

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Spelthorne College

March 1997

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

By June 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	59%	29%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	14%	50%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	12%	54%	30%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 37/97

SPELTHORNE COLLEGE

SOUTH EAST REGION

Inspected September-December 1996

Summary

Spelthorne College is a sixth form college in Ashford, Surrey. It is the sole provider of 16 to 18 education for the town of Ashford, although there are seven other schools and colleges offering post-16 education within a radius of eight miles. The college has a good relationship with parents, local employers and the wider community. Recruitment to GCE A level courses has declined markedly but there is a growing range of vocational courses, including some that are taught away from the college. The college is committed to supporting its students and it monitors their progress carefully. There is good curriculum management in a few areas. Good examination results are found mainly in GCSE and some vocational courses. The college has good accommodation which is underused because of the low student numbers. The work of the governing body is poorly administered and the college should review its decision that the principal should continue to act as clerk. The recording of many management meetings is excessively informal. Strategic planning and leadership require greater involvement by governors. The college should improve its marketing. The use of a timetabled hour for learning support is inconsistently managed and many students lose learning opportunities as a consequence. There is poor teaching in some areas and GCE A level examination results are poor. The registers of students' attendance are unreliable and retention rates are low on GCE A level courses. Quality assurance procedures are ineffective.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision	Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision	3
Governance and management	4
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	4
Resources: staffing	3
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and information technology	4	Art and design	3
Business studies	2	English and modern languages	3
Leisure and tourism	2	History, geography and social sciences	4
Health and social care	2		

INTRODUCTION

1 Spelthorne College was inspected between September and December 1996. The college's arrangements for enrolment and induction were inspected in early September. Curriculum areas were inspected in October and aspects of cross-college provision in December. Eleven inspectors visited the college for a total of 52 days. They observed 94 classes and examined students' written and practical work. Meetings were held with governors, parents, college staff, students, employers, and representatives of partner schools, the local community and the Surrey Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Spelthorne College was established in 1983 as the result of a merger between the former Sunbury and Ashford sixth form colleges. Middlesex County Council doubled the size of the buildings in 1959, and Surrey County Council subsequently used part of the land for a public library and an old people's home. The college leases premises to Spelthorne gymnastics club. The college is in the centre of Ashford in north Surrey. There are good rail and road links nearby. The area is close to Heathrow Airport and its character is closer to that of West London than to most of Surrey. It shares the West London unemployment rate of about 5 per cent, rather than that of Surrey which is 3.3 per cent. A substantial part of the college's catchment area is regarded by the health and social service authorities as being socially deprived.

3 The college is the largest provider of education in Spelthorne for students aged 16 to 18, although there are also two local 11 to 18 church schools, one of which is grant maintained. The four 11 to 16 schools in the area send about 25 per cent of their pupils to the college. Within eight miles there are two other sixth form colleges and three large general further education colleges. There has been a 35 per cent decline in the number of 16 year olds in the borough since 1988, and their numbers are not due to increase substantially until the turn of the century. Some courses for part-time students are taught in Staines and at Southall. The college has expanded to reach 1,119 enrolments, 522 of whom are full time and 597 part time. 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.

4 The college has four curriculum areas: business studies, creative arts, humanities, and science and leisure. There are 29 full-time and eight fractional permanent teaching staff, totalling over 33 full-time equivalents. In addition, there are five full-time equivalent sessional teachers. There are 22 support staff amounting to 10 full-time equivalents. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

5 The college's purpose is to provide an educational service of high quality for the community of Spelthorne and the Heathrow area. While specialising in advanced courses preparing students for entry to higher

education, it also offers training and basic education to local people of all ages, whether in work or unemployed. Its services to local employers, employees and residents also extend to providing higher education in business studies.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

6 The college offers an extensive range of daytime courses for both 16 to 19 year old full-time and adult full-time and part-time students. Twenty-two general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects, two GCE advanced supplementary (AS) courses and nine general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects are available at the college. For the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ), six subjects are offered at advanced level, five at intermediate level and one at foundation level. A national diploma course in photography and a national certificate in business and finance validated by the Edexcel Foundation (formerly the Business and Technology Education Council), national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 in administration, a diploma in nursery nursing, and a certificate in childcare and education have been established. In September 1996, the college introduced a higher national certificate in business.

7 Access to higher education courses were established before incorporation, and student numbers have grown steadily. The courses are in humanities, social sciences and art and design and they are offered flexibly so that students may study during the daytime or in the evenings. The college has formal arrangements to secure students' progression to the Royal Holloway College of London University, Kingston University, St Mary's College, Twickenham, Surrey University and the Surrey Institute of Art and Design.

8 Adult evening provision is extensive. It includes both courses funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and recreational programmes. The majority of courses for adults are offered through franchise arrangements with Surrey Youth and Adult Education Service and London Training Agency, through which courses in English for speakers of other languages, dressmaking and information technology are held at The Southall Centre. There are more than 120 part-time enrolments at Southall. The college has also introduced its own part-time courses, many of which are GCE A level or GCSE programmes. Recently, the college has obtained funding from the European Social Fund to mount courses that help people return to work. More than 40 students have successfully completed this programme.

9 The number of full-time 16 to 19 year old students entering the college has remained steady for the past five years. However, there has been a marked decline in the number taking GCE A levels following the introduction of advanced vocational courses. In 1991, there were 344 GCE A level students, but by 1996 the number had fallen by almost 50 per cent to 173. This includes students who are taking a GCE A level subject

with an advanced GNVQ course. This reduction in student numbers has not been reflected in a similar decrease in the number of subjects offered; the resulting larger number of very small groups calls into question their cost and academic viability. The college plans to review the number of subjects offered at advanced level before September 1998.

10 The college has been slow to recognise a need for a systematic approach to marketing and promotion. Recently the college's marketing committee has been re-established and a new marketing officer appointed. Whilst the current prospectus is well produced, many other public documents do little to attract prospective students.

11 Good relations have been established with Surrey TEC which has supported a series of information technology projects, including an education Internet service in 1996. The college is a member of the Thameside education business partnership and it has built up contacts with local employers which have grown with the development of vocational courses. Local employers provide work experience placements and visit the college to talk to students. They also support students by helping with the Young Enterprise scheme.

