

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Bishop Auckland College

April 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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.*

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 36/95

BISHOP AUCKLAND COLLEGE

NORTHERN REGION

Inspected September – December 1994

Summary

Bishop Auckland College is a small general further education college serving a diverse area of small towns and sparsely populated countryside. It offers predominantly vocational provision with strong enrolments in health and community care, and in business. The great majority of its students attend part time and more than 70 per cent are over 18 years of age. The college works well with local and regional development groups who see it as a responsive and approachable partner. A wide range of curriculum-related projects, and initiatives to support local business, successfully extend the main college provision. Management systems and communication channels are clear and effective. The college's externally-accredited quality system has improved many aspects of the college's work, and staff are committed to continuous improvement. Students generally experience high-quality teaching. The college is on a single site and learning is encouraged by its attractive and businesslike accommodation. In a minority of courses, a high proportion of students attend irregularly, do not complete their studies, or achieve poorly in external examinations and assessment. There is a need for more investment in equipment to support some subjects and for a clearer policy on information technology across the college.

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	2
equipment/learning resources	3
accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics and information technology	2	Art and design	3
Engineering	3	English and social science	3
Business	2	Basic education	2
Childcare	2		
Social and community care	2		
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3		

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INTRODUCTION

1 Bishop Auckland College was inspected between September and December 1994. Specialist curriculum inspections were carried out by a team of 10 inspectors using 25 inspector days. Aspects of cross-college provision were inspected by a team of six inspectors using 32 days. Inspectors observed 114 classes, examined samples of students' work, and held discussions with governors, managers, teaching staff, non-teaching staff and students. They met with local employers, representatives from local schools, universities in the region, the community, the Durham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and other organisations with strategic planning interests in the region.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Bishop Auckland College is a small, single-site general further education college. It is situated at the foot of the Pennines on the outskirts of Bishop Auckland and serves the south-west area of the county of Durham. The college makes use of other premises in the locality for its outreach work. It sponsors the Durham Local Education Authority adult basic education provision at Barnard Castle, delivers the education service at Deerbolt Young Offenders Institution near Barnard Castle and operates its own managing agency for youth training.

3 The other providers of post-16 education in the area are the seven 11-18 comprehensive schools, one private school and colleges of further education in Durham city (13 miles) and Darlington (12 miles). Darlington also has a sixth form college. There are a number of other youth training providers and an information technology centre. In 1993, the percentage of 16-year olds in the western area of the county who continued in full-time education was 45 per cent. This is significantly lower than the county average of 53 per cent, and the national average of approximately 60 per cent. Only 7 per cent of 16-year olds enter employment. Participation in youth training is high.

4 In December 1994, there were 3,353 students on roll. Of these, 497 were full-time students. Percentage enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2, respectively. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. The college employs 53 full-time academic staff and 50 support staff; the equivalent of a further 33 academic staff and 11 support staff are employed on part-time contracts. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents is shown in figure 4. The figures do not include the staff and students at the Deerbolt Young Offenders Institution.

5 Courses are provided in basic education, humanities, art and design, health studies, community and childcare, business and management, leisure and tourism, modern languages, engineering, construction, hairdressing and beauty, English, mathematics, information technology, and catering. Higher education courses are franchised from the

Universities of Sunderland and Northumbria, and the college is an associate for the Open University certificate of education. Its business development unit operates full-cost recovery courses.

6 South-west Durham includes the towns of Bishop Auckland, Spennymoor and Newton Aycliffe, a number of smaller towns and an extensive, sparsely populated, rural area to the west. The proportion of young people in the population is declining. Unemployment in south-west Durham is approximately 11 per cent and falling, although long-term male unemployment remains consistently high. Ninety-four per cent of firms in the area employ fewer than 50 people and account for 44 per cent of the workforce. Under 3 per cent of firms employ 100 or more people and account for 43 per cent of the workforce. The service sector and manufacturing industries provide the majority of jobs. Regional and local strategic planning groups identify leisure, tourism and rural development as growth areas.

7 The stated mission of the college is to work in partnership with other organisations to provide quality education and training to meet the needs of individual learners and employers. The college's aims include providing an extensive range of high-quality education and training services, enhancing and meeting the expectations of local communities, and expanding provision and attracting more students, particularly adults. A priority in the college's strategic plan is to provide education and training for people close to where they live or work.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The size of the college limits the range of the provision it can offer. Nevertheless, it responds quickly and flexibly to the identified needs of students, employers and the community. Almost 90 per cent of its students are on vocational courses. The National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) framework is used successfully to co-ordinate the programmes offered, improve access and aid progression. Direct access to higher education is provided through foundation and first-year degree programmes in particular subjects. A small number of General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects are available. The range of courses in construction, hotel and catering and science is narrow, as is the breadth of the engineering provision. Eighty-five per cent of students attend part time and more than 70 per cent are over 18 years of age. Sixty-two per cent of all students are women.

9 Health and community care courses attract some 30 per cent of the full-time students. Another 25 per cent are on business courses and a further 10 per cent attend a well-developed range of courses designed specifically for students with learning difficulties. The college's provision includes courses leading to one foundation, six intermediate, and eight advanced General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), and to

NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in business administration, hairdressing and beauty therapy. The foundation year of the business computing degree and the first year of the combined arts degree are also full-time courses.

10 Part-time students can attend one course leading to an NVQ at level 1, 11 courses leading to NVQs at level 2, 10 at level 3 and two at level 4. A range of courses leads to vocational qualifications awarded by the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G), the RSA Examinations Board (RSA) and other awarding bodies.

11 Links between the college and the 11-16 secondary schools and special schools in the area are good. The college also has a constructive relationship with two of the six 11-18 secondary schools. Staff from the college regularly visit the schools, and vice-versa; teachers and lecturers attend joint training events. A GNVQ 'passport' project, funded by Durham TEC and BTEC, aims to build links between curriculum developments for students below and above 16 years of age. Representatives from the schools and from these funding organisations consider the college to be responsive and committed to their shared areas of interest.

