

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Stockton Sixth Form College

May 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 64/96

STOCKTON SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

NORTHERN REGION

Inspected January 1995-February 1996

Summary

Stockton Sixth Form College provides general and vocational education of a high standard. The range of courses which the college offers relates to and complements existing provision in the locality. The college has successfully extended its provision for adults and the franchising of courses in outreach centres. The board of governors is involved in furthering the college's success. The management team gives clear leadership and direction to the college. Staff are well qualified and they are enthusiastically adapting to change. The quality of teaching is good. Most students achieve their learning goals. Careers guidance is an integral part of the curriculum. Accommodation is well managed and maintained. Procedures for quality assurance are effective and are ensuring continuous improvement. The college should: continue to improve the performance and achievement of its GCE A level students; remedy the low recruitment to vocational courses; market its vocational provision more effectively; fill some identified gaps in its curriculum; secure greater co-ordination of arrangements for the guidance and support of students; monitor the effectiveness of college policies.

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

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

| Curriculum area | Grade | Curriculum area | Grade |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Mathematics | 2 | English | 2 |
| Science | 2 | Social sciences | 2 |
| Computing and information technology | 1 | Other humanities | 2 |
| Business | 3 | | |

INTRODUCTION

1 Stockton Sixth Form College was inspected in four stages. Science provision was inspected in January 1995. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected at the start of the autumn term 1995. The main inspection of specialist areas of the college's work took place between October 1995 and January 1996, followed by an inspection of cross-college aspects in February 1996. The inspection took 55 days. Inspectors visited 106 classes and examined students' work. Meetings were held with college governors, the senior management team, teaching and support staff, students, parents and guardians, local employers, careers officers and staff of local schools. Discussions took place with a representative of Teesside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Inspectors examined policy statements, minutes of committees, working papers and documents relating to the work of the college.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Stockton Sixth Form College was established in 1973 as part of the reorganisation of post-16 education on Teesside. It is situated in a residential part of the town of Stockton. It occupies a single site surrounded by playing fields, which is adjacent to an 11 to 16 Catholic secondary school and a site owned by another further education college. Stockton is part of the greater conurbation of Teesside. Local government reorganisation is currently taking place, dividing the county of Cleveland into four unitary authorities. The new unitary authority of Stockton-on-Tees includes the nearby towns of Billingham, Yarm and Thornaby. Teesside and its major town of Middlesbrough were, until recently, dominated by a small number of large employers in the steel, chemical and ship-building industries. With the decline of these traditional industries, employment is now growing in the service industries and light manufacturing.

3 The population of the borough of Stockton-on-Tees is approximately 177,000. The unemployment rate is 11.2 per cent, compared with the national average of 8.8 per cent and 14 per cent in Teesside as a whole. In some areas of the borough, unemployment levels reach 24 per cent.

4 The college recruits from 13 local schools, five of which were originally linked to the college as partner schools before incorporation. It was originally built to accommodate 550 students. In September 1995, it enrolled 1,301 students, of whom 816 were full time and 277 were part time. Courses funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) are provided on sites away from the college through collaboration with the Cleveland County Adult Education Service; these account for a further enrolment of 208 part-time adult students. A further increase in enrolments of 4 per cent is projected over the next few years. The borough includes seven 11 to 16 schools in addition to the partner schools, two 11 to 18 schools, another sixth form college and a general college of further education. Within a 15-mile radius of the college there are another six post-16 providers of education.

5 In 1995, 58.5 per cent of pupils from the five Stockton partner schools continued in full-time education after the age of 16, compared with the national figure of 72 per cent. Regionally, the staying-on rate is 61 per cent. A further 24 per cent of pupils join youth training. In England as a whole, 43.5 per cent of pupils achieve five or more General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications at grades A to C whereas in the Stockton partner schools the average percentage is 30.6 per cent. Eighty-six per cent of first-year students enrolling on advanced programmes in the college have GCSEs at grades A to C. Minority ethnic groups make up 1.6 per cent of Stockton's population and are represented by 2 per cent of the students in the college.

6 Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The college employs the equivalent of 79 full-time staff. Of these, 62 have direct contact with students and their learning. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7 The mission of the college is to extend educational opportunity in a challenging and responsive environment. Its primary strategic objective is to contribute to the achievement of national targets by increasing the level of participation and success of students in the 16 to 19 age group. It aims also to respond to the wider needs of the community by introducing high-quality part-time provision for adults.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The college offers a comprehensive range of academic courses primarily for full-time students aged 16 to 19. These include:

- 29 subjects at General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level)
- six subjects at GCE advanced supplementary (AS)
- 18 GCSE subjects.

The college's provision has grown considerably over the last five years. The range of GCE A level courses continues to expand and 64 per cent of the college's enrolment is to these courses. The college encourages students to take GCE A level general studies as an additional subject: 84 students took this option in 1995. The range of subjects available at GCSE is wide and offers students the opportunity either to resit or to take new subjects in one year. The timetable is constructed to allow the great majority of students to study the combination of subjects they choose.

9 The vocational provision is limited to those areas where the college has identified a need not fully met elsewhere in the locality and for which it already has the expertise and facilities. They are:

- General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) at foundation level in health and social care, leisure and tourism and business

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- GNVQ at intermediate level in health and social care, leisure and tourism, science and business
 - GNVQ at advanced level in health and social care, leisure and tourism and business studies
 - Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diplomas in science (sports studies) and information technology applications.

The college recognises a need to fill some gaps in its curriculum. There are no accredited courses in performing arts or media studies at level 3. The introduction of GNVQ foundation level programmes is under review. Most students taking vocational courses also take additional GCSE or GCE A level subjects. In September 1995 the college offered GCE A level students units of a GNVQ advanced level management studies course as a supplementary provision.

10 The successful programme of part-time education for adults has recently been extended. The college has decided to run this separately from its 16 to 19 courses in order to ensure that these continue to meet the needs of its younger students. The programme of education for adults includes basic level courses in psychology and counselling skills, introductory courses in computer literacy and information technology, book-keeping, GCE A level courses, GCSE courses and an access to higher education course in computing for business. In addition, the college offers 'new start' courses for women returning to study and, from 1995, introductory courses in modern languages. These are delivered through the Cleveland County Adult Education Service at various outreach centres in the locality. Both programmes have grown rapidly in response to demand and now account for 37 per cent of the college's enrolments.

