material and were not always sensitive to individuals' learning needs.

30 In engineering, most teachers used good learning aids to help develop students' understanding. For example, in a class on computer-aided design and manufacture, the teacher provided excellent handouts to support students' learning and revision. In the best lessons, teachers began by reviewing what the students had previously studied and concluded by summarising what had been taught and learnt. Assessment of students' work was recorded thoroughly. Some teachers did not question their students sufficiently to be sure that they had understood the lesson. Some written comments on students' essays or assignments were not detailed enough to be helpful. In a few instances, they were almost illegible.

31 In business studies, staff and students use learning agreements which outline the stages towards achieving their goals. Students experience a suitable variety of methods of learning, including work in groups and pairs. Lively and well-informed discussions sprang up in many lessons. Teachers marked students' work promptly and returned it with clear and helpful comments. A minority of lessons lacked direction and failed to arouse students' interest.

32 In hospitality and catering, the kitchens and restaurants give students excellent environments in which to learn and practise their skills. Students work shifts and simulate jobs in the industry. In some theory lessons in catering the teacher dominated and failed to retain the students' full attention. Teaching and learning in leisure and tourism and sports studies were generally effective. Students were strongly motivated and they responded well to their structured programme. One lesson on sports coaching was particularly successful. A GNVQ student ably led the whole class, demonstrating well-developed supervisory and coaching skills.

33 In hairdressing and beauty therapy, teachers encourage their students to build technical capabilities of a high order. Work in the salons was taxing. Students had to cope with pressures comparable with those in the commercial world. Guidance from teachers was painstaking but unobtrusive. Teachers also helped students to foster the commercial skills needed to run a salon. Additional studies such as art, communications and science were insufficiently integrated with the main elements of the course and in both hairdressing and beauty therapy, students had too little opportunity to use information technology.

34 Lessons in health and social care were well prepared. Teachers ensured that activities were sufficiently varied to sustain students' interest. Lessons on theory were particularly effective, enabling students to understand some of the fundamental issues in health and care. Spelling and grammatical errors in students' written work were not always corrected.

35 Teacher training lessons were carefully structured and many of the learning activities were imaginative. Teachers' own practices provided good exemplars for their students. In one particularly successful lesson on evaluation, small groups of students were asked to consider everyday objects such as a board rubber, a waste bin and the lecturer's jacket and spectacles. They responded analytically, creatively and with humour to a topic which at first they had thought dry. They made some original and perceptive observations and reached the understanding that the teacher had intended.

36 In art, design and media studies, teachers have devised some challenging projects for their students. Staff have high expectations and students respond with work which demonstrates ingenuity and skill. GNVQ foundation students in art and design were set a particularly difficult task. They were told to buy old cutlery from charity shops, to remove the handles and to make replacements which would be fun to use. Students worked enthusiastically over two lessons and the results were ingenious and original. There is a programme of visits which complements project work and helps students to expand their understanding of the context in which they might practise. There were a few instances of inadequately planned lessons.

37 The performing arts programme includes music and dance. Lesson plans were comprehensive, specifying aims, objectives, outlines of topics, the teaching methods to be used, and the results to be expected. In a well-structured lesson on stage and screen make-up, students learned to simulate wounds on their hands and arms, using plastics and dyes. They were taught how to control the texture, colour and movement of the wounds, and how to use theatrical blood and sweat. The results were remarkable and were carefully assessed by the teacher.

38 English and modern language teachers had high expectations of their students, and the students responded well with hard work and commitment. The handouts used in class were pitched at an appropriate level. In modern languages, authentic topical materials were often used. These had been sifted in advance by the teacher to bring out new vocabulary and interesting content. Lessons were mainly conducted in the language being studied and as a result, students' confidence grew. Teachers assessed work carefully, and usually provided students with helpful comments on their progress.

39 Staff in humanities have recognised the difficulty many students have in progressing from GCSE to GCE A level work, and from access courses to higher education. A sequence of work is devised to take students through the early transitional stages to more demanding tasks. In a lesson for access course students on critical thinking, the teacher briefly recapitulated the philosophical points covered in the course. With their recent reading, this revision helped students to debate the concepts. They responded well to the teacher's lively manner. His questions were demanding and gave

the lesson momentum. In a few classes, teachers wrote text on the board or in handouts which was incorrectly spelt or had grammatical errors, undermining the standards which the area strives to set.

