

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Stratford-upon- Avon College

March 1994

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a statutory duty to ensure that there are satisfactory arrangements to assess the quality of provision in the further education sector. It discharges the duty in part through its inspectorate, which reports on each college in the sector every four years. The Council's inspectorate also assesses and reports on a national basis on specific curriculum areas and advises the Council's quality assessment committee.

College inspections involve both full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have specialist knowledge and experience in the areas they inspect. Inspection teams normally include at least one member from outside the world of education and a nominated member of staff from the college being inspected.

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are described in the Council Circular 93/28. In the course of inspecting colleges, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Assessments are set out in their reports. They also summarise their judgements on the balance between strengths and weaknesses using a five-point scale. Each grade on the scale has the following descriptor:

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 10/94

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON COLLEGE

WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected October - December 1993

Summary

Stratford-upon-Avon College, Warwickshire is a major provider of post-16 education in south Warwickshire. The college is well managed, receiving strong strategic guidance from its governors. There are good links with the local community, employers, schools and higher education institutions. Students benefit from a well-managed admissions and induction process, effective tutorial support and good teaching. They achieve creditable results in external examinations. The college has well-established and effective quality assurance procedures which it continues to develop. Teaching and support staff are well qualified and experienced. The five resource centres provide students with good facilities for developing core skills. The college should develop procedures for the early diagnosis of students' additional learning needs. It should also address the high withdrawal rates on some courses, the provision of adequate social accommodation for students, facilities for private study in the library and liaison between library staff and those responsible for curriculum areas.

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	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Computing (specialist)	3	Hotel and catering	2
Humanities	2	Science	2
Business/mangement/ leisure/travel and tourism	2	Languages	3
Performing arts	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1 Stratford-upon-Avon College, Warwickshire was inspected during October and December 1993. A team of five inspectors spent a total of nineteen inspector days in the college from 29 November to 2 December 1993. A further 20 inspector days were used for the inspection of specialist subject areas. Inspectors visited 97 classes, examined samples of students' written work and held discussions with governors, staff, students, local employers, parents, representatives of the local community and representatives of the Coventry and Warwickshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

2 The inspection was carried out according to the framework and guidelines described in Council Circular 93/28. The framework describes a four-year inspection cycle. When this cycle becomes fully established, colleges will have the opportunity to respond to the findings of earlier inspection visits before their quadrennial inspection and the subsequent published report. As the inspection of Stratford-upon-Avon College occurred early in the cycle, the opportunity for such a response has not been available.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 The college occupies a single site close to the centre of Stratford-upon-Avon. At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 1,000 full-time and 2,500 part-time enrolments. More than 50 per cent of these enrolments were of students 19 years of age or over and more than 60 per cent were female (figure 1). There were 108 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 70 full-time equivalent support staff (figure 2).

4 The great proportion of the college's work is in further education at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. The college also offers a major adult education programme and a growing higher education provision. A small but significant overseas recruitment results from Stratford-upon-Avon's unique link with William Shakespeare.

5 The college is organised in seven divisions covering both administrative and curricular functions: research, development and quality assurance; corporate and student services; academic resourcing; accounting and finance; vocational and professional; enterprise and community; humanities and science. The last three of these divisions are the only ones which carry responsibility for curriculum and course delivery. The divisions are headed by four assistant principals, the deputy principal, the college secretary and the college accountant. Areas of responsibility within the divisions are allocated to one or more directors.

6 The college's main catchment area comprises Stratford-upon-Avon, south Warwickshire and the north Cotswolds fringe. The college estimates the population as approximately 80,000, widely spread across small towns and villages. In recent years, the area has seen a rapid growth in service sector employment. Small businesses employing under 24 people form 90

per cent of companies or firms and account for 43 per cent of employment. Approximately two-thirds of the employees in the district of Stratford-upon-Avon are in service industries, mainly associated with tourism. There is also significant employment in metal goods manufacturing and construction. Unemployment has risen during the present recession although it is still relatively low.

7 There are five 11-16 high schools, two 11-18 high schools and three grammar schools with post-16 provision in the Stratford-upon-Avon area. The Mid-Warwickshire College at Leamington Spa and Evesham College are both approximately 10 miles distant. There is keen competition to enrol post-16 students.

8 The college's mission statement commits it to provide high-quality, cost-effective education and training for all. It aims to provide students with a broad range of skills, knowledge and understanding and the appropriate qualifications to enable them to maximise their contribution to society and to obtain maximum satisfaction in return. The college recognises the need for highly-skilled and well-motivated staff and hence is seeking the Investors in People award.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 The college offers a wide range of vocational and non-vocational courses. It is a major provider of General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and business studies courses. It has a substantial provision in hotel and catering, media and leisure studies programmes and a smaller provision for care and engineering. The enrolments in each curriculum area are shown in figures 3 and 4.