12 An additional studies programme complements coursework, although the range of activities has declined. There is a choice of programmes in, for example, information technology, art, creative writing and French. About a quarter of these courses are accredited by the Surrey Open College Federation. Participation in the additional studies programme among students is variable. Recreation and sports programmes are the more popular. Links with the community are strengthened by shared use of the college's excellent sporting facilities, especially those for gymnastics and basketball. Students participate in drama productions and, at the time of the inspection, Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire* was in preparation. Four or five students take work experience placements abroad every year through Spelthorne's twinning arrangement with Melun in France.

13 The college has an equal opportunity policy which is published in the student handbook, but there are no formal procedures for monitoring its implementation and effects. There is little evidence, other than in some of its franchised work, that the college promotes equality of opportunity, and there has been no recent staff development on the subject. Nobody has a specific responsibility for equal opportunities nor is there a committee to consider the issues. Enrolment data on gender and ethnicity are collected in a way which allows managers to judge the profiles for each course and for the whole college. At present 61 per cent of students aged 16 to 19 are female. The college fulfils its statutory duties under sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* by its willingness to provide students with the opportunity to participate in religious education and worship.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

14 The corporation board has 12 members: five are independent business members, one is the TEC nominee, two are from the community, one is a parent, one a student, one a staff member and the principal. There are currently two vacancies; for a parent and a business member. New governors are being sought from local companies to bring property experience and a local community perspective to the board. Members have experience in finance, insurance, computing, marketing and personnel. Governors hold only three meetings a year but attendance has been moderate, at 74 per cent.

15 The principal has been clerk to the governors since the run-up to incorporation. The Council's *Guide for College Governors* (1994) identifies the roles of the clerk to the corporation and the principal as being different. The role of the clerk is to provide independent advice to the board, and that of the principal to provide professional advice. The Council's *Guide for Clerks* (1996) describes the necessity for the clerk to preserve independence from the management of the college. At the 1996 summer term meeting of the board, the principal offered to resign as clerk but the issue was treated as a matter of confidence in personal probity rather than one of sound public administration. The governors decided unanimously that the principal should remain as clerk. They also decided that the finance officer should report to the governing body if he detected either the principal and clerk, or the chairman of the board, acting in contravention of the instrument and articles of government, or the guidelines on standards in public life. Persistence in combining the duties of principal and clerk, and in dividing the responsibilities of the clerk is unwise in the changed circumstances of colleges since incorporation. The matter should be reviewed once more by the governors.

16 Governors' meetings are conducted to a largely standard agenda on which the largest item is usually consideration of the principal's report. Members discuss a wide range of issues, including finance, the college mission, the strategic plan, and aspects of academic performance such as students' retention and achievements under one or two standard headings. There is no evidence that governors set targets for the college and its senior managers to achieve. The governors largely react to advice from managers. Discussion with governors during the inspection suggested that they had little awareness of their role. Some governors have undertaken training. They have not reviewed their effectiveness.

17 Minutes of meetings are brief and give little sense of the passage of debate. The basis on which matters are agreed is rarely reported. No clear record is made of any action decided upon. In some significant matters, such as the adoption of a register of governors' interests, the minutes of successive meetings record consideration of the matter in principle and of the format to be used, but there is no minute of a formal decision to proceed. A register does now exist but it took over a year to complete.

18 There are four committees of the board: audit; personnel and remuneration; finance and employment; and premises and health and safety. Although every committee has terms of reference, some are inadequate. For example, the premises and health and safety committee has a membership of two; the student and one other governor. The duties of this committee are mainly to carry out a termly inspection of the premises and to report on their condition. Defects are reported to each governors' meeting as matters of health and safety. Various statements on health and safety in the college do not relate clearly to one another. The premises and health and safety committee has no remit to advise on health and safety policy or on accommodation strategy. The FEFC's auditors in their report on the college (1995) recommended that a committee of the governors should deal with employment policy. The college responded by amending its committee structure to establish a finance and employment committee, but the new terms of reference still make no mention of employment policy. Records of the board and of its committees are marked by a degree of informality that is inconsistent with good practice.

19 There is a senior management team of six. They are the principal, the vice-principal, the programme manager, the systems manager, the college counsellor, and the part-time finance and premises officer. This group meets weekly and follows a standard agenda. The minutes of their meetings are brief notes with no account of discussion. In few cases is any responsibility for action identified, and there is no evidence that issues are followed through. The evidence provided by the record of these meetings is too slight to enable inspectors to form a reliable judgment of the effectiveness of the senior management team. The four curriculum leaders meet weekly. Teachers in each curriculum area also meet weekly. Communication amongst staff is good, but their involvement in meetings is costly in terms of staff time. Management of the curriculum varies widely in effectiveness. Areas such as business and art and design are well led. The management structure was modified a year ago to combine curriculum management and pastoral care. Curriculum area heads have contributed substantially to the college's shift towards vocational courses, but their heavy teaching timetables limit their potential effectiveness as managers.

20 The process of strategic planning involves all teachers. Curriculum areas produce their own development plans which both review past performance and make proposals for the coming year. These plans, all written to the same format, use data to provide a sound base for action. Curriculum plans influence the college strategic plan, but there is little evidence that the converse is also true. The strategic plan does not clearly chart the medium to long-term objectives of the college, but concentrates instead on issues for the coming year.

21 The budget is largely administered centrally. Money for materials is allocated to curriculum areas on the basis of student numbers. Curriculum area managers make bids for equipment to the principal. There are no independent cost centres and no unit costing. The college has a poor

record in producing data on time for the FEFC, but management information for internal use is improving rapidly. Most student and financial information is readily available and accurate. The college's average level of funding for 1996-97 is £18.32 per unit, compared with the median for sixth form colleges of £19.36. The college exceeded its growth target in 1994-95, and the college estimates that it did so in 1995-96. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996, are shown in figures 5 and 6.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

22 The college is well regarded in the local community, and particularly so by parents, for the support and guidance it gives to its students. There are clear guidelines to help staff to fulfil their role in pastoral care. Personal tutors are strongly committed to giving students sound guidance and help at every stage of their time in college. Students, parents and staff from partner schools are equally positive about this aspect of Spelthorne's work.

23 The college provides comprehensive information about its courses. There is an annual programme of events which helps students to make informed choices. Open days and evenings when staff are on hand to provide advice are well attended. There are close links with partner schools and promotional visits by college staff are well received. The college provides ample opportunities for prospective students to sample college life. Schools appreciate the information they receive on the achievements of their former pupils. There are well-established procedures for enrolment. Staff are fully briefed and they ensure that impartial advice is given. Arrangements for adult students and those entering access to higher education courses are equally good.