40 Teachers of basic education for adults met the needs and interests of their students well. Teaching was well organised and students found their work both challenging and enjoyable. Some teachers neglected to remark on students' progress in each task so that they could build on it confidently. In some lessons for students with learning difficulties, teaching was directed at the whole class, and too little account was taken of differing levels of attainment. Some students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are studying on mainstream courses. They integrate well with other students and enough support is provided to enable them to study and progress alongside other members of the group.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

41 Of the 489 students entered for GCE A level examinations in 1995, 85 per cent achieved pass grades. For those students under 19 years of age, the average score per entry was 4.6 (where grade A=10 points, E=2), which puts the college in the top third of all further education colleges in the country, according to the tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. The average points scored by each student under 19 years of age taking two or more GCE A levels, was 13. Ninety-five per cent or more of candidates passed GCE A level art, craft and design; English literature; German; and music in each of the three years from 1993-95. In 1995, candidates also achieved pass rates of 95 per cent or above in; Spanish, media studies, modular mathematics, and photography.

42 The college entered 695 students for GCSE examinations in 1995. The average rate of achievement of grades A to C was 58 per cent; 10 per cent above the national average for general further education colleges. Results were significantly above the national average for the subject in English literature, French, German, law, media studies, photography, psychology, child development, sociology and Spanish. Results in human biology, geography, mathematics and physics, were well below the national average.

43 The college subscribes to the national Advanced Level Information System which analyses the extent to which students' GCE A level results are better or worse than was predicted on the basis of their GCSE grades. The data for 1994 and 1995 show that most students performed at the level predicted, but that results in French and German were significantly above expectations and in law and physics they were below.

44 On all but one of the seven access to higher education courses, nearly 90 per cent of students progressed to higher education. In media and communications only two of the eight students were successful, marring an otherwise excellent set of results.

45 In the six Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma courses in engineering, information technology applications, health studies, art and design, media and performing arts, 132 students completed the programme. In five of these courses the success rate was above 90 per cent and in the sixth it was 83 per cent. Pass rates for four of the five BTEC first diploma courses were between 75 per cent and 100 per cent, but in engineering only 42 per cent of students passed. The success rates on the four BTEC first, national and higher certificate courses were good, ranging from 71 to 100 per cent.

46 NVQ level 1 results in floristry, hairdressing, sport, and catering were good with between 73 per cent and 100 per cent of students passing their course. Results were similar at NVQ level 2 in these same subjects and in administration and beauty therapy. Seventy-seven per cent of students achieved passes at NVQ level 3 in administration.

47 Results for the 288 students on GNVQ courses were well above national averages, and some were particularly good. For example, 88 per cent of the foundation level students in health and social care, 85 per cent of the intermediate level students in business, and 83 per cent of the advanced level students in leisure and tourism achieved their qualifications within the target time for obtaining the awards.

48 Nearly 950 candidates took typewriting and wordprocessing qualifications in 1995, of whom 96 per cent were successful. Results in basic counselling courses were particularly good, with 99 per cent of the 181 candidates achieving their awards. Just under 230 students took various courses in first aid approved by the British Red Cross Society, and nearly all passed. The 158 candidates for certificates in food hygiene were very successful with a 90 per cent pass rate. Some vocational courses were less impressive. For example, in the diploma in food hygiene only 55 per cent of the 11 students passed. Beauty therapy results were mixed, with success rates ranging from 44 per cent in cosmetic make-up to 92 per cent in aromatherapy.

49 In 1995, 75 per cent of the 232 students aged 16 to 18 on their final year of vocational courses achieved their award. This places the college in the middle third of colleges in the sector, according to the tables published by the Department for Education and Employment.

50 The destinations of full-time students are monitored by staff from Hampshire Careers Service in conjunction with college staff. Comprehensive reports have been published for the last three years, providing data on the first destinations of 97 per cent of leavers. In 1995, 88 per cent of full-time leavers progressed into further or higher education, or employment. There have been some notable achievements in the last two years. For example, a student achieved four grade A passes at GCE A level, assuring her entry to Cambridge University to read music. Three other performing arts students each achieved three grade A GCE A levels in 1994. Another student who returned to study after an accident had left

him unable to continue with his original career, was one of only two candidates out of 1,800 to obtain full marks in one GNVQ art and design test. There is a lively programme of theatrical performances and concerts, held at the college and elsewhere. More than 180 performances were given last year in schools, youth clubs, arts centres and theatres. Students took part in dance festivals and exhibitions. Individual and team achievements in sports included selection of a student for the Great Britain volleyball team for the disabled, another for the England junior swimming team, and the winning of a gold medal in the English schools relay final.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

51 Excellence is the consistently expressed goal of the college's mission statement and its strategic and operating plans. Managers pursue excellence vigorously with the full support of staff.