11 A major aspect of the college's strategy is to ensure that all courses are suitably accredited so that the students' achievements are properly recognised. The college works within the Teesside Region Open College Network, which provides a mechanism for the accreditation of courses at various levels, including those developed by the college for its adult students. These include introduction to information technology and counselling skills courses.

12 The college's own trading company, Stockton Educational Enterprises, provides Training and Development Lead Body assessor courses for other further education institutions and schools, and for local businesses such as a local motor retailer. Stockton Sixth Form College is one of the few sixth form colleges in the north of England to have established such an enterprise.

13 All students, except for a small number who have full timetables, are required to take part in activities designed to complement their curriculum. These include sporting activities, music, first aid, a pre-driving course and drama. Students can suggest other activities which they wish to undertake: a recent requested addition is a course in sign language for the deaf.

14 The college markets its courses effectively. Clearly-presented information about the college and facilities it offers are provided in publicity materials. Leaflets about different courses are not, however, in a standard format and do not always explain arrangements for accreditation or progression routes. Recruitment to courses is often the result of personal recommendation. The college makes good use of market information. Partner schools provide information about what courses prospective college students would like, and the college acts on this information to plan new provision. Students on the adult programmes are carefully interviewed to ascertain their individual needs. The college also acts upon knowledge derived from market surveys which were commissioned as part of a Further Education Unit project. These strategies have resulted in a growth in the overall number of enrolments over the last five years although some vocational courses at foundation level failed to recruit sufficient students. Limited use is made of market intelligence data to inform the strategic plan.

15 There are extensive links with local 11 to 16 schools. These are co-ordinated by a member of the college's senior management team. School staff welcome the college's work with school pupils. This includes an intensive modern foreign languages programme offered in schools and support for technology projects in a local primary school. School pupils also visit the college to take part in educational experiences such as science investigations and history activities.

16 The relationships developed with local employers as a result of work placements are good. The local young enterprise initiative supports students in their project work. Further contacts with employers are encouraged through the neighbourhood engineers scheme. Students following modern foreign language courses participate in exchange visits to Spain and gain work experience in France. There are valuable links with the computing departments of the University of Teesside and University College, Stockton, which are working with the college to develop links to the Internet.

17 The college has a close working relationship with the local TEC. There are regular meetings between staff from the TEC and the college. The TEC has supported the college's training of assessors and its involvement in adult education.

18 The college's brief policy on equal opportunities is supplemented by comprehensive guidelines on its implementation. All staff are aware of the policy. At the time of the inspection, departments had commenced an audit of how the policy is put into practice.

19 The college accepts students with physical disabilities who have previously participated in mainstream provision. There are currently, however, few students with a physical disability at the college. There is scope for the college to market its facilities and adaptations for the physically disabled more strongly.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 The college is well governed and managed. The board of the corporation has 18 members, including the principal: 10 are independent members. Governors have a range of professional, business and educational skills. There are two parent governors, two staff governors, one TEC representative and two members who are co-opted because of their experience in partner schools. There is no student governor on the corporation. Senior managers of the college make good use of the broad experience of governors: they provide advice on such matters as the use of outside professional services. Governors have set general targets for financial stability, enrolments and the achievement of students. Governors began to review their own performance in 1994 and have recently agreed a code of conduct and developed a register of interests. The corporation recognises it must provide a more structured approach to inducting new members.

21 Governors receive an annual quality assurance report and termly reports from the principal on a wide range of college matters. The corporation has not established a clear system for receiving other reports, which would allow it to monitor the implementation of its policies in areas such as equal opportunities. Much of the work of the governors takes place in committees and working parties, which are held regularly and are well attended. There are seven committees, each with clear and concise terms of reference. A special committee deals with extraordinary issues. The finance manager is clerk to the governors: he provides advice to, and records the minutes of, the audit committee.

22 The college's management structure was reorganised in 1994. Staff understand the structure and believe their managers are responsive and effective. Senior managers work co-operatively and have a clear view of the future of the college. They provide effective guidance and leadership. The senior management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals and the finance manager. One vice-principal manages curriculum and staff development and the other manages the timetable and provision for adults. Each vice-principal is also a section head and acts as line manager to two assistant section heads for pastoral duties. The assistant section heads work with personal tutors to provide personal support and the content of the tutorial programme, such as health education and drugs awareness. Senior managers also shadow each other for specific functions, for example adult provision and resource allocation, so that they are able to deputise for one another when necessary.

23 In response to a general growth in numbers of students and staff, three assistant principal posts were created in 1994. The assistant principals lead schools of study which comprise up to six subject related departments. The schools provide a useful forum for communicating and responding to agenda items determined by management. They are still developing their roles. The college intends the schools to assist in the sharing of good management and teaching practice between departments.

24 Courses and individual subjects are generally well managed. The 17 departments are responsible for curriculum management and teaching. Most are based around a single subject and many have small numbers of staff. Heads of department relate readily to the appropriate middle or senior managers for matters such as staff development or timetabling. The principal is in close contact with the work of the departments which are accountable to him for curriculum, operational and strategic issues. He meets each head of department regularly to monitor performance and agree targets and future developments. Heads of departments meet regularly with their staff.

25 There is a well-established and effective planning cycle. Enrolment targets are agreed with senior managers and monitored assiduously. Curriculum and financial plans are related to staffing needs at an early stage in the cycle: the senior management team prepares a first draft of the strategic plan for consideration by the corporation's strategic planning group. The plan is widely discussed within the college. It has an executive summary and a clear risk analysis. In 1995, a staff working party was set up to review the college's mission statement and values. The strategic plan specifies suitable targets for the coming year but does not identify those people responsible for their implementation. Each department generates its annual operating statement to a common format. The content and usefulness of these statements vary.

26 The corporation has approved a number of key policies and the college has developed an additional number of policy strategies to guide action. The responsibilities for monitoring and implementing each of the key policies are clearly allocated to a senior member of staff. Although staff in the departments are aware of college policies they do not routinely monitor their implementation and effectiveness within their areas of work.

27 The college's management information systems are largely computerised and meet the current needs of the college. Software has been updated recently and the database on students was used effectively during enrolment to produce individual timetables for each student, and class and tutor group lists within three days. Reports are regularly produced for managers, who use details of enrolments, participation rates, and attendance in their planning.

28 Communications between teachers and managers are good. Information and opinions flow easily within the college. Staff are involved in a wide range of productive meetings and can contribute to creating agenda items for discussion. All staff meet together at least six times each year.