12 The college takes an active role in a number of partnerships with other organisations interested in developing strategies for education and training in south-west Durham. These partners also view the college as responsive and approachable. They see the college as a natural point for support when preparing bids for special funds; meetings are held at the college and its staff take the lead in drafting the necessary planning documents. A community education and training co-ordinator has recently been appointed to strengthen links with the community.

13 The college has been, and continues to be, involved in a wide range of national and regional curriculum projects. There are many examples of good practice in the college which can be traced back to participation in such projects. The Woodhouse Close projects which began as Department of Education and Science projects, involve work with young parents in basic education and education for childcare. An Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit project has had a considerable impact on the education provision for adults based in the college and at outreach centres.

14 In a similar way, initiatives that began in the college's business development unit have had a positive impact on the main college provision. The unit responds quickly to the training needs of local employers and its work is viewed positively by them. Structural, personal and curriculum links with the rest of the college are strong. In 1993-94, the unit met its income target of £62,000 through its full-cost work (60 per cent) and project-funded courses (40 per cent). During the inspection, the unit negotiated a £30,000 contract to provide assessor training.

15 The work of the college's small marketing unit is guided by a lively and committed group of teaching and support staff drawn from across the college. The marketing policy is supported by a clearly-articulated strategy

for obtaining market information and promoting the college. The current emphasis is on customer care and promotions. Nevertheless, market research is underdeveloped. Press releases, prospectuses and newsletters are of a high professional standard. The college is well represented at events held at schools and in local communities.

16 All full-time learners receive a curriculum entitlement statement which includes a work experience placement of at least two weeks. The placements are efficiently and effectively organised. Students express appreciation of the opportunities they are given to understand the working environment, learn new skills and broaden their horizons. Both the students and their work-based supervisors are well prepared, and meticulous records are maintained. In 1993-94, 88 per cent of full-time students were placed. Considerably more placements are needed to cope with the increased enrolments in 1994-95. Employers have already offered 60 per cent more places, which is indicative of their support for the college and its work experience scheme.

17 An equal opportunities policy was developed by a college working group some years ago. A Further Education Unit project led to practical improvement in lighting and car parking, and access for wheelchair users has been greatly improved. However, the working group has not been convened for some time. Operational objectives relating to equal opportunities were identified in the college plans for 1993-94, but not 1994-95. Equal opportunity matters play little part in the curriculum and in the course review processes. A part-time equal opportunities officer has recently been appointed in order to address some of these issues.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

18 The corporation board has 15 members, including the principal and an elected staff member. Nine independent members are from the world of business and include those with professional expertise in personnel, law and accountancy. One independent member has now retired from active business interests. Two co-opted members have drawn from a local university and an 11-16 school, another is a specialist in health education. One place is vacant; the governors hope to attract a member who has wide community interests. The clerk to the board is not one of the college staff, but employed under contract from Durham County Council. Both the members and college managers find this an effective arrangement. There are four standing subcommittees of the board with appropriate membership and terms of reference; three further statutory subcommittees are convened as required. The board recently appointed a new principal who took up post during the inspection.

19 The main concern of the board members since incorporation has been to ensure the effective management of the college. They are now moving towards a more strategic role. The meetings of the board and its subcommittees are well attended and all members are active in discussion.

One is a member of the college's health and safety working group and others are increasingly invited to participate in college events and working groups. The board has not yet agreed how it will evaluate the overall performance of the college, or its own operation. As the role of governors develops, there is a need for training and for an induction programme for new members.

20 The college is managed by a directorate made up of the principal and four directors. The directors have responsibility for business and enterprise, curriculum, corporate development and finance, respectively. There are three academic section managers who are responsible, respectively, for business studies and childcare training, design and technology, and general and community education. They report to the director of curriculum. The management team consists of the directorate, the section managers and 11 other managers responsible for aspects of the college's operation. Job descriptions have been developed for all managers and for most support staff. Line management responsibilities are clear, and general responsibilities, for example those relating to staff development, are appropriately emphasised. The directors work effectively as a team and this enabled college developments to continue during a difficult period before the new principal took up post. Section managers have a similar open and supportive relationship.

21 There is a well-defined cycle of briefing and business meetings of the directorate, the management team and section managers. Strategic and operational matters are clearly separated. There are good communications between these groups and with other college staff. Teaching staff are kept informed of recent educational issues and developments through well-attended, weekly section meetings. Effective use is made of electronic mail for internal communications.

22 The courses are well-managed by curriculum co-ordinators, who are helped by a manual which synchronises the cycle of course activities with the activities of the management team. New programme area co-ordinator posts are being created to take responsibility for curriculum areas. Some cross-college developments have lost momentum following a recent restructuring. The new structure is in place, but it is not yet fully effective.

23 The board was closely involved with the directorate in the development of the college's strategic plan, which gives a clear direction for the progress of the college. The operational plan was produced with the aid of a programme of meetings which brought together the directorate, management team and groups of staff. Contributions from the staff resulted in modifications to the plan and new courses were included as a result. The operational plan is linked clearly to the objectives in the strategic plan. It identifies measurable targets, allocates clear responsibilities for action and is the basic working document for the college managers. The college fell 2 per cent short of its projected 8 per cent growth in student numbers in 1993-94. Enrolments at the time of the inspection indicate that this year's 10 per cent target for growth is achievable.

24 The college has produced a range of policy statements which vary in their style and usefulness. The health and safety policy includes detailed responsibilities and procedures. Other policy statements are written as brief over-arching statements of principle. Some of these, for example, those policies relating to the management and development of staff have been translated into action, and are monitored through the quality system. The information technology policy statement is inadequate to support the evaluation and development of this important area. There are no policy statements to cover other significant curriculum issues such as learner support and assessment.