52 There is an annual cycle of quality assurance procedures which has been developed steadily over a number of years and which is now well established. It embraces every aspect of the college's work. There are course reviews by staff and students; departmental reviews; quality review groups which consider specific aspects of the curriculum and support services; and 'quality circles' charged with securing improvements. The college sets measurable performance targets and progress in reaching these is carefully monitored. The rigour of the college's procedures is assured both by the vigilance of managers and the willingness of staff and students to be frank when expressing their views. The college continuously seeks to improve its procedures. It has considered carefully and rejected the use of standard systems of quality assurance, such as International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9000 and total quality management. However, the process of setting targets is being refined, and there is no complacency among managers.

53 The annual quality assurance cycle involves all staff and representative students in a systematic way. The principal and other senior managers lead and participate in the process. The process is rigorous. There is a high correlation between targets and achievement. All aspects of the college's work are subject to evaluation each year. Statistics on students' achievements and retention rates are routinely collected and analysed at college, departmental and course levels. The approach is challenging. Achievement is analysed both in relation to courses and the performance of individual students, and conclusions are drawn which influence the work of subsequent years.

54 Staff and students are able to cite many examples of improvement which have resulted from quality assurance procedures. They include: an annual fall in student dropout; changed teaching methods; better procedures for setting and marking coursework; changes in the length of lessons and in the timetable; a better college environment with enhancements such as the courtyard cafe; an extended catering service

for adult students in the evenings; and Saturday opening at the learning centre. This quest for improvement has the valuable side-effect of strengthening the sense of partnership between staff and students, and their willingness to participate in committees dealing with quality.

55 There is a well-established appraisal scheme involving every member of staff. It includes work observation. Individual targets for performance are set and subsequently monitored. Good records are maintained, using standard documentation, and there is a secure connection between appraisal and staff development. The staff development committee establishes priorities and co-ordinates training. Action on staff development is devolved to departments. Staff attending training courses outside the college are required to demonstrate the value of these both to themselves and to the college, and to share the outcomes with their colleagues. Expenditure on staff development in 1995-96 will be £80,000, or about 1 per cent of the college's recurrent income.

56 The college's self-assessment report follows the format of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Strengths and weaknesses are identified under each of the headings. Some evidence is included to substantiate arguments and there are specific targets for improvement in a number of areas. The report is realistic and its conclusions largely match those reached by inspectors.

57 The college's charter is distributed to students and displayed in classrooms and notice boards around the college. Students are aware of its contents and how to present any complaints. Procedures are in place to review the charter and to monitor any complaints.

RESOURCES

Staffing

58 The college employs 557 teachers of whom 126 are full time and 431 part time. Eighty-eight of the part-time staff teach only on non-vocational and leisure courses. Two-thirds of all staff are female, but only one member of the senior management team is a woman. Academic staff are appropriately qualified for the courses they teach. Seventy-one per cent of teachers are qualified to first degree or higher national diploma level and 98 per cent have a teaching qualification. The award established by the Training and Development Lead Body which qualifies teachers to assess students' work in NVQ and GNVQ courses is held by 109 staff and 24 have achieved the award for internal verification. Two have so far achieved the qualification for accreditation of prior learning. There are 196 support staff, of whom 64 are full time. First aid qualifications are held by 37 staff. All staff are fully employed and turnover is low. Seventy per cent of the college's budget is devoted to staffing costs, above the sector average for further education colleges.

59 Personnel matters are directed by the principal and there are comprehensive policies for the management of human resources. More detailed responsibility is divided between the vice-principal and the college secretary, who deal with teaching staff and support staff, respectively. Teaching staff records are held in paper files, although many statistics are also readily available on computerised systems. There are informative handbooks for both teaching and support staff. There are fair procedures for recruiting staff. Unsuccessful applicants are informed of the reasons why they have not been selected.