24 Induction activities are generally well conceived and carefully planned. Students complete an evaluation of enrolment and induction with their personal tutors, providing a useful aid to identifying early problems. The information technology skills of students are assessed during induction and a leaflet is issued to all students outlining their entitlement to further training. Transfer between courses is eased by clear procedures. Student records created during induction are good.

25 Full-time and part-time day students are allocated to a personal tutor who monitors their progress regularly and conducts registration daily. There is a system of progress review and action planning. Three times a year, personal tutors discuss reports from subject tutors with students, who then record the action that is needed. These records are used to check that the necessary action has been taken before the next review. There are consultation evenings for parents and they comment positively on the information they receive in advance of meetings. Students' records of achievements are updated so that they are ready for use when applications for employment or to higher education are made.

26 The college has developed its own materials for screening students on entry. Assessment of students' skills in mathematics and English takes place during induction and the results are passed to the learning support department for action. Students in need of support are tutored either in class or in the college learning support centre by a group of part-time specialists. In addition, there is a one-hour session at the end of each day in which all full-time students are offered opportunities for additional learning support. Help for the small number of students with special learning difficulties, for example, those with dyslexia, is arranged by the head of learning support. The college recognises that the increasing numbers of students whose difficulties are identified through the screening process has meant that it has not been able to meet their needs as promptly as it would wish.

27 Careers education and guidance are provided systematically at appropriate times of the year. The college works effectively with the Surrey Careers Service and regular checks are made to ensure that students use the service. Facilities for careers advice are good and include a special area and an interview room in the college information centre. Advice on progression to higher education is good and a notable feature of staff development has been in-service training in writing references for students applying to university. Students who leave college before completion of their courses are offered careers advice.

28 Reasons for students' absence from college are recorded and there is a procedure for initiating action when absence becomes a cause for concern. There are sanctions to encourage students to meet the college standard of 80 per cent attendance. Parents are contacted swiftly if problems arise and they speak highly of the college's efforts to keep them informed. Students receive a handbook with basic information on their rights and responsibilities. It also contains the college charter. All students receive a copy of this booklet but few show any awareness of its contents. A college council with representatives from each tutor group is active in representing student views.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

29 The quality of teaching is variable. Of the 94 sessions observed, only 48 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. This is 15 per cent below the average for all lessons observed during the 1995-96 inspection programme, according to the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. Almost 10 per cent of lessons had weaknesses which outweighed strengths which is slightly above the average of 8 per cent recorded in the same report. The average attendance in the teaching sessions inspected was 82 per cent. Attendance ranged from an average of 88 per cent in health and social care to 73 per cent in English and communication studies. The average number of students in the sessions inspected was 11. The following table summarises the grades awarded to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		4	14	16	4	0	38
GCSE		0	0	5	1	0	6
GNVQ		3	10	9	1	0	23
Other		4	10	10	3	0	27
Total		11	34	40	9	0	94

**includes access to higher education courses.*

30 Schemes of work were good in only two of the seven curriculum areas inspected; leisure, tourism and sport, and childcare. They contained clear statements of aims and objectives, details of the teaching methods to be used, resources, assessment policy and procedures. Teachers in these subjects discussed course aims and objectives with students to engender a sense of partnership. In some other areas, schemes of work were little more than lists of topics. They provided minimal information about learning activities and assessment. In science, schemes of work were brief and superficial, giving only topic titles. The planning of lessons was variable. In the better lessons, teachers discussed the aims of each lesson with their students at the outset. In art and design, some lessons were carefully planned and tasks were interesting and challenging. Teachers encouraged their students constantly. In leisure, tourism and sport, activities were carefully matched to the aims of each lesson and to the aptitudes of students. Lesson plans in most mathematics and science lessons lacked sufficient detail to be of use. In English and communication studies, the work in some lessons was too easy and there was too little opportunity for students to contribute to class discussion.

31 In the better lessons, teachers managed their classes well and used a variety of teaching methods to keep students' attention. In health and childcare lessons, there was a good balance between theory and practical activity. The pace of work varied but required constant effort and concentration from students. In a nursery nursing lesson, students worked in pairs to solve a practical problem within a strict time limit. In one inventive and challenging art and design lesson, staff had made a large mobile as a stimulus for the work of the students. The lesson was divided up so that students had to draw the mobile in several ways. Students' confidence grew and their skills developed during the lesson. The final part of the lesson involved a gymnast performing aspects of her routine with moving ribbons, which evoked the appearance of the mobile. Students were well taught by the tutor who was assisted by one of the artists in residence. At the end of each part of the lesson, there was a group critique of the drawings, which helped students to make rapid improvements in their work.

32 Relations between staff and students are generally good. This is particularly evident in childcare, leisure, tourism and sport, performing arts and business studies where cordial relations underpin a climate of high expectations and purposeful work. In GCE A level physical education, there is a friendly partnership between staff and students which encourages students to take some responsibility for their own learning so that the sense of satisfaction when things go well is shared. However, in some other curriculum areas where relations are friendly there is less evidence of challenge and urgency in the work.

33 Many of the weaker lessons were characterised by low expectations of students' ability on the part of teachers. In science, teachers often failed to make the link between theory and practical work. In mathematics and science, lessons sometimes proceeded so slowly that students were left to cope with the most difficult part of a task after the lesson. On several occasions where teachers allowed a few students to dominate the lesson, the rest of the class remained passive. In a business studies lesson the tutor continually interrupted group discussion, so that students had little scope or encouragement to develop and test ideas. In some humanities classes teachers seriously underestimated their students. For example, in a second-year GCE A level English lesson, students were required to count the sentences on an overhead transparency and to give definitions of simple everyday words. In an English literature lesson discussion was so dominated by the teacher that students were unable to contribute effectively.

34 In many areas of the curriculum, too little account was taken of students' differing aptitudes and abilities. Because of low recruitment in art and design, classes of a reasonable size can only be created by bringing together students from different courses, at different levels and from both years of a two-year course. At times, the pace of work was dictated by that which could be achieved by students of the lowest ability, because teachers found the task of providing appropriate work for students of all levels of ability too complex. Expectations dropped and the standards to be expected at each level were obscured. In humanities, and in some business studies and science classes, the lack of differentiation meant that the more able and the weaker students were expected to work at the same speed. Some lessons were based on activities that could more appropriately have been undertaken as homework so that valuable teaching time was unnecessarily curtailed. For example in business studies, students were required to read the set textbook in class. Tutors' expectations in several science sessions were much too low and when demands were made, for example by setting homework, students' attendance fell away.