29 The college attempts to comply with the requirements of *The Further and Higher Education Act 1992* with regard to the provision of acts of religious worship. Although students are asked at the beginning of the year if they would like a collective act of worship, in 1995 all declined. The college provides opportunities for students to study religious studies

at GCSE and GCE A level. A weekly Christian union meeting is run by students and a small number attend. The college responded positively to a request from Islamic students for a quiet room during Ramadan.

30 The resources of the college are used effectively and efficiently. Financial planning is synchronised with the strategic planning cycle. A clear and well-understood system of delegating budgets for small items to 20 budget holders is in place. The finance officer provides senior managers and budget holders with detailed monthly statements. Departments bid each year for an annual budget based on projected numbers of students and need. The system is seen to be fair and equitable, and most needs are met. In 1995-96 the college's average level of funding is £19.33 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.37. The median for the further education sector as a whole is £18.56. 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

31 A comprehensive range of pre-enrolment activities with local schools includes: introductory courses in a range of subject areas in the summer term, visits by college staff to give information about college courses, open evenings and a day during which students can sample lessons in a range of subjects. Local schools value their links with the college. They regard the staff of the college as professional and supportive in the way they give school pupils clear and impartial advice. The college's arrangements for admitting and enrolling students are effective. Each prospective student is first interviewed at the school or at the college and again at the time of enrolment. The college runs advice sessions when the GCSE results are known. The enrolment day is well organised and runs smoothly. Staff who interview students are well briefed. In a few instances, however, students who had failed to achieve the GCSE grades they needed were placed on a GCSE resit programme without being told of alternative courses which might have been more suitable for them, at other institutions. Enrolment of adults takes place in the evenings and each adult student is interviewed.

32 Students are appreciative of the effective processes to familiarise them with the college and their courses. Full-time students stay in their tutorial groups on their first day. They are introduced to the library and information technology facilities, complete a number of administrative matters and receive a copy of the college charter. Further induction to meet the needs of individual subjects takes place within departments. For example, students taking GCE A level mathematics have a two or three week initial bridging course with an assessment of their skill in algebra. Adult students on the evening provision also receive a structured introduction to the college which includes information on the careers department, the college's charter and the college's policies.

33 The college relies on its effective tutorial system to provide continuing support and guidance for students. The system is reviewed regularly. Each tutorial group contains about 20 students from a range of the college's courses. Each group is limited to students in either the first or second year of their programmes. Most teaching staff are tutors to one of these groups. Tutors are responsible for keeping the students informed on college matters, providing guidance and monitoring their achievement. Groups meet daily, either for brief information-giving sessions, or in longer sessions for group and individual work. A number of sessions are left free to enable students to choose their own topics. These are not always entirely successful. Some students consider that the sessions are not sufficiently focused.

34 The processes used for monitoring the academic progress of full-time students are rigorous and effective. Information from subject teachers on the achievement and attitude of each student is used in tutorial periods to develop individual action plans. Students develop their plans in consultation with their tutors, setting their own learning objectives and, subsequently, evaluating their progress in achieving them. Parents and guardians receive regular reports of progress and have the opportunity to attend consultancy evenings. Students who fail to meet the targets of their action plans are subject to special review. Students on special review are interviewed by an assistant section head; parents and guardians may be invited to attend. The college does not encourage students to complete records of achievement, though most new students bring such records from their school. Problems of absence or attitude are followed up quickly by tutors using a system of 'notes of concern'. The procedures for students to drop or change a course are clear, and accurate records are kept. Fewer than 10 per cent of the students make such changes. Adult students also have individual interviews that result in action plans.

35 Additional support in learning is provided in a number of ways. A member of the teaching staff visits each local school specifically to identify students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This information is the main evidence used in determining students' needs; there is no structured screening for weaknesses at the college. Specialist teachers are timetabled for five lessons a week to help students on GNVQ courses to develop the core skills of communication, number and information technology. Students on other courses who need support with written communication are offered individual help in extra timetabled periods and most accept this. There are lunchtime group sessions in extra mathematics, including a weekly session for students who are resitting their GCSE. Students with particularly low levels of achievement in GCSE English and mathematics are grouped together for special tuition and some study for an alternative qualification to GCSE. Similar arrangements do not exist for students who have shortcomings with information technology skills. A teacher is, however, always available to provide help with information technology in the open learning centres. The college

does not co-ordinate and evaluate its systems for providing students with additional help and support with learning. Some teachers are not fully conversant with the extent or nature of the help available to their students.

36 The careers department comprises one full-time careers teacher and three others specially timetabled for this work. It provides a good service to students. Each tutorial group is allocated one of the careers staff as a careers tutor. The thorough careers tutorial programmes for one-year and two-year students run alongside the main tutorial work. Careers staff work closely with the local careers service which is represented at open days and parents' evenings. There is an extensive programme of university visits, for example, in May 1995, about 250 students visited the universities in Leeds to find out more about courses there. Students from other local sixth form colleges join the college's annual three-day visits to Oxford and Cambridge Universities. External speakers, often previous students of the college, give talks on a range of careers; visits to employers are arranged. All students have at least one careers interview a year from which an agreed action plan is developed. The careers department and careers service collate the information on students' destinations and this is widely distributed. The department evaluates its work by analysing answers on questionnaires put to the students. It acknowledges problems in dealing with the minority of second-year students who show little interest in higher education and believe they are being overshadowed by those who do.

37 The college does not have an independent counselling provision for its students. An external agency provides a service for young people locally and this is widely advertised in the college. One of the teaching staff with counselling qualifications has a small timetable allowance to provide personal counselling for students referred to her by assistant section heads. As this has become known, a number of students have asked for appointments independently. In these cases, the assistant section head is informed of the appointment.

38 The student council does not play a major role in the life of the college. Each tutor group is asked to elect a member of the council but only about half do so. The council organises a limited number of social activities and has a committee which meets regularly with the catering staff. Two members of staff, including one of the vice-principals, attend the council meeting, and they note opinions expressed. Students are not formally represented at course or other team or committee meetings.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

39 Of the 106 sessions inspected, 73 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses. This reflects the high quality of teaching in all programme areas. Weaknesses outweighed strengths in less than 2 per cent of sessions inspected. The following table summarises the teaching grades awarded.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

| Programmes | Grade | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Totals |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|---------------|
| GCE AS/A level | | 13 | 38 | 15 | 1 | 0 | 67 |
| GCSE | | 2 | 13 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 24 |
| GNVQ | | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Other | | 2 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Total | | 17 | 60 | 27 | 2 | 0 | 106 |

40 Classes are generally well managed. Relationships between staff and students are friendly, mutually supportive and respectful. Most courses have well-planned schemes of work which the teachers share with their students; these are, however, not always translated into detailed lesson plans. The quality of learning is enriched by useful handouts. Teachers put a great deal of effort into organising project work and individual assignments for their students. They sustain their students' interest and motivation through a proper variety of teaching and learning methods; in some instances, however, students could exercise more initiative in the classroom by working in pairs or groups. In some lessons, opportunities were missed for checking and reinforcing what had been learnt. In certain instances, the expectations which teachers had of the students were too low to ensure that the more able were continually challenged.