60 Both teaching and support services staff are committed and hard working, and most say they are proud to be members of the college. The uniformed reception staff provide a warm welcome to visitors and they are well informed about the college and its work. Nearly one-third of full-time teaching staff have been at the college for more than 10 years. There are job descriptions for most staff which are reviewed in the light of their annual appraisals. New staff are attached to a mentor for their probationary year and there is an induction programme for them. New part-time staff also receive induction arranged to suit their convenience, sometimes on a Saturday morning or a weekday evening. There are sufficient technical support staff in all programme areas, and students speak highly of the help they give.

Equipment/learning resources

61 The college has sufficient well-maintained equipment for the courses it offers. There is a replacement policy for ageing or obsolete equipment, and at least one of the 10 information technology teaching rooms are re-equipped each year. The restaurants, theatre and hairdressing and beauty salons are all equipped to professional standards. Two new language laboratories have been installed recently with 41 study places. There is good lighting and sound equipment for the public theatrical, dance and music performances. The specialist 16-track recording suite meets current professional standards. The modern multi-gym is available for staff and students.

62 General classrooms and most specialist teaching rooms have whiteboards and overhead projector facilities; not all have screens. Sufficient video players and televisions are available throughout the college, and they are carefully maintained by a central service. There are 348 personal computers available to students, including 20 laptops. The computers are networked in nine classrooms. The travel office has a small computer suite and the learning centre has 25 personal computers which can be booked by students. Desktop publishing is available in art and design. The hairdressing and beauty salons do not have access to computers for day-to-day operations such as payment, bookings and stock control. There is a suite of 16 machines at the college's Cowplain adult education centre which is used for wordprocessing classes.

63 The learning centre was extended recently to increase its seating from 80 to 220 places. There are about 38,000 books, 224 periodicals, nearly 3,000 video recordings and 55 compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database titles. The college is connected to the Internet and students are using it increasingly. When the system was first installed students were allowed only 20 minutes each, but this has been extended to one hour in the light of demand. The centre is well resourced and is a pleasant environment for private study. The cataloguing is still manual, limiting the possibilities for monitoring use of the centre and controlling stock. There is a clear and detailed induction pack and students speak highly of the help they receive from staff. The centre is open until 20.00 hours on four evenings and on Saturday mornings in term time. Inter-library loans are readily available through the Hampshire Technical Research Industrial and Commercial Service and the British Library. The centre is improving its links with subject areas to ensure that the books that are bought meet the needs of students and staff.

Accommodation

64 The college inherited good buildings from Hampshire County Council. The single main site is well maintained and the five permanent buildings are in good condition. There are a few temporary single-storey buildings which have a short life expectancy. Since incorporation, the college has built a new teaching block to provide an extra 20 classrooms, an art studio and the 'Courtyard Cafe'. The college is well furnished and decorated throughout. Internal refurbishment has improved the reception and customer support services areas, and the studios for performing arts and electronic music. Some staffrooms are cramped but a quiet workroom is available. There is a large sports hall.

65 Space is used efficiently. There are 5.26 square metres per full-time equivalent student. The college has statistics which show that the frequency of accommodation use is 76 per cent; seat occupancy is 80 per cent; and overall utilisation is 60 per cent. There are 600 parking spaces for cars. All but 2 per cent of the college's facilities are accessible to wheelchair users by means of ramps, lifts and automatic doors.

66 The college is cleaned to a high standard by private contractors, working to a service agreement which requires them to clean communal areas and classrooms twice a day. Students and staff value the quality of the college's learning environment. The estate is supervised by the college secretary and the team of caretakers carries out daily routine maintenance quickly and efficiently. A 'disaster recovery plan' sets out the action to be taken to maintain continuity of service in extreme circumstances. The college's service control systems ensure efficient use of lighting, heating and power. The British Safety Council has made its award to South Downs College for the past three years in recognition of its good safety policy and procedures.

67 The college refectories are well furnished and the standard of service is high. The college offers meals for staff and students throughout the day and evening. Adult students particularly praise the evening opening which allows them to arrive at college from work and have a meal or snack before evening classes begin. Customers are invited to give their views in a comments book and to respond to a questionnaire.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

68 The main strengths of the college are:

- its broad range of courses
- the good links with schools, industry, the TEC and the community
- effective leadership and governance
- clear policies which are carried out in practice
- good pastoral care and guidance for students
- its good management information system
- its rigorous quality assurance procedures
- the high standards of teaching
- low dropout among students
- good examination results
- its well-qualified and motivated staff
- its efficient use of good accommodation.