35 The college offers a fifth hour at the end of each college day to provide opportunities for full-time students to study on their own, under supervision, or receive additional learning support. This session is an integral part of the five hours allocated to each course or subject. However,

the time is not used consistently well across the college. Sometimes teachers are required to attend meetings during the fifth hour. Alternative arrangements are not always made and as a consequence students do not receive their full allocation of teaching or learning support time. Students regard the use of this time as varying in its effectiveness. More teaching time is lost as a result of allowing students a break in the middle of the college's standard two-hour lessons. This break is intended to last no more than 10 minutes, but it often lasts much longer and it disrupts the rhythm of the lesson. There are few adults on full-time programmes and there is only limited support for adult part-time students. They have access to the learning centre in the evening and students state that staff are responsive to their needs.

36 There is no systematic approach which is standard across the college to assessing homework or recording students' progress. While homework is set and returned regularly in humanities, some feedback is poor and does not explain how the work might be improved. In GNVQ leisure and tourism, while the written briefing notes for assignments are clear and comprehensive, and work is marked and returned promptly, teachers' comments are often unhelpful. The grading process leading to the final mark is not properly explained and some students are confused about it.

37 The college provides several kinds of work experience. In childcare programmes, individual targets are set for the progress to be achieved during work placement. Students' experiences are used afterwards to provide examples in class. However, in health and social care programmes, work experience is poorly integrated with the rest of the curriculum and second-year students see it as of only marginal importance. The business studies section has built up close links with local firms to ensure that work experience is appropriate, and employers often visit the college to contribute to classes. One employer provides an award for the best business studies student of the year. In leisure and tourism, work placements, and visits and contributions from guest speakers are all closely linked to units of the GNVQ programme. Some departments provide enrichment opportunities to enhance students' learning experience. Artists in residence set an example of the disciplines of professional work to art and design students, and show them how their work progresses from day to day.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

38 Many students enjoy college life and appreciate the good relations with their teachers. They are generally interested in their studies and the more motivated show enthusiasm for their work. Most students display an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding of their work. In practical sessions students demonstrate a good awareness of health and safety issues.

39 The following table shows the number of students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE A level examinations each year between 1993 and 1995,

together with pass rates at grades A to E, measured against national averages for sixth form colleges.

GCE A level entries and pass rates 1993-96

	1993	1994	1995
Number of students entered	123	117	101
Number of subjects in which students were entered	26	25	23
Average pass rate A to E (per cent)	80	70	73
National average for sixth form colleges (per cent)	82	83	84
Number of subjects with pass rates at or above national average	Data not available	4	4
Number of subjects with pass rates below national average	Data not available	21	19

40 The college's average pass rate at grades A to E declined from only two points below the national average for sixth form colleges in 1993, to 11 points below in 1995. At the same time, the national average for sixth form colleges was rising. In 1996, the college's average pass rate declined even further to 69 per cent.

41 The number of entries for GCE A level qualifications among students aged 16 to 18 has declined by 24 per cent since 1993. In 1996, entries in 11 out of 20 subjects were very small, ranging from one to nine. Entries exceeded 20 in only two subjects. The following table gives a comparison of 1995 pass rates in selected subjects with the number of students who enrolled in November 1993.

Comparison of GCE A level pass rates with numbers enrolled 1993-95

GCE A level subject entered	Number of students	1995 A to E rates (%)	Successful completion rate*
Art and design	10	90	82
History	8	100	53
Chemistry	2	100	22
French	1	100	11
Geography	9	78	44
Mathematics	10	70	16
Psychology	10	70	41
Sociology	12	58	44

**percentage of students who started the course in November 1993 and who passed on completion.*

Good pass rates in many subjects are severely compromised by poor student retention.

42 Students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1995, scored on average 3.8 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2). This placed the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, according to data published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE).

43 Between 1993 and 1996, there was a substantial increase in numbers of GCE A level entries from students aged 19 or over. However, the average pass rate has declined from 76 per cent in 1993 to 59 per cent in 1996. Pass rates were above the national average for sixth form colleges in only two subjects out of 16 in 1996. Enrolments in individual subjects were low and although retention was variable, it was generally poor.

44 In 1992, the college decided to subscribe to an independent, external service which provides an analysis of the value added to students' achievements by comparing their actual performance at GCE A level with their predicted performance based on GCSE achievements. The college was unable to complete to its satisfaction the preliminary work and it therefore abandoned the project. Since that time, staff have developed a college system for measuring added value but there has been no systematic evaluation of the data. The college is reviewing and refining the system for use next year.

45 The analysis of retention on all courses was made difficult for inspectors by the generally untidy and poorly kept registers. They were not always signed, and dates on which students joined or left the college were not clearly identified. The 1995-96 registers for five GCE A level subjects were missing. According to the college's data, retention across the whole GCE A level provision is poor and it has declined sharply from 76 per cent in 1994, to 66 per cent in 1996. Retention in physics, chemistry and biology is consistently poor. In biology it was 22 per cent in 1995 and worse still at 13 per cent in 1996. In mathematics, retention improved from 23 per cent in 1995 to 60 per cent in 1996, but it was still below the college average.

46 The number of students aged 16 to 18 entered for GCSE has dropped by 43 per cent since 1993. This is largely a consequence of the college's early decision to introduce a wide range of vocational programmes which it considers more appropriate for many of the students who were previously enrolled on GCSE repeat courses. The number of entries has fallen even more sharply by 62 per cent over the same period. Pass rates at grades A* to C have varied around the national average, but the rate rose to 58 per cent in 1996, which is 7 per cent above the national average. Retention is generally good, and it has remained fairly constant at about 86 per cent. Data on students' achievements on GCSE courses are shown in the following table.