41 In computing and information technology, the standard of teaching is high: 90 per cent of the classes had more strengths than weaknesses. Well-produced lesson plans provide a structure for lessons. Helpful handouts incorporate diagrams and tables to focus learning. Students work individually while teachers circulate to give assistance when needed. In one carefully-planned session, students were set the task of establishing a database for an imaginary sports club. This enabled them to handle interesting data and so achieve an understanding of the uses and structure of a database. Adults appreciate the increasing number and range of part-time courses which are successfully developing their information technology skills. Staff adapt their teaching approaches to meet the needs of adults.

42 The planning of teaching and learning in mathematics is thorough. Teachers are adept at using different teaching and learning methods to suit the varying needs and abilities of their students. Lessons are well managed. Students who have particular difficulties with some aspects of their learning receive effective and sympathetic support. In one example of good practice, the teacher successfully introduced the students to a new theory. The theory was clearly explained and then the students undertook a practical exercise applying the theory they had learnt. Learning was further consolidated and the students' interest and involvement sustained, by shorter tasks and a question and answer session. Departmental guidelines aim to ensure that standards of assessment are fair and

appropriate. In a few instances, teachers employ too narrow a range of methods of working; in particular, they fail to make enough use of information technology.

43 In science, teachers have devised clear programmes of study and they share these with their students. Programmes are based upon a calendar which allocates different periods of time to particular aspects of the syllabus. Lessons following this format are organised and managed as a series of relevant tasks and related activities. Lesson plans are well structured and ensure there is consistency in the coverage of topics across different groups. Aims and objectives are clear. Teachers make good use of up-to-date source materials from television programmes and periodicals to stimulate discussions. In a particularly effective GCE A level chemistry group, students were introduced to the functional structures in organic chemistry. They were given sets of cards which each carried a chemical formula. Students were required to sort these into groups and use their textbooks to identify the family of compounds to which they belonged. This involved them in productive debate about the exact form of each compound. In other lessons, there were some examples of poor teaching; practical activities in some GCSE classes were introduced too late in the lesson. In other classes, students were allowed to talk while the teacher was trying to instruct. Some teachers had a poor questioning technique and others paid insufficient attention to the answers which students gave to questions and some imprecise or unsatisfactory responses were allowed to go unchecked.

44 In English lessons, students particularly enjoy contributing their views and ideas which the teachers value and receive attentively. The teaching is generally well organised. The students' written work is soundly structured. Source materials are stimulating and provide a sequence which leads students on to more challenging tasks. In one example of imaginative practice, students were asked to update the style of passages written in *The Times* in 1884 describing a shipwreck in which the survivors resorted to cannibalism to keep alive. In some classes, the questioning techniques are too simple and more able students are not sufficiently challenged. Teachers need to write in more detail on students' assignments to ensure that the students have a permanent record of what they need to do to improve their work.

45 In other areas of the humanities, teaching is well organised and encourages students to be fully involved in their work. A variety of efficient and effective teaching methods is used, including classroom discussion to consolidate learning, note taking from text books and group work. Good-quality printed notes and handouts, providing up-to-date information, help to develop and reinforce students' knowledge and understanding. Where appropriate, learning is enriched by activities which promote the development of empathy. In a GCSE history lesson, a teacher carefully used source materials to encourage personal responses from students to the housing problems of the 1960s. Most humanities

teachers cater effectively for students' individual needs. Learning methods extend and challenge students of all abilities. Detailed schemes of work provide a plan of humanities courses throughout the year, although some individual lesson plans do not always comply with these. The assessment criteria are used to ensure consistency in the marking and grading of work; they are clear and shared with students. Teachers of modern languages are competent linguists and teach through the medium of the language being studied.

46 Teaching in the social sciences is generally competent and effective. Files of course work are well maintained and students receive help and guidance in organising these. Some teaching is dull and mechanistic. Although teachers properly aim to help students pass their examinations, not all of them challenge their students sufficiently by taking them beyond the limits of the examination syllabus.

47 In business studies, courses are well planned and topics are introduced to the students in proper sequence. In the best lessons, teachers communicate their enthusiasm for their subject to the class. Packs of learning materials are well used although they are not always suited to the needs of individual students. In some lessons, teachers missed opportunities to check that students had fully understood what they were learning. In some instances, learning could have been reinforced by a summary at the end of the lesson. Most of the work in business studies is carefully marked and teachers provide students with helpful and detailed comments on their performance and progress.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

48 The college has consistently achieved results below the national averages for 16 to 18 year old students since 1989, although pass rates in GCE A level are improving. In 1995, the pass rate was 79.5 per cent, a rise of 6.2 per cent over the previous year. The average pass rate for 16 to 18 year old students in sixth form colleges in 1995 was 84 per cent. Pass rates at grades A to C in the college were 45 per cent, where the average for sixth form colleges is 50 per cent. In 1995, students taking two or more GCE AS/A level subjects scored, on average, 4.5 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college in the top third of all colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure based on the data in the 1995 tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. The college has improved its ranking in this measure since 1994. The pass rates in most subjects in the 1995 GCE A level examinations show a steady increase over previous years.

49 Adult part-time students accounted for 13 per cent of the college's GCE A level candidates. In 1995, they achieved a pass rate of 82 per cent, with 57 per cent achieving grades A to C. The comparative national averages for adults in sixth forms were 70 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively. The college's adult students also achieved good results in GCSE; 87 per cent gained grades A to C. Adults who studied part time on

courses franchised to Cleveland local education authority at local community centres did well. Adult students who began on basic level computer courses have successfully progressed to introductory level computer courses and then on to the GCSE in computing.

50 In 1995, 49 per cent of full-time students on one-year GCSE courses achieved grades A to C compared with an average for sixth form colleges of 48 per cent. The percentages of students achieving grades A to C in English and mathematics matched the averages for sixth form colleges. There were good results in GCSE media studies, law, sociology, Spanish and French. Results in GCSE religious studies and human biology were poor.