25 The academic board of the college was established as a forum for all curricular decisions. Its duty is to advise the principal. The board is intended to meet once or twice each term but this has not always happened. Attendance at meetings has deteriorated. Much of the board's business involves receiving minutes from other groups and this limits its effectiveness in the eyes of staff. However, the course approvals subcommittee of the academic board is active and influential. Other groups, known variously as working groups, task groups or committees, have been set up to develop or monitor different aspects of the college's work. Members are drawn from staff across the college and students are sometimes included. A long-established group monitors the college's health and safety policy and has contributed to teaching and staff-development programmes. Some groups, for example the group concerned with development of core skills, have sensibly been dissolved once their initial tasks are completed. Others, including the nursery group, have not met for some time, although there are plans to reconvene them.

26 The director of finance prepares annual estimates of income and expenditure for consideration and approval by the corporation and manages the budget and resources. Budgets are devolved to middle managers who are well supported by monthly financial statements. Some unit costings have been done on full-time courses but more work is required before the results can be used to improve efficiency. The college's average level of funding for 1993-94 was £19.85 per unit. The median for general further education colleges is £18.17 and the median for the sector is £19.02. Summaries of the college's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

27 Information on key aspects of college activity is systematically collected. There is appropriate emphasis on the use of statistical information as performance indicators and this is carefully collected and up-dated. The centralised entry of data provides rapid and accurate enrolment information to managers. The presentation of some statistics could be improved to provide more useful indicators of performance at course level; for example, overall attendance rates, and completion rates that relate to the number of students originally enrolled on courses.

28 Increasing use is made of computerised systems which provide relevant information for managers and respond quickly to requests. Managers have received training, and they use the systems competently. The number of terminals on the network system is sufficient for managers to have most relevant information on-screen. Some bottlenecks still occur when the management information office is the only source of more detailed information. The college has developed individual software packages to increase management efficiency, for example to manage part-time teachers' contracts and to record examination results. A recently piloted swipe-card system enables staff to analyse the use made of the study support centre.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

29 The college uses a wide variety of mechanisms to encourage recruitment. A community newspaper is delivered over a wide geographical area and an increasing number of information noticeboards are strategically placed in the locality, for example, at local post offices. College staff attend parents evenings and careers sessions, and support a 'young engineers' club in local schools. Tuition on college-based link courses for students from special schools is free; college staff are involved in reviews of statemented students from the age of 13 to assist in planning their progress. Free bus services from a number of outlying areas are provided by the college.

30 The admissions system is effective and responsive; it deals promptly and efficiently with applications for entry. Admission procedures work smoothly and are well managed by staff from the admission and guidance unit. The college sets targets for the time within which application forms should be acknowledged and interview dates arranged. Admissions staff also examine the reasons why students who made an application to the college did not finally enrol.

31 Staff from the unit, supported by specialist teaching staff as necessary, give guidance on the suitability of courses and facilitate transfer arrangements if students believe they are on the wrong course. The enrolment form asks students to provide details of any particular requirements they might have for additional support; responses are collated and passed to section managers, and the equal opportunities co-ordinator monitors subsequent action. Employers, students and course co-ordinators commented positively on the responsiveness of the unit and the effectiveness of its work. Some enrolment takes place on employers' premises.

32 Initial programmes introduce all students to their course and to the college generally. Full-time students have a week-long induction, and there is a single-session induction for part-time students. The students' induction pack includes a simple, practical student handbook and a checklist which is used by many tutors at the end of the week to evaluate their group's experience. The induction guidelines given to staff are clear

and comprehensive, and indicate a well-structured programme. However, students on various full-time courses reported that practice varied considerably. Some part-time students did not attend induction because it was presented as an optional addition to their course; others repeated the induction session because they had enrolled for more than one programme of study.

33 During induction week, all full-time students are assessed for numeracy and literacy. Some course teams, for example the engineering teams, incorporate additional subject-specific tests. Results from the tests are returned to tutors within a few days and students are offered additional support where appropriate. A recently-appointed co-ordinator provides specific learning support for individuals. The base for this work is a newly-refurbished study support centre. Students' attitudes to taking up extra support depend on their programme of study. Many GNVQ students realise the importance of improving their basic skills and make good use of the centre. Hairdressing and beauty courses have the lowest proportion of students taking advantage of the support available. The service provided is developing rapidly. There is scope for extending the range of diagnostic assessment and support which is on offer, and for improving the service to part-time students.

34 At induction, students are given clear information on the college systems for personal support. The student support officer is a trained counsellor employed full-time in this role. Good records are kept of interviews with students, and these are subsequently analysed. Currently over 40 per cent of enquiries relate to financial issues. Where appropriate, students are referred for specialised counselling outside the college. With the help of a small committee, the student support officer administers the college's Department for Education access fund, which is supplemented by money raised from a variety of fund-raising activities and charitable awards. As well as providing financial aid to students, the fund has been used to purchase an electric wheelchair and a laptop computer to help students with impaired mobility.

35 Students find the college staff accessible and concerned to help them make progress. Lecturers teaching students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities provide good support for students who experience difficulty finding somewhere to live or experiencing problems with social security. Full-time and part-time teaching staff on the adult basic education programme take care to share information about the achievements of individual students. Lecturers on the part-time course preparing students for entry to higher education give strong personal support to their students. Details of the central support services are made known to part-time students, including those at outreach centres, but they make little use of them.

36 Almost all full-time students are allocated one hour per week with a tutor. They meet as course groups and the tutor of each group is often the

students' curriculum co-ordinator. Recommended activities in the tutorial programme include interviews with individual students, work on the student's record of achievement, and action plans which involve students in drawing up their own learning objectives and evaluating their own progress. Students' perceptions of the effectiveness of tutorials varied according to the course and the tutor. The college's record of achievement document is clear and well structured. Procedures include notes of concern, which can be initiated by a lecturer or a student, and which are sent to the tutor to follow up. There are clear reporting procedures for students on release from employment: each employer is asked to specify the frequency of the report and the depth of detail required.