10 Most courses are offered full-time and part-time with opportunities for day and evening study. The access course has been helpful in assisting adult students to return to study. Several information technology (IT) courses are offered in a mode which enables students to attend at times which they find suitable, and the well-managed open learning provision enables home-based students, such as parents with young families and shift workers, to enhance their qualifications. There is no crèche in the college. Instead, students are given advice on local facilities for the care of children under school age.

11 The college offers a special needs course, 'Springboard', which prepares students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to progress into mainstream further education courses. The physical location of this course in the centre of the college assists the integration of specialist and mainstream provision.

12 There are five learning resource centres for business, numeracy, literacy and communications, foreign languages and IT, which afford students opportunities to enhance their study skills. The centres are timetabled for some group work, but they also offer a drop-in facility. They are well used by students.

13 Fifty-seven per cent of full-time equivalent students are studying advanced level courses. A further 6 per cent are on higher education courses consisting mainly of higher national diplomas or degree provision franchised from Coventry, Warwickshire and Thames Valley universities. The distribution of students by level of study is shown in figure 5. The college has been slow to make use of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) but preparation for the introduction of NVQs and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) is now well advanced.

14 Links with local employers are well developed and the college is responsive to employers' needs for training. The enterprise unit offers short courses for local industry. The college co-operates with local employers through its association with the Stratford Enterprise Centre. A travel shop on the college site has given students in the travel industry a good opportunity for realistic work experience.

15 There are effective links with local schools, including special schools and with Warwick and Coventry universities. The college participates in the Warwick University International Foundation Programme. Coventry University has given financial support to the business learning resource centre.

16 There is a close relationship with the Coventry and Warwickshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). The TEC has funded a college project aimed at the analysis of local training needs and the provision of short courses addressed to adults seeking a return to work.

17 The college has strong links with the local community. The adult education programme brings many local people into close contact with the college. The training restaurant is a popular venue for visitors from the town. Students have shared in international exchanges sponsored by the town. There are close ties between the college's performing arts provision and the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. The network of contacts with schools, employers and local industry ensures that the college has a high profile in the local community.

18 The college provides evenings for the parents of students under 18 years of age. These are well-attended and parents interviewed commented positively on the helpfulness of staff and the ease of communications with the institution.

19 The marketing of existing courses is effective and some market research has been carried out with a mind to the possibilities for new courses. However, there has been no overall survey of market opportunities which could enable the college to make better use of existing resources.

20 An equal opportunities policy is in place. Senior staff have been assigned responsibilities for issues relating to age, gender, race, learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All course teams have an equal opportunities remit. The academic board has recently created an equal opportunities subcommittee and an overall review of the progress of the college in promoting equal opportunities is taking place.

21 The college has provided a series of training days for governors and staff to raise awareness of government policy for further education, the Charter for Further Education and FEFC inspection procedures.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

22 The governing body includes members with senior management experience in industry and commerce at a national level. Some of the members represent local industry, tourism and community interests. The chief executive of the TEC is a member and there is also representation from higher education. College representatives include the principal, teaching and support staff and a student. Three of the eighteen members are women. The governors' wealth of experience and expertise has greatly assisted the college, both during the approach to incorporation and subsequently.

23 The governors have been active in providing strategic guidance and they take a strong interest in the college's activities. There is a well-defined committee structure linking the corporation with senior management. The college's strategic plan addresses the medium and long-term educational and training needs of the community.

24 The management team consists of the principal, the deputy principal and six divisional heads. There are a further 11 directors and seven other senior staff associated with the running of the divisions. Management is characterised by its co-operative ethos and clear lines of communication. The academic board has a clear structure of subcommittees but the membership of some of the committees does not reflect changes in staff responsibilities which have occurred recently.

25 Both governors and senior managers are intent on making the college more responsive to the needs of industry and commerce. There is an awareness of the increasingly competitive market for students and a wish to develop the college as a high-quality, business and community-centred institution with flexible provision and managed growth. The college's mission statement and strategic plan influence policy and practice at divisional and course levels. Course aims and objectives are directly related to the strategic plan.

26 The principal gives good leadership in stressing the value of information technology for planning and modelling. The information provided by the management information system is comprehensive and up-to-date. Data relating to examination results, drop-out rates, student destinations, feeder school numbers and students' places of residence are used to plan, monitor and improve the quality of provision. However, the data are not always presented in a form which is easily understood, and a computer network would improve access to the system. The college has an innovative system of bar-coded identity cards for staff and students for use in the library and other areas of the college. In the case of students, the bar codes are automatically produced from information supplied at enrolment.