51 Increasing numbers of students are enrolling on, and completing, vocational programmes. In 1995, all 20 students enrolled on the BTEC national diploma in science (sports studies) gained this award. There were 100 per cent pass rates in City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) numeracy and London Chamber of Commerce and Industry for foreign languages at work courses. In more advanced vocational programmes, 34 of the 36 students who entered; 94 per cent, achieved the award. This places the college in the top 10 per cent nationally, according to the tables published in 1995 by the Department for Education and Employment. A high pass rate of 86 per cent was achieved in GNVQ foundation and intermediate awards.

52 The work of some students in social sciences and modern languages is impressive. In modern languages, students achieve competence in grammar and a good command of vocabulary. Students of all abilities do well in those GCE A level subjects, such as religious studies and philosophy, which may be taken in one year. Results were above the average for the sector in GCE A level politics, history and religious studies. Results in GCE A level geography were, however, poor.

53 In English, the proportion of students achieving GCE A level grades A to C increased from 14 per cent in 1994 to 50.5 per cent in 1995. GCSE students are making valiant and successful efforts to improve their spelling. Some grammatical errors persist in written work.

54 In science, students' work is well presented but sometimes contains spelling errors. Students display good practical skills in chemistry and follow safety precautions. Students in GCE A level physics who are not taking GCE A level in mathematics have additional classes in mathematics. Results in GCE A level biology and physics are good. Pass rates have declined in GCE A level geology over the last three years. GCSE results in the sciences, with the exception of human biology, are above the national average for sixth form colleges. Students obtained six gold and two platinum awards in the national Creativity in Science and Technology award scheme during this academic year.

55 In mathematics, the students' work is well organised. The college has taken action to identify the reasons for, and to overcome, poor performance in examinations. Some students receive additional classes in mathematics. Results in GCSE mathematics have improved and are now slightly above the average for the sector. Results in GCE A level further mathematics are good. In GCE A level mathematics, however, they are below average, particularly for passes at grades A to C.

56 In computing and information technology, project work is of a high standard. One group of students is working on a database to assist the running of a veterinary surgery. Students use information technology effectively. GCE A level computing results are improving and both GCE A level and GCSE results are above the average for the sector.

57 In business studies, some GCE A level students fail to achieve the results predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE results. Results in GCE A level business studies and economics are poor. GCSE results in business studies are good.

58 Students do well in sporting activities. They represent the college and the county in national competitions in athletics, hockey, and rugby. Students win awards regularly in public speaking events. The college came third in the locally-organised Teesside Tomorrow competition for ideas to redevelop an incinerator site.

59 Eighty-nine per cent of students completed the courses on which they were enrolled. On vocational courses the proportion was lower: 75 per cent of students completed their programme in 1995. For adult students the retention rate is 79 per cent. Rates are analysed centrally and then broken down for year groups and subjects. Some students take four or five GCE A level subjects initially and then drop one subject. In some subjects, retention is good, for example in many social science subjects. In others, for example, modern foreign languages, the drop out rate gives cause for concern. In GCE A level French, of the 31 students who started the course, only 20 completed it. Eighteen per cent of the students who enrolled for GCE A level chemistry failed to complete the course. The average rate of attendance in the classes which inspectors observed was 88 per cent.

60 The destinations of students are carefully monitored. The majority of students achieve their learning goals: an increasing number continue their studies at university. Of those who completed GCE A level or BTEC national programmes in 1995, 85 per cent have progressed to higher education, a third of them locally. Of students completing the BTEC national diploma in science (sports studies), 65 per cent entered university. Nearly a quarter of the students on one-year courses progress to more advanced courses at the college. Almost a fifth find employment.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

61 Quality assurance is well organised. College staff are clearly committed to the principles of continuous improvement. The quality assurance framework builds on existing good practice in the college. The policy and framework are published in the strategic plan and summarised in the handbook of college policies, which is issued to all staff. The recently-established posts of assistant section heads and assistant principals introduce clear lines of responsibility for assuring quality in all areas of the college's operations, including the curriculum, support for students, the physical environment, staff development and training, marketing and liaison. There is some variation in the rigour with which quality assurance procedures are applied, particularly in departmental planning and course review.

62 The quality assurance committee, which meets termly, is composed of all levels of management and is chaired by the principal. It plays a central role in reviewing targets, identifying issues which require attention and taking corrective action. In meetings at all levels in the college, staff discuss issues of quality and report to the quality assurance committee. For example, information gained from the monitoring of notes of concern about students' academic progress was discussed in tutors' meetings and reported to the committee. As a result, a particular cohort of students was identified as being in need of support and this was then provided. Each area of the college's operations prepares an annual report on quality issues: from these, the committee produces an annual report on quality assurance for the governors.

63 There are effective systems for collecting and using information to monitor and review quality in all aspects of the college's provision. Performance indicators are in place. Students give their views on quality by answering questionnaires at fixed points in the college year. Summaries of the students' responses form the basis for further discussion in tutorial sessions. Specific issues are raised with chosen tutorial groups or groups of students gathered together for the purpose. Action is taken as a result of the feedback received. For example, modifications to the tutorial system reflected the views of students. Departments collect and use students' views on their courses to inform departmental reviews and to improve the quality of teaching. Parents' comments on reports and employers' comments on work placements provide useful additional information. There is variability in the collection and use of data. Some departments have not fully developed effective ways of gathering and analysing the views of students.

64 Examination results are carefully monitored. The principal regularly meets each head of department to review subject examination results, to set targets for the coming year and to discuss strategies for improvement. The college subscribes to the Secondary Heads Association Advanced Level Information System. This provides statistics showing the extent to

which students taking GCE A level achieve results that are better or worse than those predicted on the basis of their GCSE results. Departments set targets using this information. The data are also used by senior managers to identify any groups of students who are under performing. Some departments are more successful than others in using this information to generate strategies for improvement.

65 All students, including the adult part-time students in college and on the franchised courses, receive the college charter during the induction period. The charter meets the minimum requirements of the FEFC. The original charter was produced by a group of staff in consultation with governors and other interested parties, but there was little involvement of students. A working party of staff recently reviewed the charter. After discussions with students, the governors' charter committee and local businesses, some changes were made. The charter contains few precise targets to aid monitoring. Students do not regard the charter as important.