37 All full-time students can take advantage of a well-structured careers programme. They are given a programme guide which lists the activities available through the year, the resources required and the people who can be consulted. The programme begins at induction and continues in the tutor groups. The success of the programme depends on the initiative of the student and the support given by the individual tutor.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

38 Of the 114 classes observed 59 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses. Eleven per cent had more weaknesses than strengths. The following table summarises the grades given for the sessions inspected. The distribution of grades is in line with the norms established for the colleges inspected so far.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		1	6	1	1	0	9
GCSE		0	5	1	1	0	7
GNVQ		0	9	10	3	0	22
NVQ		0	5	9	1	1	16
Other		13	29	13	5	0	60
Total		14	54	34	11	1	114

39 Almost all lecturers followed schemes of work which indicated the order and timing of the main topics in their subject. The schemes varied in quality. Some lecturers in business, social studies, and information technology used detailed schemes that included the teaching methodology to be used, the resources required, the learning to be achieved and the way this was to be measured. Specialist lecturers working with students with learning difficulties had well-developed schemes which also explored avenues for certificating the students' achievements. In other instances, schemes were little more than subject syllabuses annotated with the dates when the topics were expected to be covered. These schemes are of limited use. They do not, for example, enable lecturers or course managers to

check the balance of teaching methods experienced by the students following that subject or course.

40 Detailed planning and preparation were apparent in the most successful sessions. In business administration, resource packs and worksheets produced by lecturers were used to support individualised programmes of learning for students on NVQ and part-time courses. Carefully-planned simulation exercises, relating directly to the lesson topic of learning through play, encouraged the full participation of an initially timid group of nursery nursing students. They recalled their experiences on their recently-completed work placements and the lecturer skilfully linked these to the lesson objectives.

41 In the best classes, lecturers established a good rapport with the students. They involved the students through individual questioning or through appropriately demanding individual or group tasks. Many lessons were organised to include varied activities for students and the work was lively and interesting. The needs of students with widely different abilities or experiences were met particularly successfully in basic education and information technology classes. One lively lesson involved a large group of adults, of varying ability and experience, in elementary information processing. The session had been well planned by a committed and enthusiastic lecturer who reviewed previous work, set clear objectives and used a number of different teaching methods to ensure that all members of the class were learning effectively. Precise records of students' progress and achievements were maintained.

42 The teaching of English had many strong features. In a GCE A level evening class, students were helped to discover that their language is rich in synonyms. They first worked on individual assignments using a thesaurus and dictionary, then engaged in lively group discussion. Specialist mathematics teachers used different methods, including workshops, for organising students' learning. They increasingly work with teams in other subjects to improve students' perceptions of the relevance of mathematics, for example, by developing and assessing numeracy skills through subject assignments. Students studying information technology as part of their course used good support materials to enable them to progress at different rates. These ensured that the more able students were constantly challenged. In one effective class, students with learning difficulties were using a computer graphics programme and laser printer to create their own Christmas posters.

43 Much of the teaching in social studies, business and social care was sound but it lacked flair and student involvement. Lecturers in vocational subject areas, teaching groups of students with learning difficulties, did not always exhibit the skills necessary to cater for the range of learning needs. A third of the classes observed in engineering suffered from lack of preparation, shortcomings in subject expertise or weak class control: printed material was of poor quality, students arrived late for practical classes, and queries from students were avoided.

44 The effectiveness of some sessions was reduced by inadequate physical resources or inappropriate use of such resources. Although some teachers made skilful use of overhead projectors, as in social studies, others used poor-quality transparencies or required the students to spend too much time copying pre-prepared transparencies into their notebooks. One class in art history was disadvantaged by a lack of window blinds and an appropriate projection screen; students could not see the colours or the detail of the slides being displayed. Shortcomings in specialist equipment also affected the credibility of the teaching in some practical areas. For example, the beauty therapy salon had a limited range of materials and lacked essential basic equipment.

45 Most courses had clear and appropriate methods of assessing the progress and achievement of their students. Students were issued with a programme of assignments and assessments for the coming year which included dates by which the students were to return their work. All assignments in full-time engineering programmes were moderated by another lecturer before being issued to students. In a minority of courses, the assessment process had shortcomings. In the GNVQs in business, the criteria for differentiating performance in the use of information technology lacked clarity. Lecturers responsible for the NVQ in vehicle mechanical and electrical systems had no clear mechanisms for recording progress in acquiring competences. The courses are new, and insufficient guidance and support from the awarding body contributed to the problem. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, feedback from teachers during the sessions failed to indicate the criteria under which students were achieving, or failing to achieve, the required competences.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

46 The aspirations, backgrounds and ages of those who enrol at Bishop Auckland College cover a broad spectrum. Examination pass rates, which vary widely across the college, do not adequately reflect the achievements of those students who do not complete courses, or cannot adequately apply themselves to study because of personal circumstances. For example, of six students who failed to complete one full-time course, two left the course early to take up offers of paid industrial training and will continue their education on a part-time basis; one joined the army; and two, who achieved passes in most of the course units, hope to take up courses again after resitting some examinations.

47 Students seen individually and in groups were generally committed to their studies and enjoying their time at the college. Health and social care students asked questions in lessons and were prepared to discuss issues at every opportunity. Those on a nursery nurses course commented on the confidence they had gained, and the way in which they had been able to use the skills acquired on the course in their work experience. Information technology groups frequently stayed in the college in the evening to continue work that they had begun in class. Students on the

special provision for those with learning difficulties were proud of their achievements and could talk about their personal action plans and the further goals they hoped to achieve. On a small minority of courses, students showed less enthusiasm for their studies, showing disrespect for their lecturer or arriving late for classes. The college system for obtaining students' views on their courses showed considerable levels of disenchantment with one engineering course.

48 Students' responses to formal assignments and tests demonstrated that they were reaching standards appropriate to their abilities and the levels of the courses they were studying. Particularly good project work was produced by GCSE sociology students. Assignment reports from some engineering classes showed skilled use of action plans and the achievement of goals through group work. Individual projects undertaken on the higher national certificate in engineering had good links with the students' workplace; they were often of a good professional standard and, in some cases, the outcomes had been of immediate use to the employer. Portfolios of work produced for GNVQ business studies were complete, well organised and appropriately assessed.