Students' achievements on GCSE courses 1993-96

	1993	1994	1995	1996
Number of students aged 16 to 18	249	170	147	142
Number of subjects	22	16	16	15
Number of entries	488	222	229	187
Average pass rate grades A* to C	43	51	47	58
Average pass rate grades A* to C for sixth form colleges	50	49	48	51

47 The college introduced advanced vocational qualifications in 1993. In 1995, 63 per cent of the 41 students aged 16 to 18 entered for GNVQ advanced level assessment in four courses were successful. This placed the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, according to the tables published by the DfEE. Results in 1996 show a marked improvement. The number of students rose to 71; retention improved to 93 per cent; and the pass rate rose by 24 per cent. The pass rate in business studies was particularly good at 84 per cent with 77 per cent of students awarded distinction or merit. Data on students' achievements in GNVQ advanced courses are shown in the following table.

Students' achievements on GNVQ advanced courses 1993-96

	1993-95	1994-96
Number of students aged 16 to 18 enrolled	54	71
Number of students completing the course (retention as a percentage in brackets)	41 (76)	66 (93)
Number achieving a full pass (percentage of those enrolled achieving a full pass in brackets)	26 (48)	51 (72)
Number achieving distinction/merit (percentage of those passing achieving merit or distinction in brackets)	9 (35)	40 (78)

48 Entries of students aged 16 to 18 for GNVQ intermediate level have fallen by 43 per cent since 1993. The average pass and retention rates have been variable over this period. The pass rate for GNVQ intermediate business studies in 1995 was 90 per cent with 100 per cent retention, whereas the pass rate for GNVQ intermediate in art and design was 33 per cent with 60 per cent retention. The data on students' achievements on GNVQ intermediate courses are shown in the following table.

Students' achievements on GNVQ intermediate courses 1993-96

	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96
Number of students enrolled	110	71	63
Number of students completing the course (percentage retention in brackets)	87 (79)	51 (72)	47 (75)
Number achieving full pass (percentage of those enrolled achieving full pass in brackets)	50 (46)	40 (56)	27 (43)
Number achieving distinction/merit (percentage of those passing achieving merit or distinction)	30 (60)	29 (73)	16 (59)

49 In 1995 there were 114 entries in seven single vocational subjects at NVQ level 2. The average pass rate was 62 per cent, with 85 per cent retention. Records for entries in 1996 are incomplete. Entries in vocational subjects for students aged 19 or over totalled seven in the two years 1995 and 1996. Two of these students passed. In 1996, all 10 students entered for the nursery nursing diploma passed but retention was only 57 per cent.

50 The college has entered students for assessment on access to higher education courses for some years. More than half of the students who applied for higher education have been successful. The destinations of students who did not progress to higher education are largely unknown.

51 The college records the destinations of its leavers. Progression to higher education is lower than the average for sixth form colleges. Data on destinations of students aged 16 to 18 for the last two years are set out in the following table.

Destinations of students aged 16 to 18 in 1995 and 1996

	1995	1996
Total number of students completing their courses	226	248
Progressing to higher education (%)	19	19
Progressing to other further education courses (%)	8	10
In employment or training (%)	60	63
Other (%)	7	5
Unemployed (%)	2	2
Unknown (%)	4	1

52 Students have taken part in events and competitions outside the college. In 1996 the college's first and second soccer teams came top of their respective Surrey Sixth Form College leagues. A student has

represented England at cricket; another has been selected to represent England in a junior ladies' basketball competition in Holland in 1997.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

53 The college has not yet developed a policy and strategy for improving the quality of its services. Over the past three years, the college has carried out a number of course reviews which have had little obvious impact on academic performance. Between 1993 and 1996, the college introduced a three-year cycle of internal peer group inspections of curriculum areas, which followed the format of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Since 1995, course reports have been produced in all areas. These set out data on examination results and retention. In 1995, the college became a member of the Hampshire and Surrey sixth form colleges' external quality review group, through which staff assess curriculum quality in each others' institutions. Some courses, mainly vocational and access to higher education programmes are also subject to external assessment by awarding bodies.

54 The quality of course reports is uneven. They are descriptive rather than evaluative and they lack any measurable targets for improvement. Questionnaires to students are used widely and an analysis of their findings has led to improvements in a few areas. However, the data obtained are not collated to inform planning. The college's administrative and support services are not yet subject to systematic quality assurance procedures.

55 Senior managers are aware of the deficiencies in the college's quality assurance practice. In January 1996, the principal passed her responsibility for quality assurance to a member of the senior management team. In June 1996, a quality assurance board was established. Membership was originally confined to senior managers but it has now been supplemented by the addition of a governor. The terms of reference of the board and its intended membership are unclear. However, it is beginning to define a framework for quality assurance. There will be a review of the peer inspection process which, in the past, failed to address key issues such as the quality of teaching and learning, poor examination results, poor attendance and low retention. The college recognises that it needs to set specific targets for improvement if its new procedures are to have the desired effect.

56 An appraisal system for full-time teaching staff was introduced in 1995. It includes observation of teaching. Staff are appraised by their managers. The first round of appraisal was completed in July 1996. The second round has now begun and includes both teaching and support staff on permanent contracts. The appraisal process identifies staff-development needs.

57 Staff development is the responsibility of the college's programme manager. In 1995-96, £20,000 was spent on external training, representing about 1.6 per cent of the college staffing budget.

Staff-development activities include training to participate in the Hampshire and Surrey sixth form colleges' external quality review system, training in academic subjects, and training for assessor and verifier qualifications. In addition, five days of college time are allocated to staff development. All external training is evaluated by the staff concerned, but its impact on college performance is not assessed. The college hopes to achieve Investor in People status in March 1997. The college has no staff handbook but there are briefing and policy papers covering a number of areas which provide some guidance.

58 The college charter is included in the students' handbook. It has been revised. However, students' awareness of the charter and their appreciation of its importance are variable. An evaluation of the charter was undertaken by students in February 1996 and the findings analysed. However, their recommendations have been only partially implemented.

59 The college self-assessment report follows the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Some sections are rigorous and evaluative and others much less so. The report overrates strengths but it does recognise weaknesses, particularly those relating to quality assurance. It does not take a sufficiently critical view of the many issues that confront the college, notably the quality of teaching and learning. There is no action plan to address the issues that have been identified.

RESOURCES

Staffing

60 There are 29 full-time and eight fractional permanent teaching staff totalling over 33 full-time equivalents. In addition, there are five full-time equivalent sessional teachers. There are 22 support staff amounting to 10 full-time equivalents. Only one member of support staff is full time. The college employs students as part-time technicians and assistants. There are three artists in residence who are given facilities to work in return for teaching up to six hours each week. Sixty-three per cent of the teaching staff are female and 8 per cent are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Sixty-three per cent of teachers are over 40 years of age. Fifty-three per cent have over five years' service at the college and 30 per cent have over 10 years' service.