66 Requests from staff for training are identified through individual questionnaires and departmental recommendations. The majority of staff-development activities are undertaken in college. The senior managers organise professional development days to keep staff informed of current issues. When the adult education programme was introduced, all teachers received suitable training. A vice-principal co-ordinates staff-development activities. There is a staff-development policy but no written plan to connect staff development with the college's strategic objectives. All activities are recorded and reported to the governors in the principal's termly report, but the college has only recently started to evaluate training activities methodically. Staff development concentrates on the content of courses and syllabus changes. There is insufficient focus on helping staff to develop a wider range of teaching and learning methods. The timetable for achievement of the assessor and verifier awards needed to deliver vocational courses is being met. The college has made a recent commitment to secure the Investors in People standard by the summer term of 1996.

67 Staff are appraised through a staff review scheme which has recently been modified to include both teaching and support staff. Formal links between the staff review scheme and staff development are now established. The scheme covers all members of staff with the exception of the principal. Details of his appraisal have yet to be determined. The appraisal policy and procedures clearly indicate how the scheme will operate. It is now into its second cycle, although not all staff have been appraised. Staff are positive about the process, which includes the observation of teaching. The college recognises the need to provide training in skills associated with appraisal.

68 There are induction arrangements for new teachers. Newly-qualified teachers work a reduced timetable for their first year. Procedures for the induction of new support staff are not so clear.

69 The college has produced a self-assessment report which addresses aspects of its operation using the headings identified in the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report includes most issues raised in the inspection. The system for cross-referencing to other documents was clear. Some of the language of the report was obscure. All governors received a copy of the section concerning governance and management. The report has been discussed by the quality assurance committee and the college intends to distribute its report to staff and governors at the same time as the inspection report.

RESOURCES

Staffing

70 Staff in the college have responded positively to change. They are generally enthusiastic and committed to the development of their subjects. All have suitable qualifications for the subjects they teach. Ninety per cent have a teaching qualification and nearly half have an additional postgraduate qualification. Several teachers have recent experience as external examiners for the subjects they teach. Some are involved in professional activities within their subject area, such as writing and publishing textbooks and articles. The expansion of the curriculum has necessitated new appointments: six full-time and two part-time staff were recruited in 1994-95. More staff would benefit from the opportunity to have a work placement in industry. There are a small number of well-qualified part-time staff on fractional appointments. They take a full part in the life of the college and account for 8 per cent of teaching time. The staff to student ratio is 1:15.

71 The work of the support staff is appreciated by the teachers. Technician and administrative staff are flexible in their approach to their duties and support the college well. They are well managed and their duties are reviewed regularly. Most have relevant qualifications and undertake staff development to extend their expertise. Support staff attend all relevant college meetings and are involved in a range of college activities.

72 A comprehensive staff handbook addresses a range of practical matters. It is supported by policy documents on personnel issues. Detailed guidelines are in place covering leave of absence, freedom of speech and a code of practice on undertaking external consultancy work. Recently-updated job descriptions exist for all staff except the principal; these clearly indicate the responsibilities of each member of staff. Governors have decided that the articles and instruments of governance constitute the principal's job description.

Equipment/learning resources

73 Most areas have sufficient equipment of a satisfactory quality. There is a planned policy on replacement of items. There are sufficient supplies of textbooks. Specialist equipment in a number of areas is of a high quality.

In sports studies, a substantial investment has been made in providing computerised exercise facilities. Links with industry have enabled staff and students in information technology to have access to equipment and state-of-the-art software. In modern foreign languages the use of information technology is limited. There is adequate provision of television and audio-visual aids.

74 Classrooms are well resourced. All rooms are carpeted and supplied with blinds and overhead projectors. The walls are attractively decorated with students' work. Teaching is supported by the work of the reprographic service in the college. This has enabled some departments to produce substantial learning materials for their students, including workbooks and study packs.

75 There is a central library which is supplemented by departmental libraries. The central library is managed by a part-time library assistant who reports to a senior manager. Individual teachers are timetabled to assist with library supervision throughout most of the week. The library contains 7,000 books and a small range of newspapers and journals. Its facilities include 86 study spaces and access to 16 computers. Departmental libraries are well resourced. There is, however, no overall catalogue of books held by the college. The dispersal of books throughout the college makes it difficult for some students to locate certain texts they want. A recent review by the college has clarified the respective roles of the central and departmental libraries. The review has identified a primary role for departmental libraries as providers of specialist texts for students. The role of the central library within the framework of the college's information technology facilities has yet to be clarified.

76 Most students have sufficient access to computing facilities, although individual departments vary in how they provide this. The college is committed to developing a centralised provision of information technology. This is based in five suites which contain 87 networked computers. The overall ratio of students to computers is 9:1. Over half the usage of computers is by full-time students on computing courses. Other students have access to computers in one of the suites which is kept available for the purpose: they may also join the full-time computing groups. The college systematically reviews the use of its information technology facilities: there are plans to increase provision. Compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database facilities are available on the network. The college has a good range of over 40 CD-ROMs. Connection has recently been established with the Internet.

Accommodation

77 The college was purpose built in 1973 on a single site of 6.5 hectares. It comprises single, two and three-storey blocks of steel-framed construction with large areas of windows and panels. Playing fields surround the buildings but some are frequently water-logged during the winter months. Students consider the location an important factor when

choosing the college. There is convenient access from a major suburban road junction for cars, ample car parking on site, and ready access by bus. The road entrance to the college is not signposted. The main entrance could be more clearly signposted.

78 A learning environment of good quality has been created within the buildings. Most classrooms are conducive to effective teaching and learning. They are pleasantly decorated and well lit. Modifications have enabled teaching rooms to accommodate the increasing numbers of students. Almost all classrooms and social areas are accessible to people using wheelchairs. Further improvements are underway to increase the accessibility of accommodation to students with physical disabilities. Teaching in a few classrooms is subject to disruption because these also serve as thoroughfares. Some classrooms are too small or narrow and restrict flexibility in methods of teaching and learning. The majority of rooms are unused outside normal term-time hours and on Wednesday afternoons, although they are used in the evenings. Heat loss from the building is high. Some rooms are cold at times. Others become too warm and this can have an adverse effect upon the quality of teaching and learning.

79 Public areas are decorated with the art work of students. The standard of cleanliness is high. Litter and graffiti are removed quickly. Minor repairs are attended to. Storage space is inadequate in some areas. A positive feature is the large, well-used sports hall which enhances the attraction of the sports courses for students and is also available for use by community groups. The canteen and student communal areas can be crowded at peak times, but staggering of break periods alleviates this problem. Students complain that their communal area is too public and lacks facilities for privacy. Students have access to communal seating off corridors and around a mezzanine floor above the entrance to the college.