27 The college's unit of funding for 1992-93, inherited from the local education authority, is recorded in the FEFC report, *Funding Allocations 1993-94*, as £2,464 per weighted full-time equivalent student. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £2,436. Summaries of the college's estimated income and expenditure are given in figures 6 and 7. A course resourcing model helps in the evaluation of the relative unit costs of courses and enables staff resources to be more effectively deployed. There is a corporate policy to maintain staffing costs at approximately 70 per cent of the college budget.

28 Enrolment targets are set at divisional and course levels. Student drop-out rates are monitored at course level on a monthly basis. Annual retention rates are scrutinised in the course review process. Despite well-established procedures for monitoring attendance and counselling students, the college had an average drop-out rate of 14 per cent in 1992-93 which is roughly in line with average rates nationally.

RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

29 The admissions process, from initial enquiry to induction, is well managed and well documented. All enquiries are logged and the admissions team receives regular and up-to-date information on trends. Prospective students receive comprehensive advice on the courses available and any related financial information. Late admissions are dealt with effectively and opportunities are available for students to transfer between courses.

30 The college prescribes the content and structure of induction programmes and checks that course teams comply with the guidelines. Students' perceptions of the induction process are monitored. Their comments, which are generally positive, are fed into the college review process.

31 All students have a personal tutor, and full-time students have regular, timetabled tutorials. Tutorial support is supplemented by counselling and other specialist student services. Full-time students are required to complete records of achievement using IT facilities. The nature and purpose of these records is carefully explained to the students.

32 The college has effective systems for careers support and guidance. Students planning to progress to higher education are helped to develop their curricula vitae and to complete application forms. A comprehensive advice service alerts students to the need to plan early for their industrial placements and provides guidance on what would be most suitable for individuals. A student handbook contains useful information on industrial placements.

33 The college has a policy to develop facilities for the accreditation of prior learning. Some progress has been made in the implementation of the policy, mainly in business studies. In general, admissions and induction processes are not as effective as they might be in diagnosing students'

additional learning needs. Although the learning resource centres are well-equipped to provide learning support, the college is not in a position to identify all who might benefit from support or to assess accurately the resources required.

34 There is a high rate of student withdrawals on some courses and this has a substantial impact on published examination pass rates. The college makes considerable effort to ensure that students are counselled prior to withdrawal. Course team leaders keep careful records of the reasons for withdrawals and these are subsequently analysed as part of the annual cycle of course review.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

35 Fifty-six per cent of the teaching sessions inspected clearly had more strengths than weaknesses and a further 36 per cent had strengths balanced by weaknesses. The number of teaching sessions and the grades awarded are summarised below.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
A/AS level		0	18	14	3	0	35
GCSE		0	5	5	1	0	11
GNVQ		0	1	0	0	0	1
BTEC		1	18	12	2	0	33
NVQ		0	0	3	1	0	4
Other		1	10	1	1	0	13
Total		2	52	35	8	0	97

36 Relations between staff and students were generally good. A wide range of teaching techniques was used including lectures, seminars and workshops. Group sessions were purposeful and students well motivated. In the best lessons, the pace of work was appropriate and students were sufficiently challenged. Staff were knowledgeable and authoritative about their subject and their expertise was well used in advancing students' understanding. Teaching took good account of individual students' learning needs. Theory and practice were well integrated in areas where there was a strong emphasis upon practical work. Core skills were being effectively developed in many of the vocational courses.

37 Practical work was carried out competently, and health and safety were given a high priority. In science classes, good safety equipment was provided and used. In hotel and catering courses, the kitchens and restaurant provided professionally-realistic settings for students' practical work.

38 Weaknesses were predominant in a small number of classes only. These included the failure of teachers to involve less articulate students or

to cater adequately for the differing abilities of students, and the inappropriate pace at which some learning activities were conducted. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were sometimes given too much assistance in carrying out practical tasks.

39 Although the majority of sessions were held in satisfactory or good accommodation, there were several instances where accommodation had an adverse affect on teaching and learning. Rooms were sometimes too small for the size of the class and some activities took place in inappropriate accommodation. Students on certain courses attended the great majority of their classes in the much less attractive temporary accommodation. The timetabling of the business centre did not always take account of the competing needs of users and a number of classes suffered from constant disruptions and background noise.