61 Teachers are well qualified. Eighty-nine per cent of permanent teachers have teaching qualifications; 87 per cent hold first degrees and 19 per cent postgraduate awards. Six people have qualifications from the training and development lead body to act as internal verifiers, and one person is qualified to accredit students' prior learning. Nearly half the teaching and management staff are qualified to assess GNVQ and NVQ awards. Only about one-third of the permanent teaching staff have either qualifications or recent professional experience in vocational areas, although the college offers GNVQ and other vocational courses in most curriculum areas. There are no teachers with qualifications in leisure and

tourism. The staff in childcare and health and social care are particularly well qualified, and they have recent professional experience.

62 Staffing is the responsibility of the principal. She is assisted by a newly-appointed personnel officer who has taken over the day-to-day aspects of this work. Neither the principal nor the personnel officer have personnel qualifications. The college has a service contract with Surrey Personnel Services through which it is able to draw on professional advice. The principal, vice-principal and curriculum area managers discuss the deployment of staff each year and draw up their timetables. The large number of courses with very small numbers hinders the efficient deployment of staff. Job descriptions form part of the standard sixth form college employers' contract. Staff also receive an annual statement of responsibilities and duties as a basis for their appraisal. Staff personnel files vary in the amount and relevance of the information they contain. Some hold curricula vitae which are out of date and job descriptions that do not accurately describe current work. The college takes the view that they need not be updated with, for example, staff-development activities because this information is kept elsewhere.

Equipment/learning resources

63 Most courses are adequately or well equipped. Sports equipment used by physical education students is good, and the sports hall is particularly well equipped. The gymnastics centre has equipment of international standard for gymnastics and basketball. Whilst leisure and tourism students have no travel shop at the college, they do have access to a local commercial travel agency for work experience. The curriculum in business studies is supported by a wide range of equipment, learning resources and facilities for information technology. Secretarial students continue to use electronic typewriters for most of their work. Creative arts courses are generally well equipped. Facilities for photography and ceramics are particularly good, but there are some gaps in the equipment, especially in video and textiles. The college workshop has a range of wood and metal working equipment. Resources for full-time and part-time courses in childcare and health and social care are on different sites. Staff in childcare bring equipment and demonstration materials from their homes into college. There is only one resuscitation doll, which is old and cannot be used to demonstrate the recovery position. There is no replacement policy for equipment.

64 The information centre houses the library, 54 study places, 13 computers on a college network and four freestanding machines, two of which have compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases. The librarian is professionally qualified, but the library assistant is not. Students work part time to help staff in the centre and they carry out data entry and book processing duties. Opening hours are from 08.45 to 16.30 hours five days a week during term time. The centre also opens from 18.00 to 20.00 hours on Thursdays. Some students use Ashford public

library which is adjacent to the college and which opens on two evenings a week. The number of books is estimated to be between 14,000 and 15,000. About 30 periodicals and six newspapers are taken regularly. The library provides adequate support for the current courses. The information centre budget this year is £15,000. Part of this sum is earmarked for each curriculum area and the rest for general purchases. The librarian consults with curriculum area heads and individual subject teachers over the purchase of new stock. There is a computerised catalogue which was installed three years ago, but only about half the stock was listed at the time of inspection. The librarian produces an annual statement that shows the rates of new acquisitions and lending.

65 Information technology facilities are a particular strength of the college. The ratio of high-powered, modern computers to full-time students is 1:5, and about 1:7 for the whole student body expressed as full-time equivalents. All the college's computers are networked and have access to CD-ROM facilities. Half the computer equipment is leased and it is now nearly three years old. There are colour printing facilities and appropriate software for most purposes. Students can use any of the machines as and when they choose if they are not being used for teaching.

Accommodation

66 The college is housed on a single site in the centre of Ashford. Steady progress has been made in improving the general standard of accommodation. The pre-1914 main building has light, airy rooms which are clean and well maintained. Window replacement has been partially completed and the remainder of the work is planned for the summer of 1997. The student refectory has been refurbished and a new staff room has been constructed. A teaching block which was built in 1959 provides generally good accommodation, but the students' lavatories need improving.

67 The space available for teaching is generous in all curriculum areas. Childcare courses are housed in pleasant, carpeted rooms. The rooms at the Oast House, which are used for play workers, are better suited to practical work as the building has a quarry-tiled floor and a sink. The rooms are spacious, well kept and equipped with teaching aids. Mathematics and science rooms are well adapted for the purpose, light and well furnished. There is a fume cupboard, but chemicals are stored in jars above a radiator even though there is ample and more appropriate storage space elsewhere in the room. Creative arts accommodation is extensive, but it is scattered all over the site. The performing arts rooms are attractive and located around the hall. There is a dance studio and a seminar room on a mezzanine which overlooks the hall. There are two photography studios but there are none for video. Humanities and business studies classrooms have displays of work and reference materials. Modern languages are taught in a large room which houses the language laboratory, and there is further teaching space close to the learning centre.

The college makes particularly good use of the art, design and photography work produced by its students. It is displayed on the walls of staff and student common rooms and in most corridors. This work is changed regularly.

68 The sports facilities are good. There is a large purpose-built sports hall with an attractive seating area, a gymnasium with a sprung floor and a fitness testing room. The outdoor facilities are extensive with football pitches, hard tennis courts, a five-a-side pitch, netball courts and a floodlit basketball court. The college has daytime access to the gymnastics centre which houses the college's own multi-gym.

69 Access for students with restricted mobility is poor. There are no lifts, but ramps give access to the ground floor of the main building. Other buildings allow some access, but the library which is on the second floor has no access for students with restricted mobility.

70 The college's space utilisation is low. The large spaces and the configuration of the main building hinder the efficient use of space, but room occupancy and utilisation are only 17 per cent. Other space analysis methods also suggest that the college has twice the accommodation it needs. The college should be able to rehouse students who currently occupy mobile classrooms and other buildings within its main buildings. In 1993, the college installed a swipe-card access and registration system. There have been problems with the systems which have delayed its completion until September 1997. It should be capable of both producing a range of information on space utilisation and of replacing student registers.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

71 The particular strengths of the college are as follows:

- its good relationships with local employers and the community
- its wide range of vocational courses
- its adult education courses
- curriculum leadership in business studies, creative arts and leisure, tourism and sport
- some good results in vocational courses and GCSE
- good accommodation and equipment
- well-qualified staff.