80 The college's comprehensive strategy for accommodation is reviewed each year. It relates closely to the college's mission statement and strategic plan and promotes the effective management of the buildings. The college is aware that further increases in the numbers of students or changes in modes of provision may require extensions to the existing buildings. More effective use of the floor area in the main building is limited by its shape and poor accessibility. Maintenance of the building is well managed. Room usage is monitored. There are good efforts to conserve energy; for example, a computerised energy management system controls the recently-installed hot water boilers.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

81 The college's strengths are:

- sufficient and generally well-qualified teaching and support staff
- teaching of a high quality

-
- a considered approach to the programme for adult part-time students
 - a well-constituted and supportive corporation
 - effective senior management which provides leadership and a clear direction for the college
 - a clear cycle of strategic planning
 - close integration of careers guidance with the curriculum
 - effective procedures for quality assurance which ensure continuous improvement
 - well-resourced teaching areas and attractive and well-maintained site and buildings
 - continued improvement of the accommodation.

82 If it is to succeed in achieving its aims, the college should address the following issues:

- GCE A level results which are generally below average for sixth form colleges
- some gaps in its current curriculum
- a lack of recruitment to foundation level vocational courses
- lack of stringent monitoring of most policies
- insufficient co-ordination of the arrangements for providing support for students
- variability in the quality of planning by departments.

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 (as at November 1995)

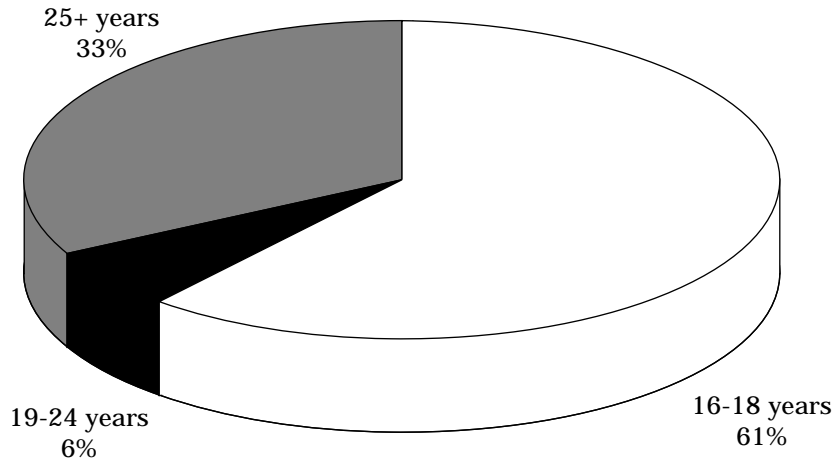
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 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

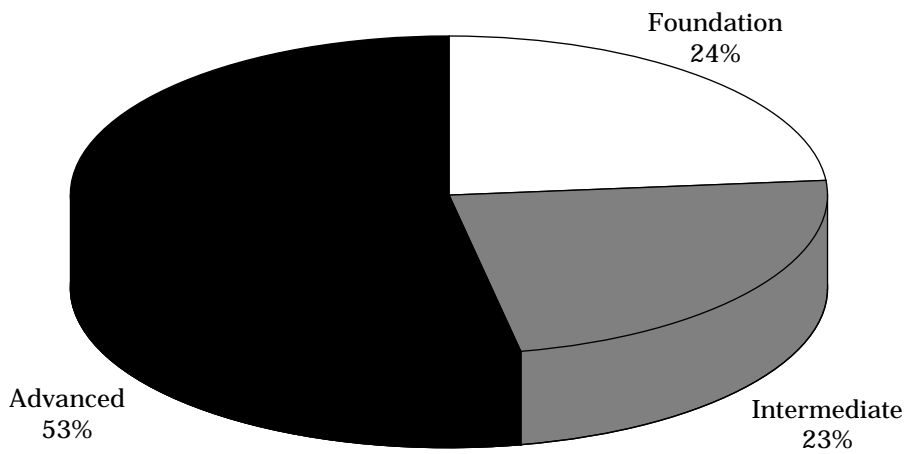
Stockton Sixth Form College: percentage enrolments by age (as at November 1995)



Enrolments: 1,301

Figure 2

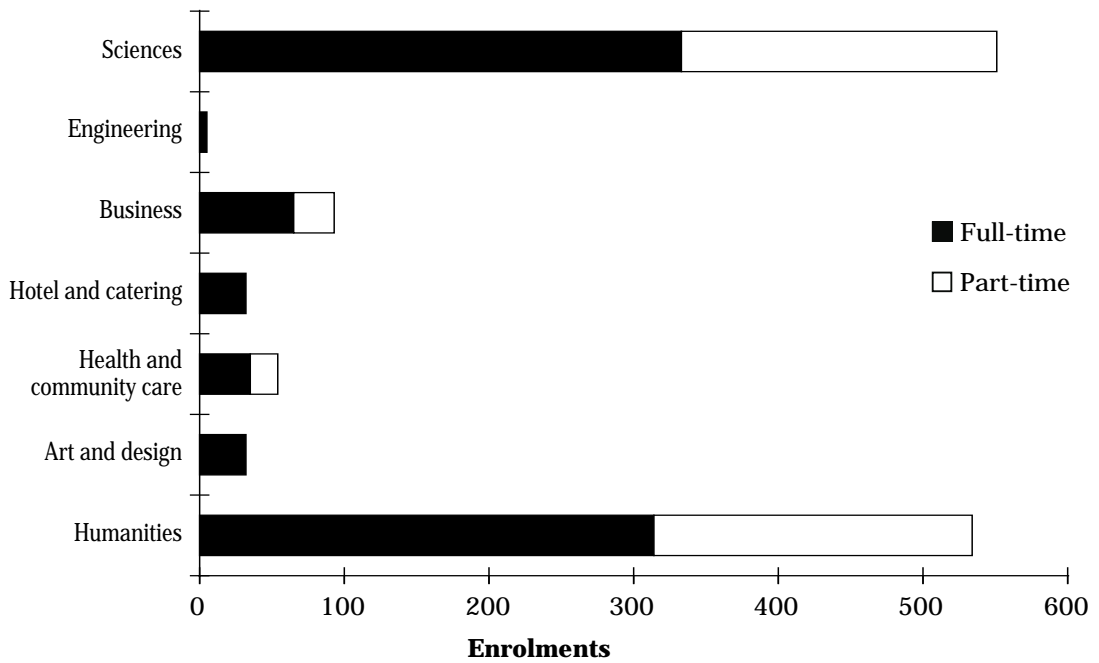
Stockton Sixth Form College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at November 1995)