69 If the college is to improve further the quality of its provision, it should address the following issues:

- the separate provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the lack of consistency in tutorial practice and additional support for learning
- the lack of modern library catalogue and control systems
- inadequate information technology facilities for hairdressing and beauty therapy.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at November 1995)

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

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

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

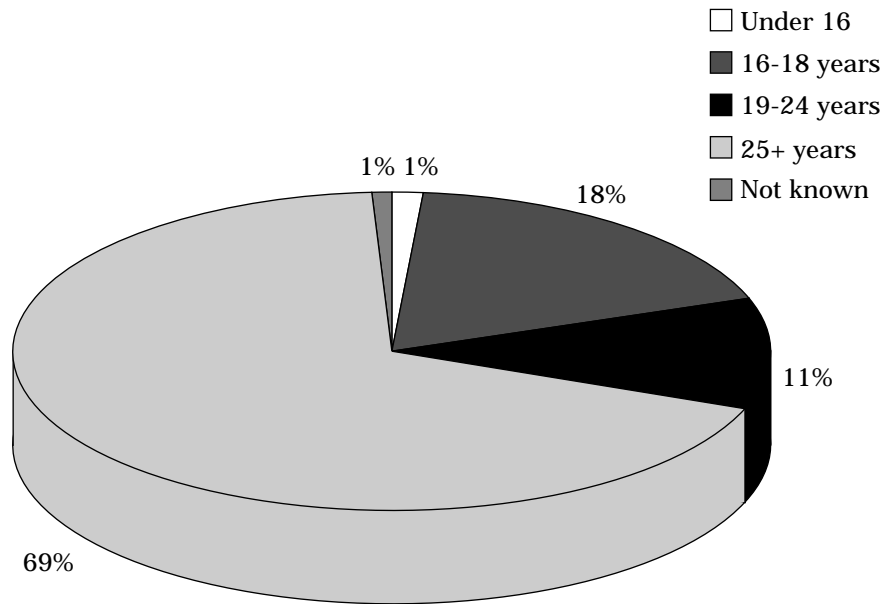
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 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

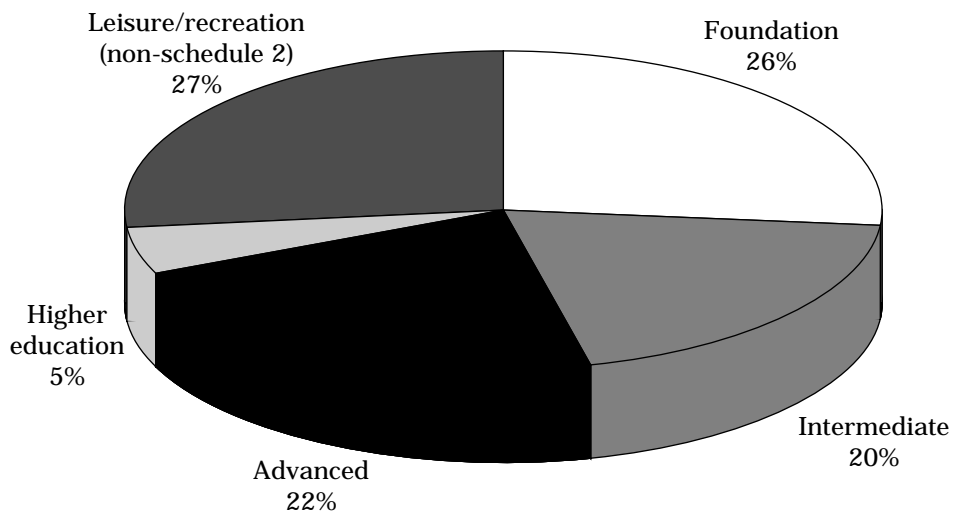
South Downs College: percentage enrolments by age (as at November 1995)