72 If the college is to improve its provision, it should address the following:

- the rapid decline in GCE A level student numbers
- underdeveloped marketing
- the many courses with a small number of students
- insufficiently firm strategic guidance by governors

-
- unsatisfactory arrangements for clerking the board of governors
 - poor strategic planning
 - inconsistent use of the time allocated for students to study on their own
 - poor teaching in some areas
 - poor GCE A level results and low retention in most subjects
 - the lack of effective quality assurance
 - the lack of performance targets and action plans
 - poor access for students with restricted mobility.

FIGURES

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

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

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

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

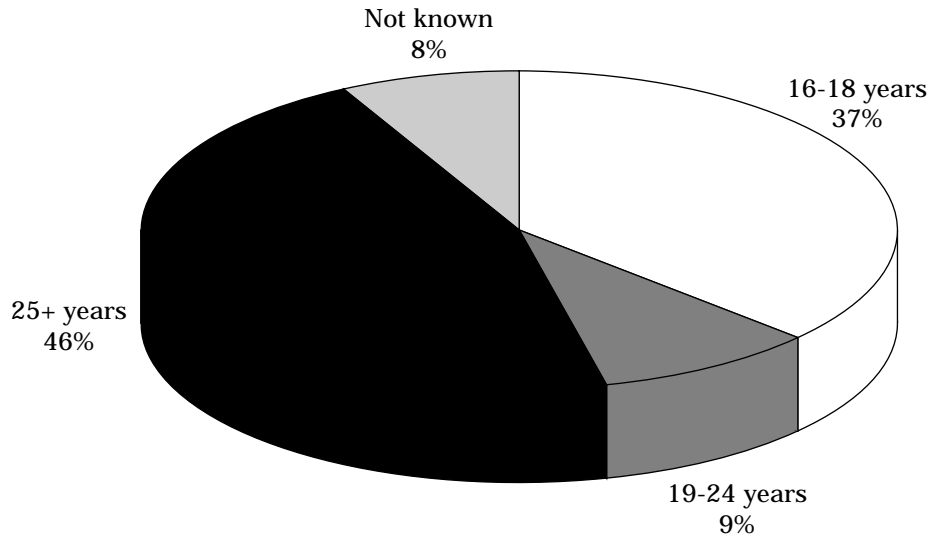
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1996)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

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

Figure 1

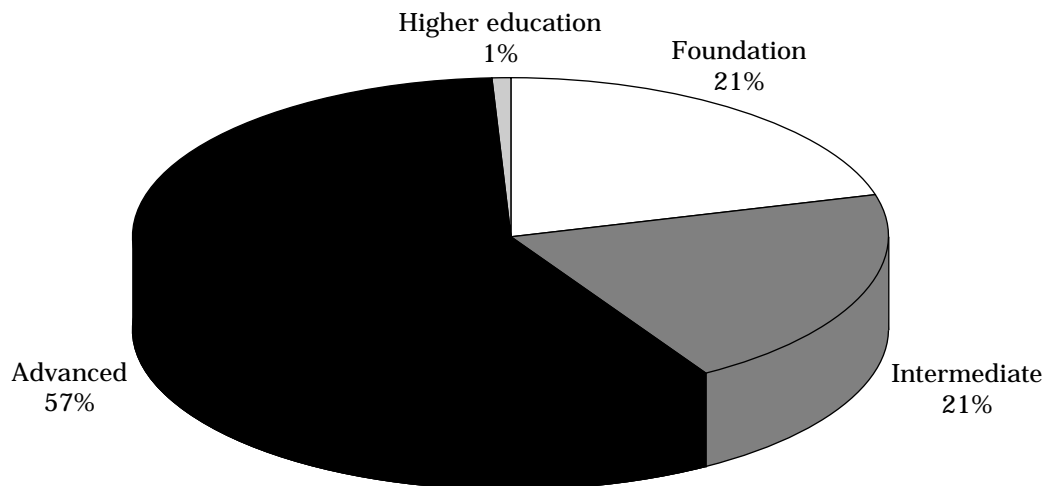
Spelthorne College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,119

Figure 2

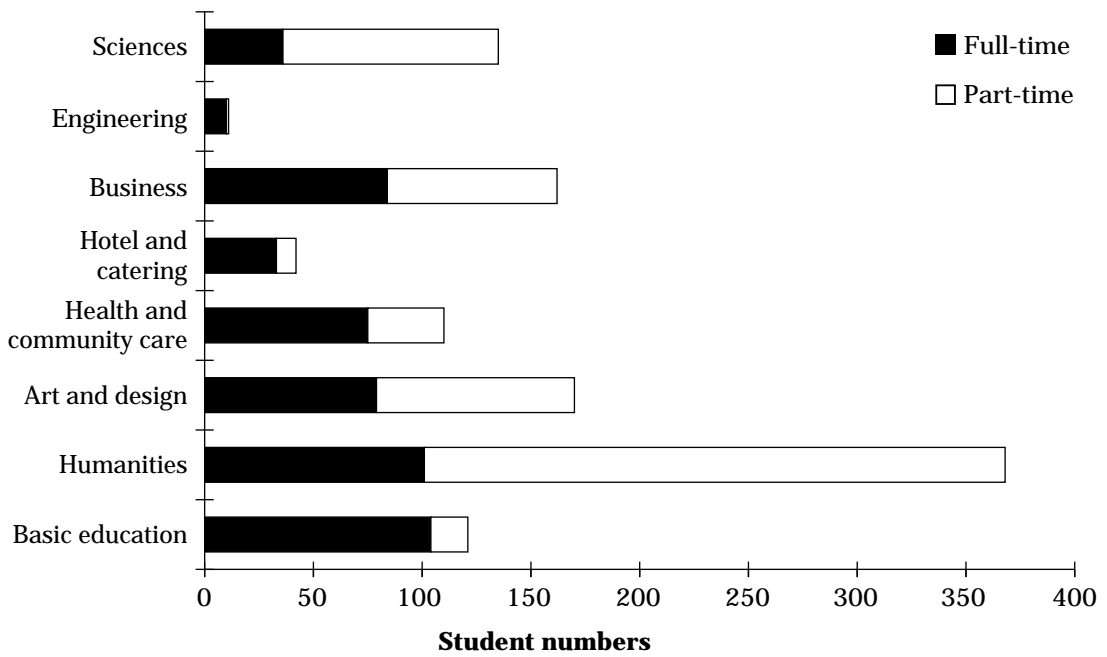
Spelthorne College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,119