49 Some important general skills could have been better developed. Courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy did not include information technology, and opportunities were missed for using information technology in adult basic education. Engineering students' work showed weaknesses in basic mathematics, even when other aspects were of high quality. Poor grammar and spelling were noted in the written work of students in health and social care, and in engineering. In some cases, this went uncorrected by the lecturer. GNVQ courses in business failed adequately to address the development of general skills.

50 Part-time students on vocational courses are generally regular in their attendance and most complete their courses of study. The majority are released from employment to go to the college, and this provides them with discipline and motivation. In 1993-94, for example, an average 90 per cent attendance rate was recorded for students on the higher national certificate in business studies, and only 10 per cent of the students who enrolled failed to finish the course. In the mechanical and production engineering competences first-year group, the overall attendance was 93 per cent and no students left before its end. Problems do exist in a few courses. Only three of the seven students who embarked on the two-year national certificate in electrical engineering completed the course.

51 On full-time vocational courses, attendance and completion is more variable. In 1993-94, the NVQ health and social care course recorded a 98 per cent level of attendance and all of the enrolled students completed. On the NVQ administration course at level 3, the overall attendance was 93 per cent and again no student left. However, other courses achieved much poorer figures. On the intermediate GNVQ in design, for example, the attendance rate was below 70 per cent, and seven of the 15 students

failed to complete the course. A high proportion of GCE A level and GCSE students also fail to complete their courses.

52 Some vocational and academic courses achieve good pass rates. On the two-year higher national certificate in engineering, all the students finished the course and achieved their qualification. On the similar course in business studies, 88 per cent of students who enrolled gained their award. Good results were also recorded for professional programmes in business management and quality assurance; RSA information technology courses; the diploma in nursery nursing; and the certificated work in basic education and with students who have learning difficulties. Many of the individual C&G programmes, for example in secretarial studies and computer-aided design, have high success rates. On the GCE A level programme, results are good in sociology, where the pass rate of those who completed was 86 per cent, and in art and photography, where all students who completed passed.

53 Results are less than satisfactory in a minority of courses. In the BTEC first and national awards in engineering, the 1994 results show that 62 per cent of those completing their course gained their award, which represents 45 per cent of those who originally enrolled. However, more than half of those who did not achieve the award failed on only one or two units of their course and are expected to pass after further assessment. In some cases, they have been allowed to go on to a course at a higher level. Results for some GCE A level subjects, for example law and psychology, are poor. On the GCSE provision, where many students are repeating subjects that they initially studied at school, results are mixed. For some individuals, a low grade represents a significant improvement on previous performance. Only 29 per cent of GCSE mathematics students achieved grade C or higher, but students who achieved lower grades spoke of losing their fear of mathematics as a result of taking the course.

54 Sixty-nine per cent of the 112 students, aged 16-18, in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education's 1994 performance tables were successful. This places the college among the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure.

55 The college's course monitoring system requires all curriculum co-ordinators to collect information on destinations. The 1994 data shows that a small proportion of full-time students who successfully complete their course go directly into employment. An exception is the group achieving the diploma in nursery nursing, where four out of five succeeded in finding a job. Almost two-thirds of those gaining intermediate level vocational qualifications continued their studies in further education and about one-fifth gained employment. Fourteen per cent of students who passed advanced GNVQ courses and national diplomas found employment, 14 per cent continued in further education, 37 per cent took up places in higher education institutions, and 24 per cent are unemployed.

56 Most students on the range of courses designed to prepare them for entry to higher education are successful. All those from the foundation year of the business computing degree, and from the first year of the combined studies degree, continued their studies in higher education. About 90 per cent of the students from the part-time certificate in foundation studies go on to higher education courses. More than half of the trainees leaving the college's youth training schemes enter employment and 10 per cent continued in further education. Of seven students leaving the initial year of the course designed specifically for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, four took up youth training places and a fifth is on an NVQ course at the college.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

57 The college's commitment to quality assurance is underpinned by a comprehensive policy and a summary statement endorsed by the board. Staff throughout the college regularly review the quality of the service they provide. Many college procedures include standards and targets to enable performance to be evaluated.

58 The quality framework is built around the standards and specifications outlined in the internationally-recognised British Standards (BS EN ISO 9001) system. The college was the first in the Northern Region to receive this accreditation for all its education and training programmes. Most staff understand the quality assurance system and are involved in further development of standards and procedures. A manager co-ordinates all quality initiatives. A quality assurance managing group, drawn from staff and students across the college, has the main responsibility for, and is successful in, developing and implementing quality assurance. Regular internal and external audits of the quality system are a condition of accreditation. The audit processes have been rigorous and have resulted in improvements. However, the academic boards' relationships to the quality system requires clarification as do references to various quality groups in the staff handbook.

59 The curriculum co-ordinator's manual provides considerable assistance to managers of teaching teams. The course files, kept centrally, provide continuous records. The manual and course files are continuously reviewed and are improving. Initial problems in relating standard documentation to part-time and short courses have been recognised. The annual curriculum review reports involve course teams in evaluating the provision they make: resource and training needs are identified and suggestions made for improving course content or design. The standard documents used for review are somewhat limited; for example, they do not encourage teams to look at their teaching methods. An additional course review procedure involves an in-depth review of two courses per term.

60 A customer care group, focusing on internal customers, has representatives from across the college and enjoys a good reputation among staff. It has been successful in dealing with many college issues, including communications. Students and staff are encouraged to recommend improvements through a quality improvement suggestion scheme.

61 In the self-assessment report provided by the college to support the inspection, perceived strengths and weaknesses are succinctly listed, and briefly explained, under the headings used in FEFC inspection reports and the balance between strengths and weaknesses is evident. Supporting evidence and cross-references are kept to a minimum. The report forms a useful and balanced introduction to the college. It provides a realistic evaluation of the college's position and its conclusions are matched closely with the judgements of the inspection team.

62 The college's student charter was issued at induction in the form of a handy-size laminated card. The charter defines measurable standards relating to response times to applications and complaints, and guides students to other sources of information. The student handbook specifies a wider range of standards relating to services that students receive. Students think that this handbook is more useful, overall, than the charter.