Enrolments: 11,454

Figure 2

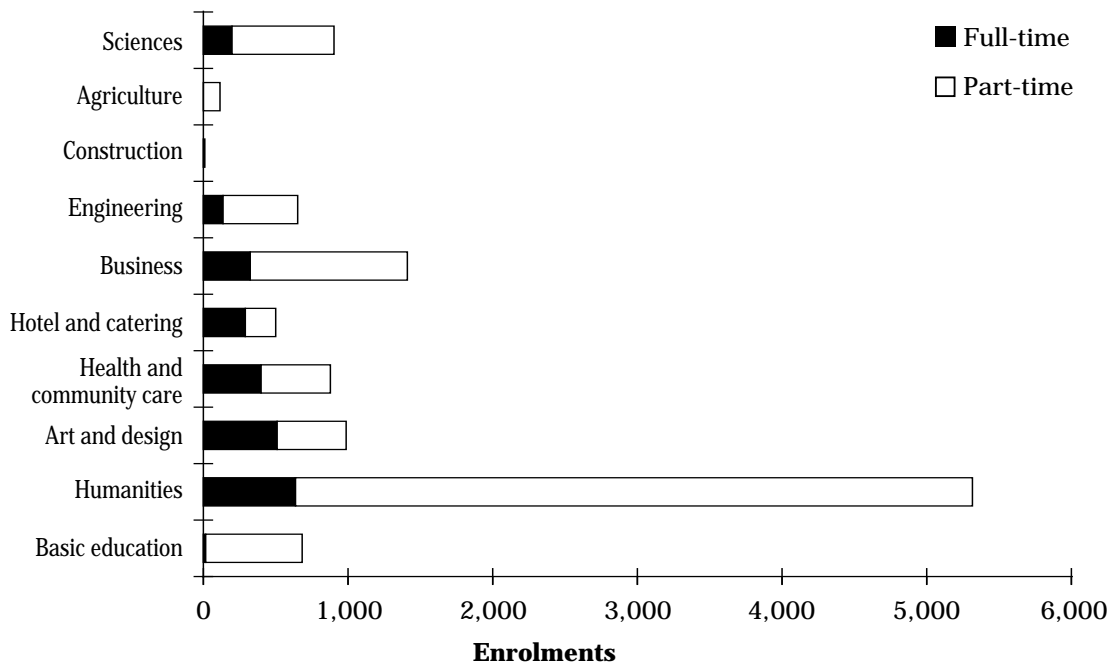
South Downs College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at November 1995)



Enrolments: 11,454

Figure 3

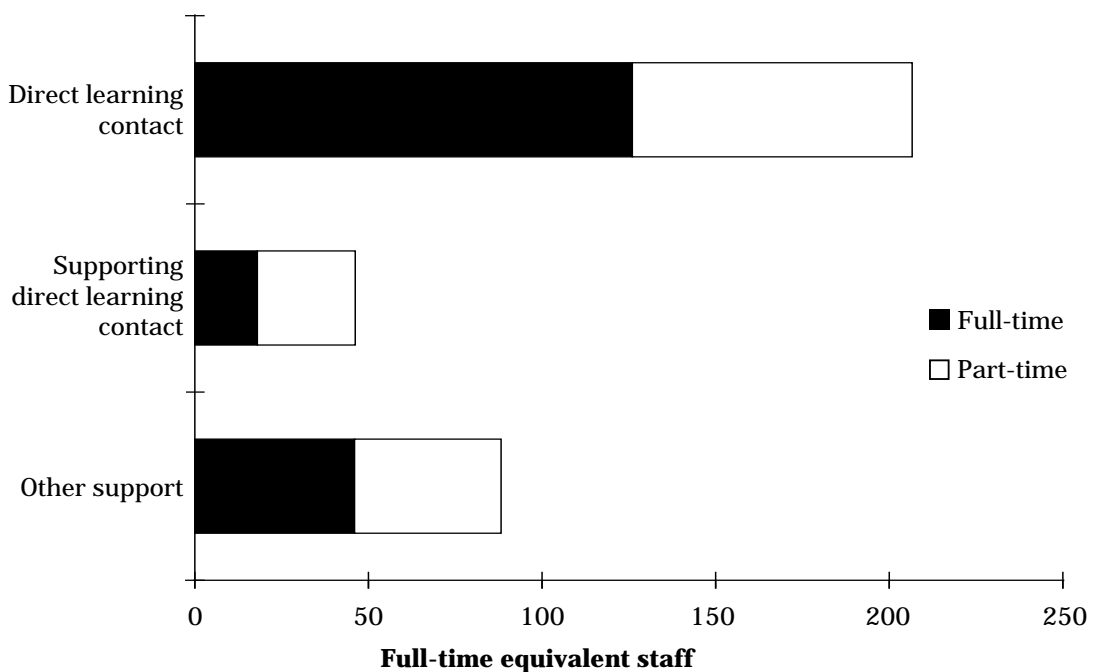
South Downs College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)