Figure 3

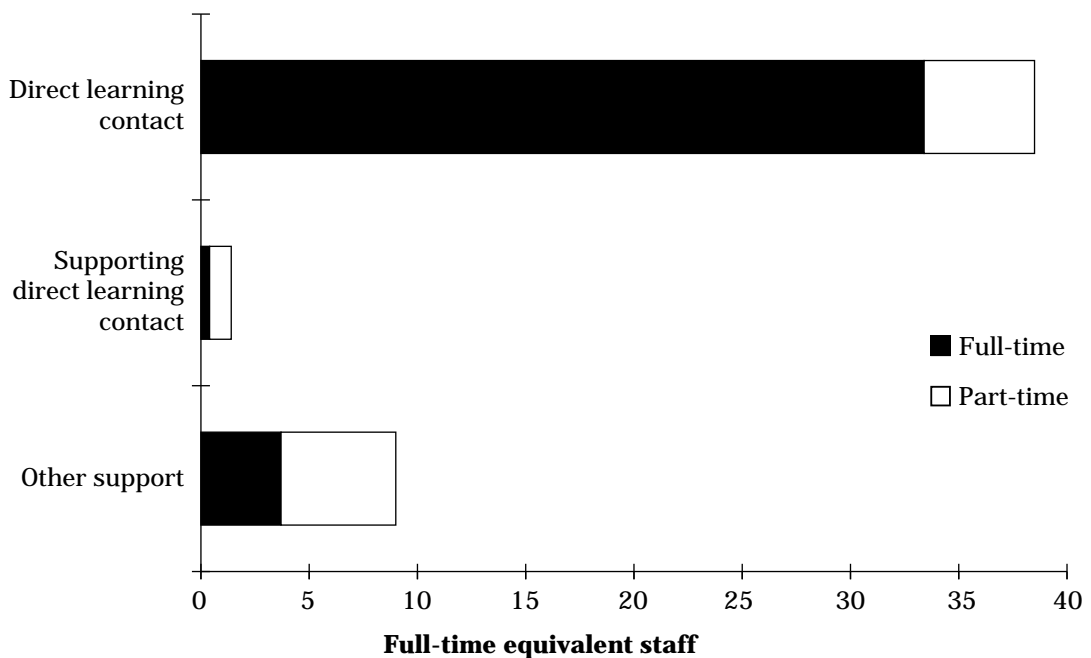
Spelthorne College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)



Student numbers: 1,119

Figure 4

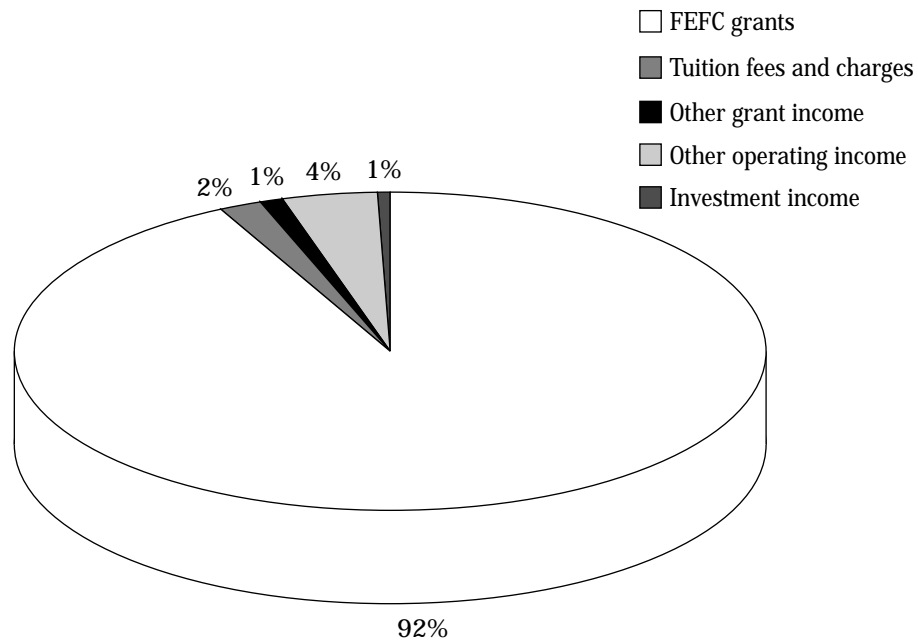
Spelthorne College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1996)



Full-time equivalent staff: 49

Figure 5

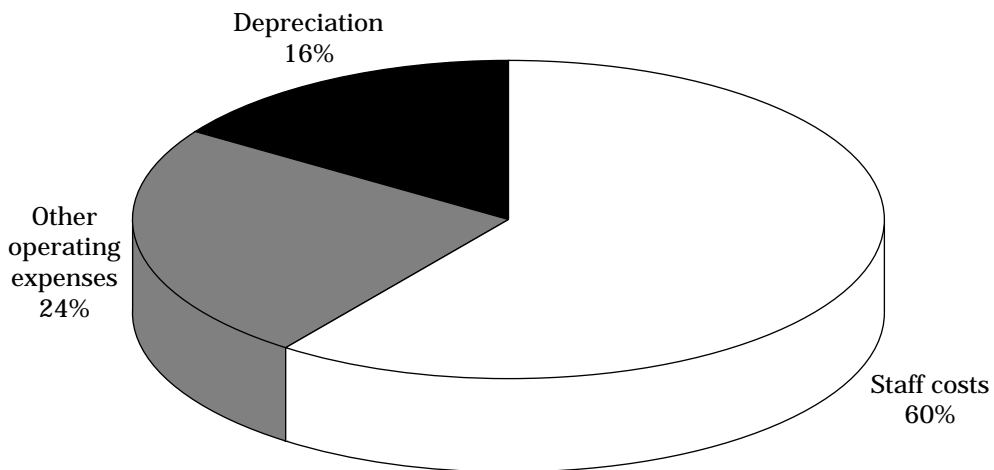
Spelthorne College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)



Income: £2,029,000

Figure 6

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



Expenditure: £2,258,000

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
March 1997