63 Personnel and staff-development procedures are comprehensive and reflect the college's supportive attitude to staff. The staff-development group, which has representatives from across the college, agrees a programme that attempts to balance personal, curriculum and college needs. The budget available, about 2 per cent of the college's overall budget, reflects the emphasis the college places on staff development. Positive features include specific training for section managers taking up new responsibilities. Procedures for disseminating the knowledge gained from staff development and training, and for evaluating its effectiveness are underdeveloped. External assessment for the Investors in People award is arranged for February 1995. The college's progress in quality assurance means that many of the procedures required for accreditation are already well established.

64 Staff appraisal focuses on the personal development of staff. Training for appraiser and appraisee has helped to allay staff concern, and the processes are well understood and supported. All members of the directorate, and two-thirds of the management team, have been appraised. Progress is variable across the teaching sections. Participation by support staff is voluntary. Five per cent have chosen to be involved.

RESOURCES

Staffing

65 Teachers are generally well qualified, experienced and highly committed to their students. Over 80 per cent of those working full time

have a degree and a teaching qualification. More than 70 per cent of the part-time lecturers are qualified teachers. Support staff are also appropriately qualified and experienced. Technicians often have a wide expertise that enables them to maintain a broad range of equipment. Some teachers lack recent industrial or commercial experience. Despite recent redeployment and other staff changes, morale remains high.

66 Staff are generally efficiently deployed. Part-time staff and external specialists under contract are used to provide extra flexibility and expertise. New full-time and part-time staff benefit from an induction process which includes work shadowing. However, there is over-reliance on part-time teaching staff in some areas and this places undue administrative demands on curriculum co-ordinators.

Equipment/learning resources

67 Most teaching rooms are equipped with basic teaching aids such as overhead projectors and whiteboards. Video recorders, television monitors, and a good stock of video materials are readily accessible. Most specialist areas have acceptable levels and quality of equipment but some areas of work require further investment; for example, much of the machinery in engineering is outdated. Standards of maintenance are high: technicians complete first line repairs speedily. The college does not have a policy for improving and replacing equipment.

68 The library is well used. The number of textbooks is sufficient and the budget appropriate. Library staff employ a computer to monitor the use of resources on a daily basis. A book security system is in operation. The library and adjacent resource centre both lack modern equipment to access information.

69 Students have the use of a large stock of computers. However, much of the equipment is old, and cannot run industry-standard software. The diversity of the workstations limits students' ability to transfer their programmes or to consolidate the skills they have learned. The outreach provision at Spennymoor run in partnership with a charity comprises a pleasant environment and houses high-quality computer workstations.

Accommodation

70 The college is located on a single campus and has extensive car parking and adjacent sports facilities. A large part of the accommodation comprises a series of interconnected buildings, dating from the 1950s with further additions in the 1960s. There is one block of four storeys. The nursery is housed in temporary mobile accommodation. Buildings are well maintained, clean and notably free of graffiti. Security arrangements include uniformed evening patrols and this has helped to keep vandalism to a minimum. Public areas are bright and attractive. The college has a happy and business-like atmosphere.

71 A detailed accommodation strategy is used effectively to plan maintenance and further development. A considerable amount of work to improve the existing accommodation has recently been completed. Where possible, generous corridor space has been subsumed into new classrooms, and smaller rooms combined to improve flexibility. Access for those with impaired mobility has been improved. A newly-refurbished hairdressing salon, recently opened, is of professional standard but a new beauty salon is small for the group sizes that use it, and the changing facilities are limited. The art and design rooms are unsuitable for advanced work. Secure storage for students' personal belongings is scarce. Rooms are well heated but thermal insulation is poor. Some of the car parks and pathways adjacent to buildings remain poorly lit. Internal and external signposting is poor.

72 The refurbishment of ceilings and lighting is to a high standard. Most rooms have carpets and window blinds. The new furniture, standardised across the college, looks attractive and functions well. Some areas of the college still have furniture and fittings that are worn or damaged.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

73 Bishop Auckland College is a small institution which is moving successfully towards achieving its mission. Its strengths are:

- the close and effective working relationships between the directorate and staff at all levels
- well-defined and clearly-understood lines of accountability and communication
- responsiveness to, and collaboration with, employers, schools and local organisations
- the well-organised systems for recruitment, induction and guidance of students
- teaching that is generally sound and sometimes varied and challenging
- the college-wide quality framework and the commitment of staff to continuous improvement
- generally well-qualified and experienced staff
- supportive approaches to staff development
- accommodation on a single site, much of which has been refurbished to a high standard.

74 In order to improve further the quality of its provision, the college should:

- develop effective policies to guide some aspects of the curriculum
- strengthen some cross-college functions
- develop open and outreach learning
- ensure that students' tutorial experience is of a consistent quality
- encourage greater creativity and student involvement in some classes
- improve attendance levels and completion rates on a minority of courses
- improve examination results on some of its courses
- update equipment in some areas of work.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at December 1994)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (as at December 1994)

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at December 1994)

 - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at December 1994)