Enrolments: 11,454

Figure 4

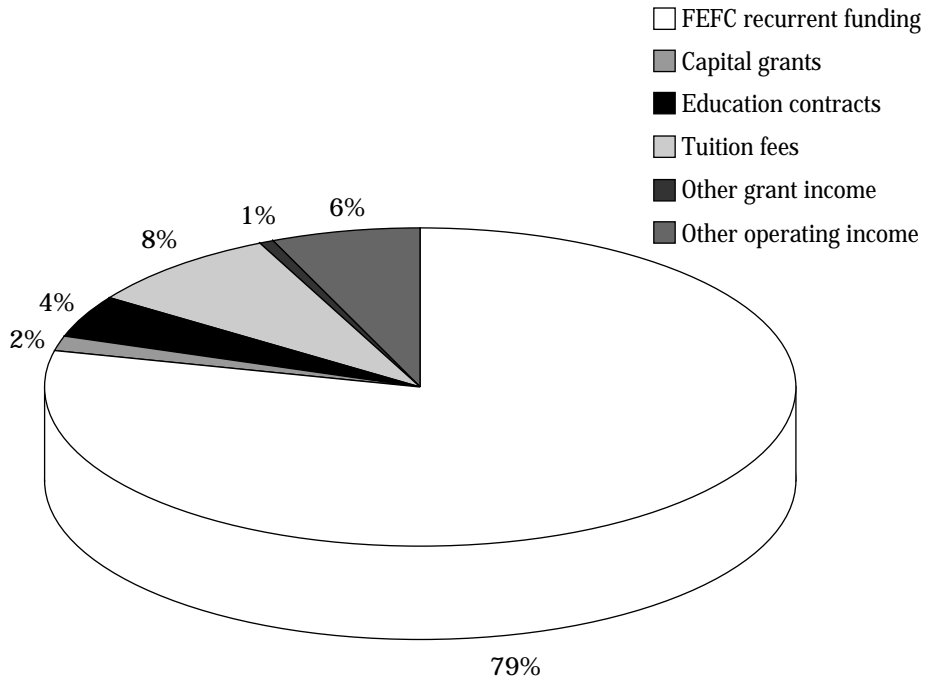
South Downs College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1995-96)



Full-time equivalent staff: 341

Figure 5

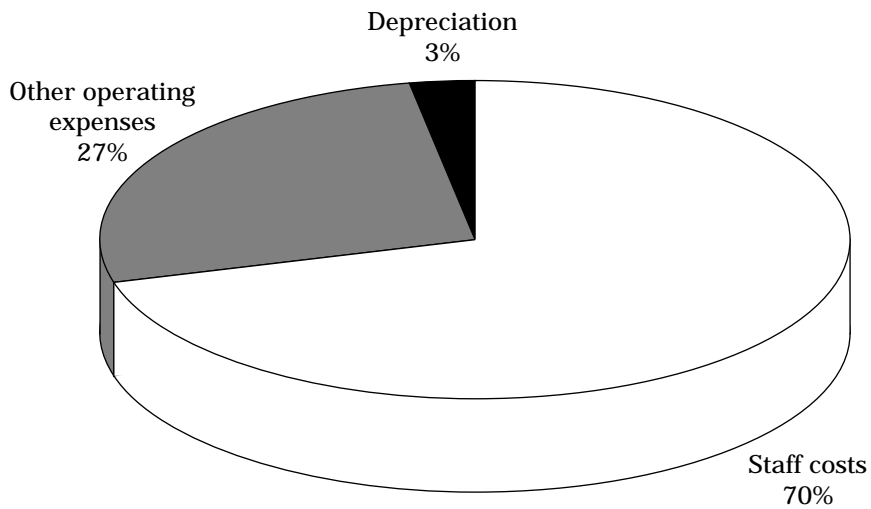
South Downs College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £9,599,883

Figure 6

South Downs College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £9,120,356

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