40 Students were set appropriate assignments. In most cases, the work was accurately assessed and promptly returned. Teachers generally provided helpful written comments to assist students in identifying their strengths and weaknesses. There were examples of good practice in several areas of work. Many of the Business Technology and Education Council (BTEC) course assignments were creative and challenging. They elicited good responses from students. Tutors made use of local businessmen to provide an employers' perspective on the realism of business and finance assignments. In science, students' work was regularly assessed by a second tutor in order to moderate standards. Hotel and catering students' achievements were measured through a range of activities including competitions, work experience in this country and abroad, and projects in industry.

41 There is a wide range of IT facilities available throughout the college which are used regularly by many of the students. Some students, however, had limited timetabled access to IT facilities and there was insufficient training in the use of standard software packages.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

42 Students worked with a high level of concentration, commitment and enjoyment. Those interviewed spoke about their work and the college with enthusiasm. Performing arts, science, and hotel and catering students were particularly highly motivated and confident.

43 In most cases, students were developing appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding of the subjects they were studying and were able to apply these in their written work and during class discussions.

44 Students on vocational courses generally achieved good results in external examinations. In 1992-93, 92 per cent of the 170 students in their final year of study for BTEC national or City and Guilds national diploma achieved their qualifications. This performance places the college in the top 20 per cent of all colleges in the sector.

45 In 1993, the average A level pass rate, grades A-E, was 73 per cent, which shows a slight improvement over the previous two years. The

national average pass rate for all students was 79.8 per cent. However, the college's results include those for mature students and are based on a relatively open policy for entries. The 1992-93 average for 16 to 18 year old students who sat two or more A levels was 11 points (where A = 10; E = 2). This put the college's results in the top half of institutions within the sector. Particularly good results were achieved in theatre studies and English.

46 GCSE pass rates, grades A-C, of 58 per cent are satisfactory for the sector although they declined from 63 per cent for the previous year. The national average pass rate, grades A-C, for all GCSE students was 51.3 per cent. The college's best results were achieved in English.

47 The college has already introduced value added analysis to GCSE results on an experimental basis and undertakes some value added analysis of A level results as part of a scheme operated by the Warwickshire consortium of schools and colleges. The GCSE results indicated that the value added to students' achievements in English were good but that a significant number of students made no overall gain.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

48 The college has well-established quality assurance procedures. A quality team, recently appointed, has the task of ensuring that consistent policies continue to be developed. The use of quality standards enables courses to be compared and ranked. Targets are set and reviewed at college and course levels. The quality of courses has improved as a consequence of these procedures.

49 Course teams are required to maintain logs which record the development and progress of their courses. These logs help to standardise procedure for all the courses and give senior managers access to up-to-date information on courses. Team meetings take place regularly and decisions are formally recorded. Annual course reports take account of surveys of students' opinions, external moderators' reports and informal reviews of the course process. Course targets are set with the aim of improving the quality of provision. Course leaders are interviewed annually, by the principal and members of the divisional team, to discuss the development of their courses. At a college level, the timetabling of meetings ensures regular feedback to the senior management team on a monthly cycle.

50 The comprehensive staff handbook includes details of all college policies and procedures. A regularly-produced newsletter also helps to keep staff aware of new developments.

51 Advisory committees make an effective contribution to course review and development. The biannual survey of employers' perceptions of the college presents a positive picture.

52 Staff are appraised annually. The college is committed to, and preparing for, the Investors in People award. Areas of training for staff

and governors include health and safety, governance and management, IT and preparation for NVQ and GNVQ. Several staff have updated their qualifications, some in preparation for the development of new courses.

53 Staff development is centrally administered and a profile of staff training has been in existence for approximately two years. The college allocates 3 per cent of its staffing budget to staff training, half of which is allocated to administering the scheme. Staff are required to complete evaluation reports of all training sessions and to convey their findings to colleagues. The quality of these reports is variable.

RESOURCES

54 There are sufficient teachers with appropriate qualifications and experience to cover all aspects of the programmes offered. Good progress is being made in training staff for the implementation of NVQ and GNVQ. Support staff are adequate in number. They work increasingly closely with teaching staff in many areas. It would be advantageous to students of modern languages if the modern languages assistant were to offer the same language year on year.

55 Much of the accommodation is good. The lack of lifts prevents wheelchair users from gaining access to upper floors although ramps are in place at the ground floor level. The college intends to instal a lift and has allocated funds for the purpose. The classrooms located in the huts provide a poorer quality environment for teaching and learning than exists in the main buildings, and there are problems in providing satisfactory heating. Rooms are clean and well maintained but their effectiveness as centres of learning could be improved by the display of relevant learning materials. There is an inadequate level of social accommodation for students. The use of accommodation is being reviewed by the college following a survey carried out in November 1993. The college grounds are well managed. For the most part, the college provides a stimulating and supportive learning environment.