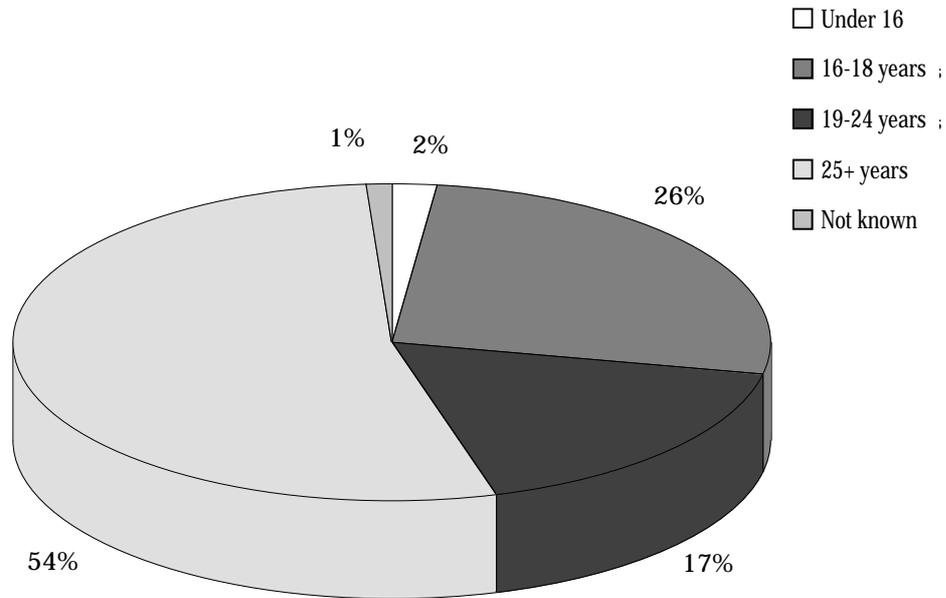
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

Bishop Auckland College: percentage enrolments by age (as at December 1994)

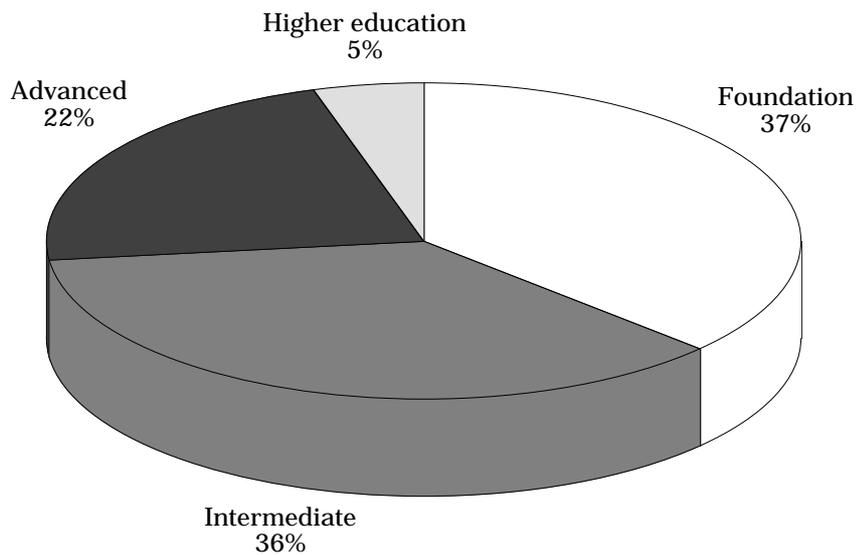


Enrolments: 3,353

Note: this excludes figures for the Deerbolt Centre.

Figure 2

Bishop Auckland College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at December 1994)

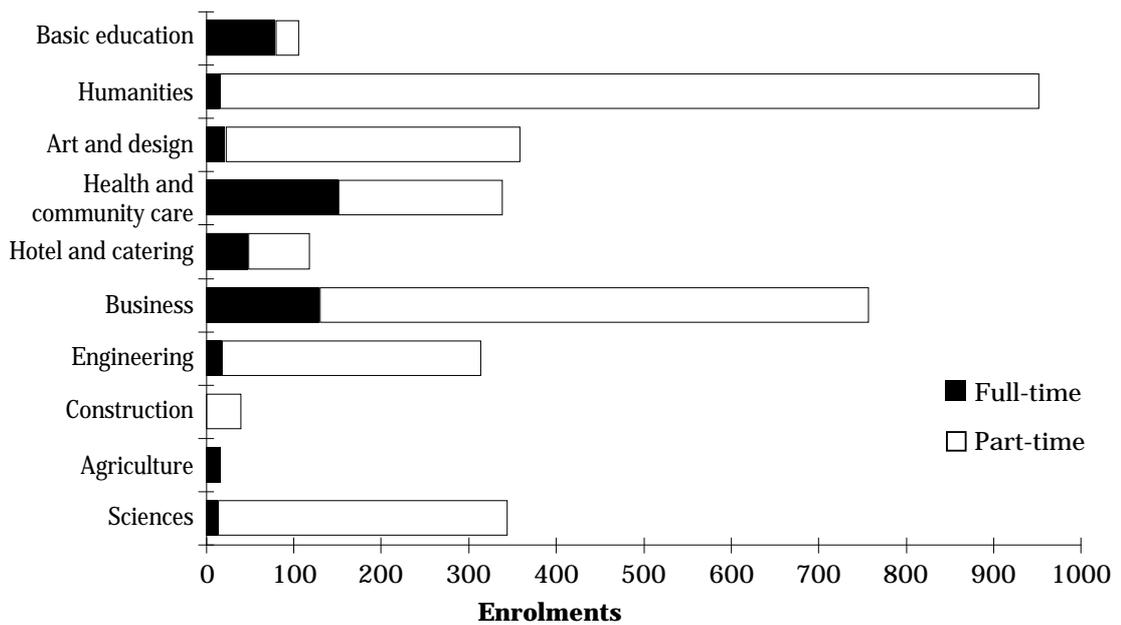


Enrolments: 3,353

Note: this excludes figures for the Deerbolt Centre and a small number of leisure/recreation enrolments.