Enrolments: 1,301

Figure 3

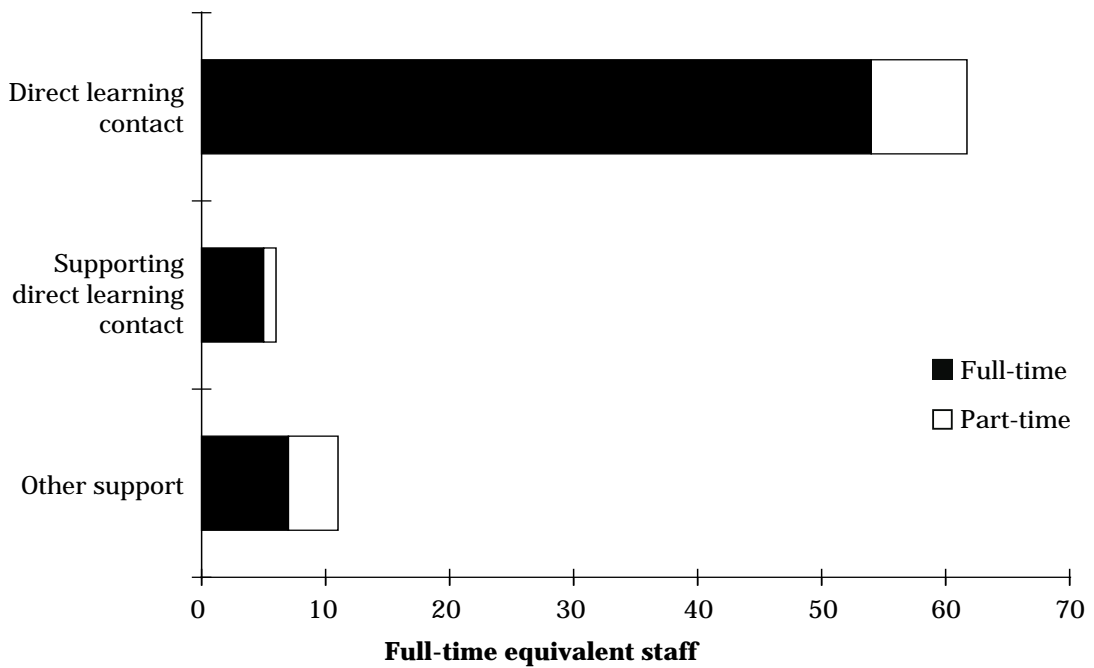
Stockton Sixth Form College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1995)



Enrolments: 1,301

Figure 4

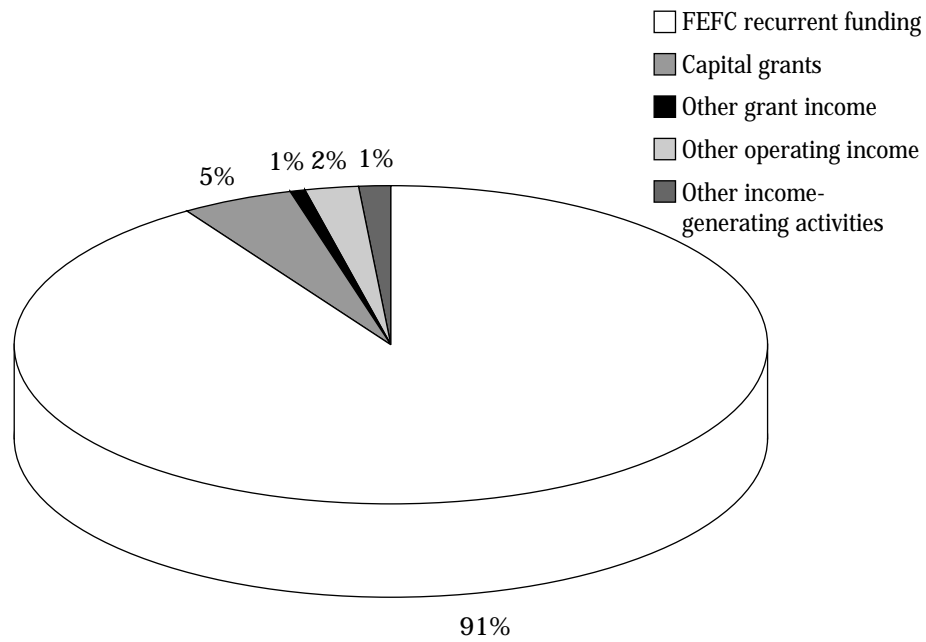
Stockton Sixth Form College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at November 1995)



Full-time equivalent staff: 79

Figure 5

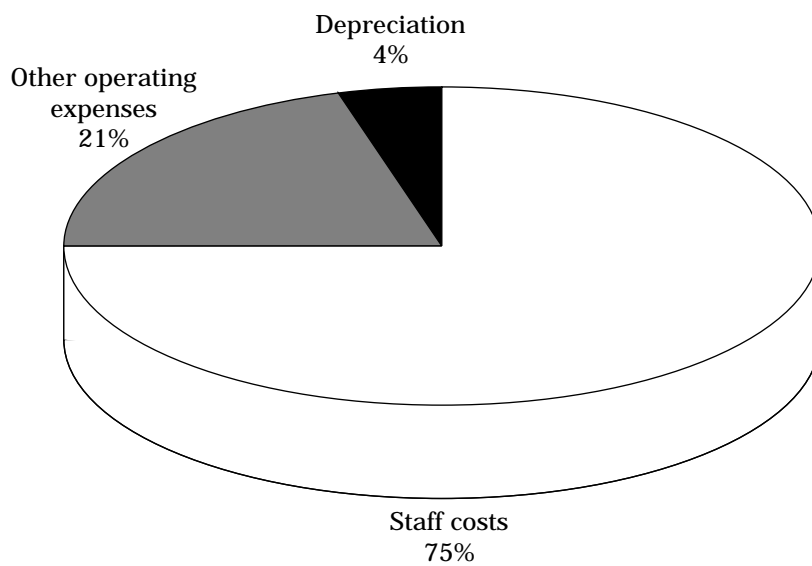
Stockton Sixth Form College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £2,489,000

Figure 6

Stockton Sixth Form College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £2,423,000

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