56 There is an adequate range of teaching and learning aids and sufficient specialist equipment for the range of courses offered. The library is satisfactorily staffed and opening hours allow both day and evening students reasonable access to resources. The bookstock for computing and science needs updating but provision in other curriculum areas is adequate. Liaison between the librarian and teaching staff in some of the curriculum areas is weak. The college should consider whether there would be advantage in establishing a library committee of users. Facilities for private study in the library are inadequate. Group work often causes disruption to other users. Students frequently complain of the high levels of noise in the library.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

57 The college is making good progress towards achieving its aim of providing high quality cost-effective education and training for all. Its particular strengths are:

- the strategic guidance provided by the governors and the effective management
- the good links with schools, employers, the local community and higher education
- the well-established quality assessment procedures, including the use of performance indicators
- the generally good quality of teaching and learning
- the creditable results students achieve in external examinations
- the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the well-managed admissions and induction process
- the well-qualified teaching and support staff
- the learning resource centres.

58 If the college is to raise its standards yet further it should address the following issues:

- the high drop-out rate on some courses
- the effective diagnosis of students' learning needs
- the provision of adequate social accommodation for students
- liaison between the library and some curriculum areas
- facilities for private study in the library.

FIGURES

1 Enrolments by age (November 1993)

2 Staff profile (1993-94)

3 Enrolments by curriculum area and mode of attendance (1993-94)

4 Full-time equivalent enrolments by curriculum area and mode of attendance (1993-94)

5 Percentage of full-time equivalent students by level of course (1993-94)

6 Estimated income (April 1993–July 1994)

7 Estimated expenditure (April 1993–July 1994)

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

Figure 1

Stratford-upon-Avon College: enrolments by age (November 1993)

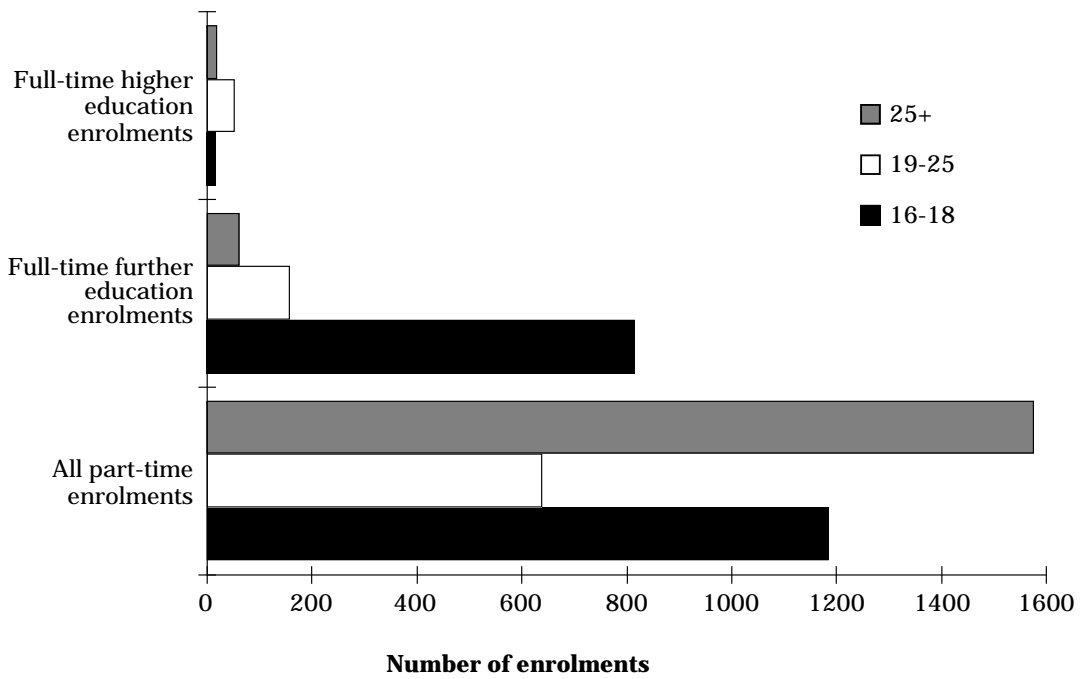
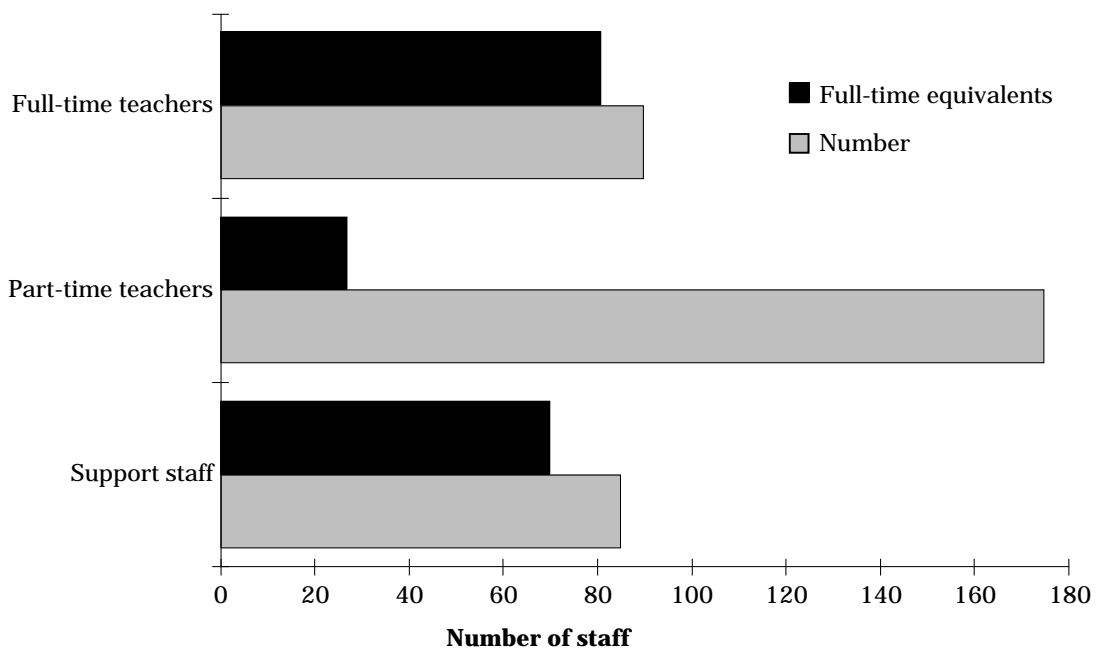