Figure 3

Bishop Auckland College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at December 1994)

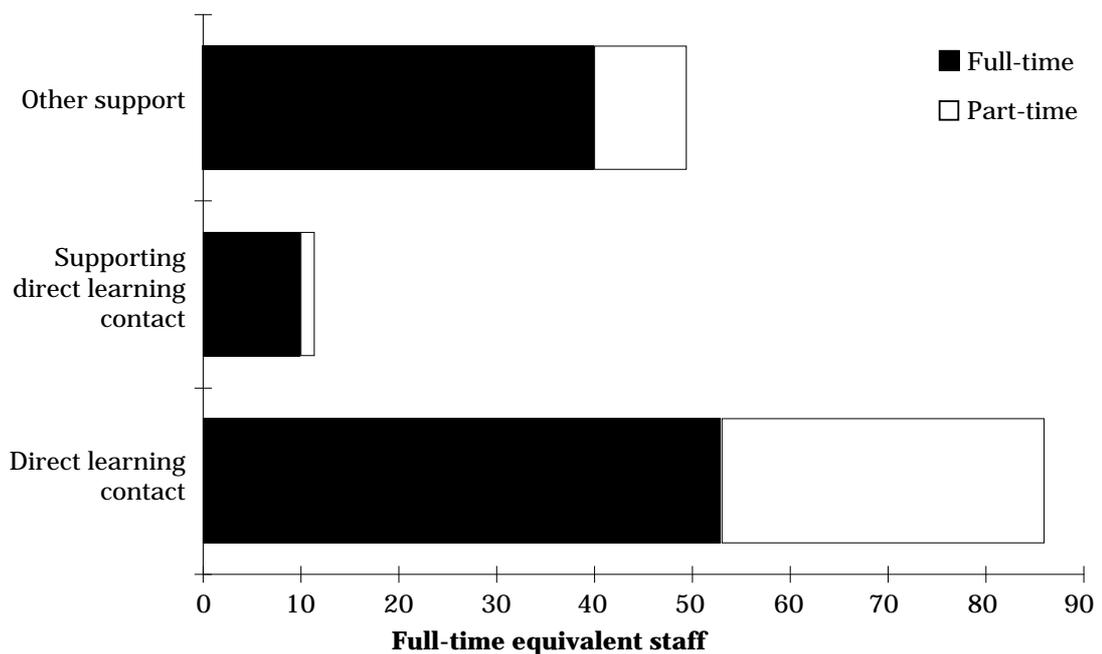


Enrolments: 3,353

Note: this excludes figures for the Deerbolt Centre.

Figure 4

Bishop Auckland College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at December 1994)

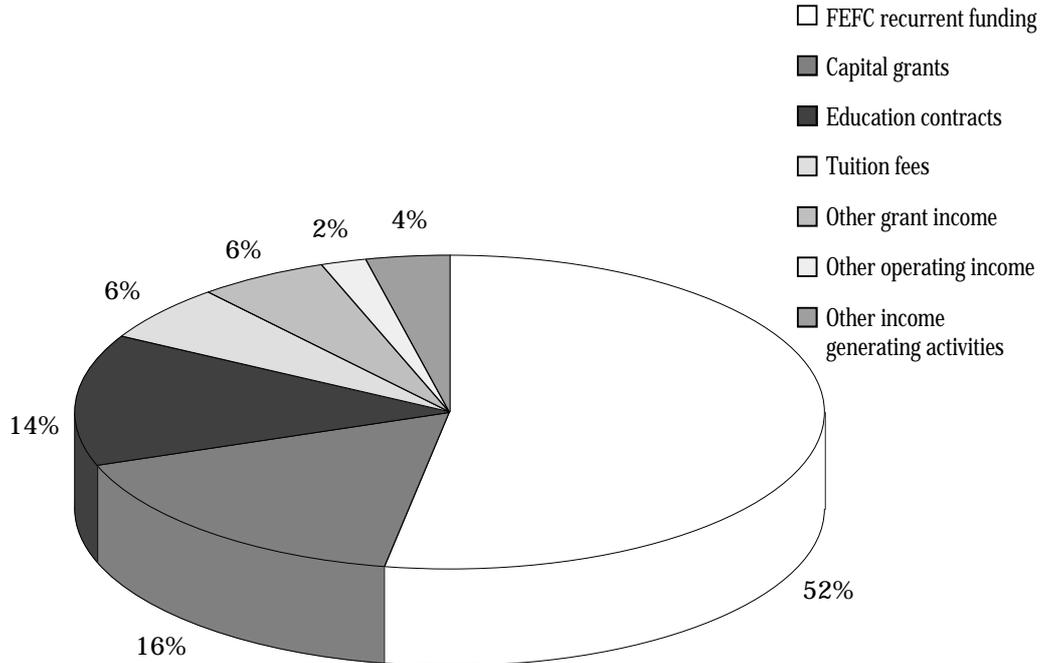


Full-time equivalent staff: 147

Note: this excludes figures for the Deerbolt Centre.

Figure 5

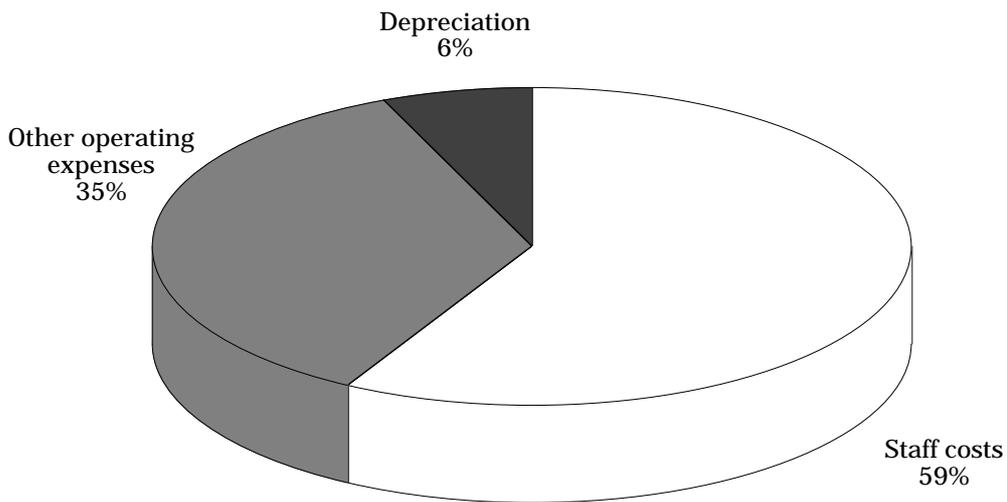
Bishop Auckland College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £5,883,000

Figure 6

Bishop Auckland College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £6,172,000

Note: this chart excludes £13,000 interest payable. The historical cost surplus for the period is approximately £86,000.

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