Figure 2

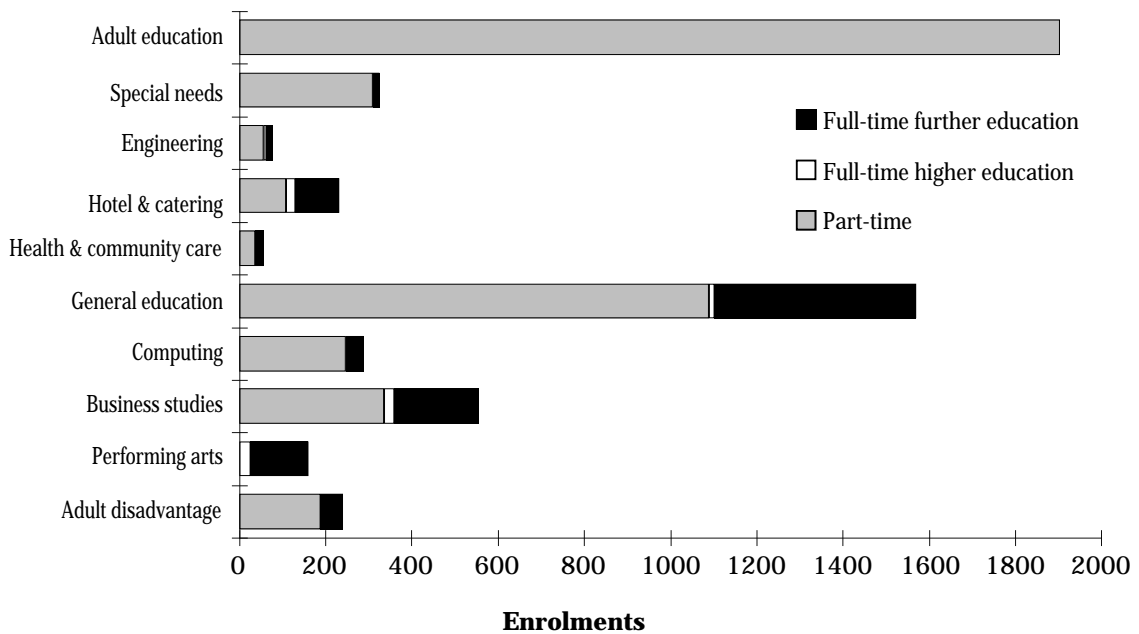
Stratford-upon-Avon College: staff profile (1993-94)



Note: full-time numbers include some fractional full-time appointments

Figure 3

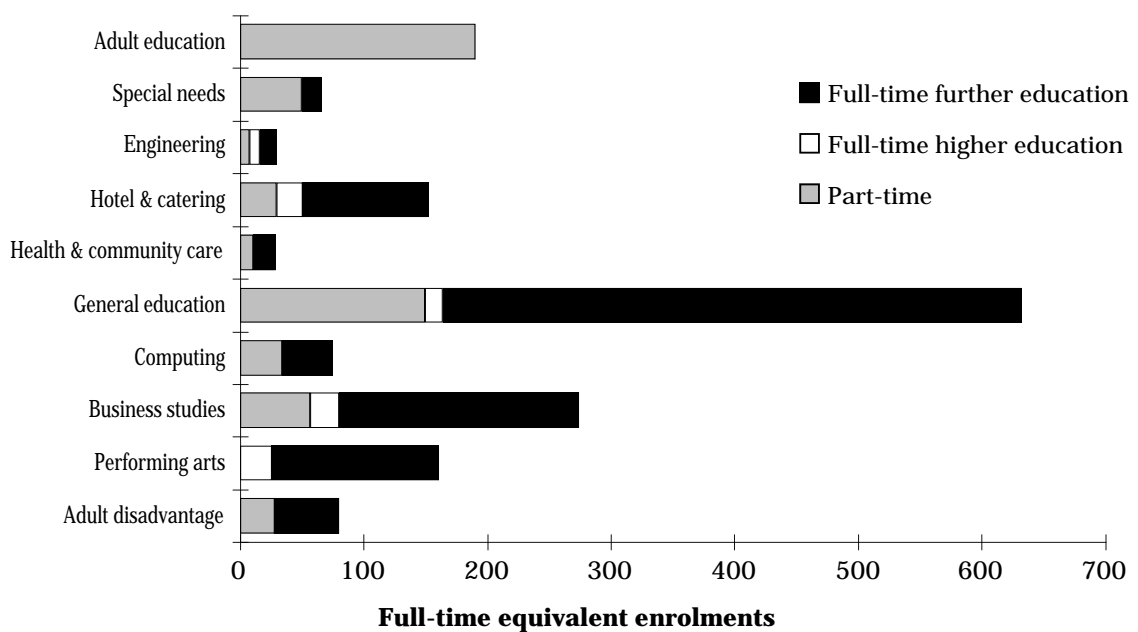
Stratford-upon-Avon College: enrolments by curriculum area and mode of attendance (1993-94)



Total enrolments: 5,409

Figure 4

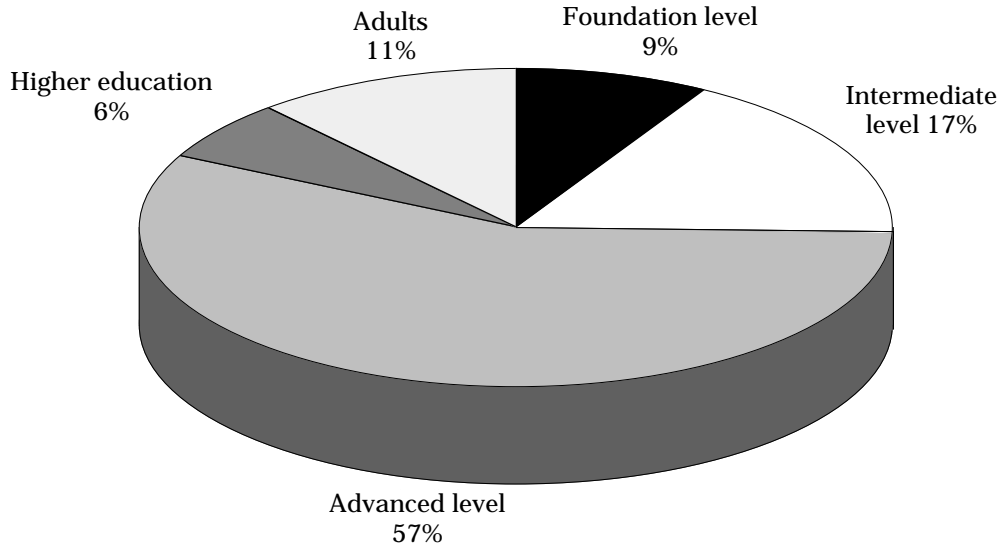
Stratford-upon-Avon College: full-time equivalent enrolments by curriculum area and mode of attendance (1993-94)



Total full-time equivalent enrolments: 1,690

Figure 5

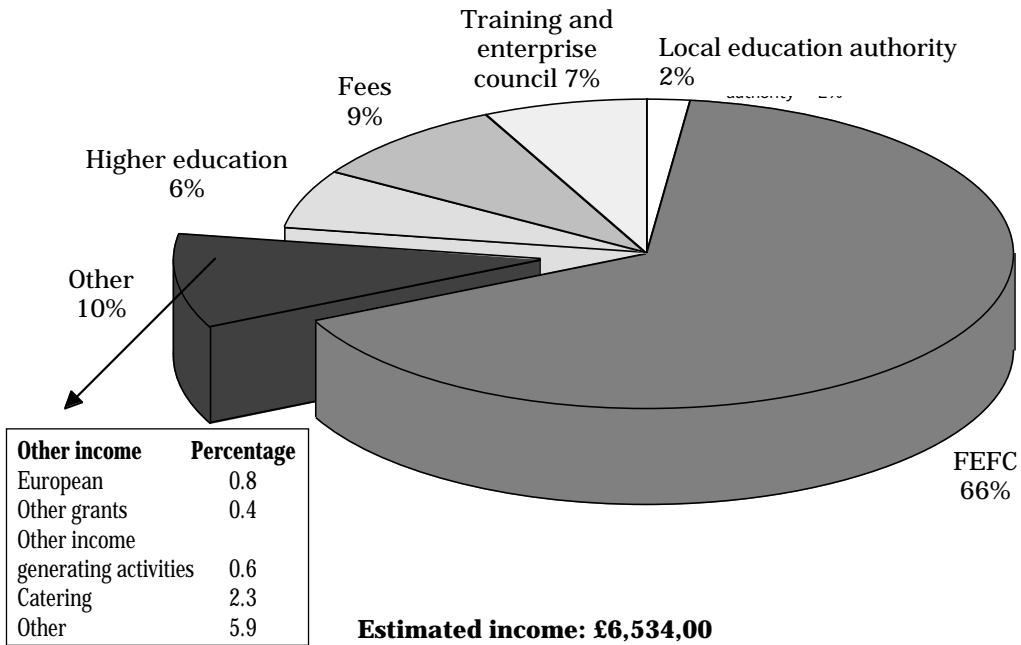
Stratford-upon-Avon College: percentage of full-time equivalent students by level of study (1993-94)



Total full-time equivalent enrolments: 1,690

Figure 6

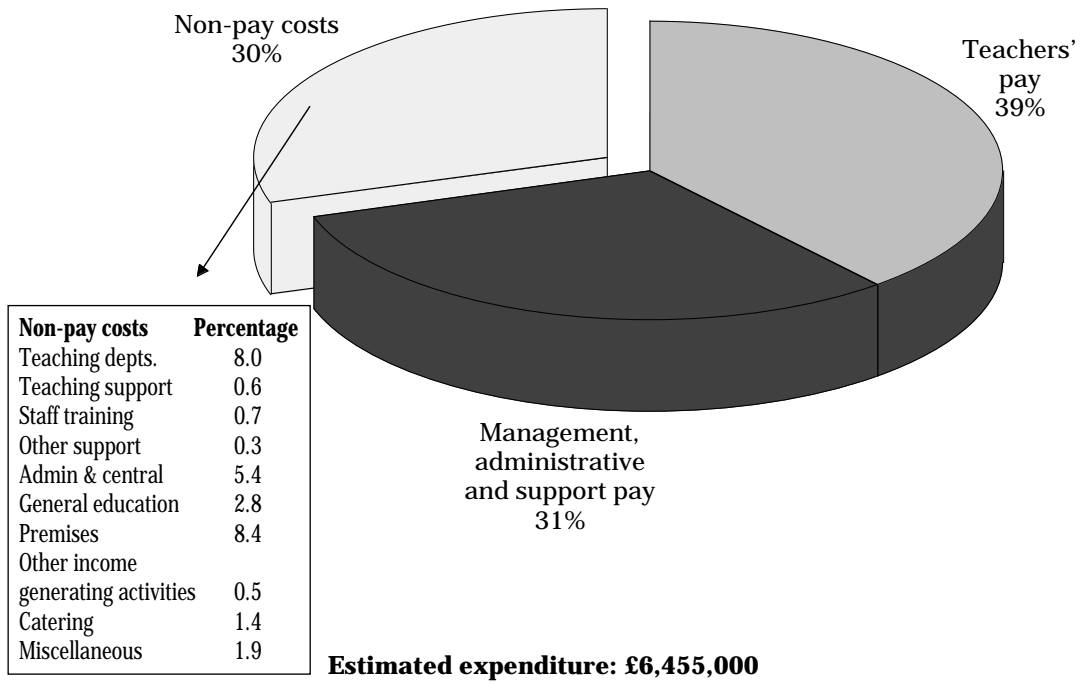
Stratford-upon-Avon College: estimated income (April 1993-July 1994)



Note: the college receives additional funding for equipment and minor works of £134,000

Figure 7

Stratford-upon-Avon College: estimated expenditure (April 1993–July 1994)



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