

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**The Blackpool
Sixth Form
College**

May 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 47/95

THE BLACKPOOL SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected October 1994 – January 1995

Summary

The Blackpool Sixth Form College was established in 1988. Purpose built as a sixth form centre in 1971, its accommodation is generally of a high standard. The college's main purpose is to provide a high-quality academic education for 16-18 year olds. The college is perceived as highly responsive by parents and the local community. It offers an extensive GCE A level programme and students are encouraged to broaden their skills and experience by participating in a wide range of other activities. Staff-student relationships are good and examination results overall are close to the national average for sixth form colleges though a significant minority of students are not achieving their full potential. A distinctive feature of the college is the computerised management information systems which it has developed and now successfully marketed to other colleges. These include a swipe-card system for recording students' attendance. The college should: ensure that teaching is adapted to meet individual students' needs; develop its strategic planning, particularly in relation to financial forecasts; clarify the roles and responsibilities of senior and middle managers; and extend the work that is under way to introduce quality assurance procedures.

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	3
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	1

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	2	Art and design	2
Business and secretarial studies	2	Psychology, sociology, law and economics	2
		English	2
		Languages	3
		Geography, history, classics, religious studies, philosophy	3

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INTRODUCTION

1 The Blackpool Sixth Form College was inspected between October 1994 and January 1995; its enrolment and induction procedures had been inspected at the start of the 1994-95 academic year. A team of 14 inspectors spent a total of 60 days in the college. They inspected a broad range of work, observed 114 classes, and examined college documentation. In addition, meetings were held with governors, parents, the careers service, students, senior managers and staff and representatives of industry, commerce, higher education and partner schools.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 The Blackpool Sixth Form College was established in 1988. Purpose-built in 1971 as the sixth form centre in a split-site 11-18 school, the college enjoys a long-established tradition. Some elements continue including the wearing of uniform by students and weekly assemblies which the principal regularly addresses.

3 Student numbers have grown from around 650 in 1988 to almost 1,000 in 1994. The majority are studying for General Certificate of Education advanced levels (GCE A levels). Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2 and by curriculum area in figure 3. The college has 66 full-time and 17 part-time teachers. Staff expressed as full-time equivalents are shown in figure 4. First-year student numbers in 1994-95 increased by approximately 5 per cent but overall the college has not met its growth targets for this year. Lower enrolments in the previous two years are attributed to a demographic downturn which is now coming to an end.

4 The college's primary catchment area extends across Blackpool and the nearby town of Poulton le Fylde. It also recruits from a radius of 20 miles which includes the towns of Garstang, Fleetwood, Lytham St Annes and Kirkham, in addition to the many villages which occupy the area known as the Fylde.

5 The other providers of post-16 education in the area are a large further education college, five 11-18 state schools (one grant maintained) and six 11-18 independent schools. A small number of students transfer to The Blackpool Sixth Form College from each of the 11-18 schools.

6 The main industry in the area is tourism. Blackpool is a popular seaside town with year-round conferences and a large seasonal influx of tourists. The population in the summer rises to approximately 500,000, whereas in winter it is approximately 150,000. Minority ethnic groups represent less than 1 per cent of the population. The unemployment rate fluctuates around 6 per cent and part-time work is readily available for students, many of whom take advantage of this opportunity.

7 The college states that its mission is to provide the most responsive, the most widely valued and the most generally successful high quality academic education opportunities for students aged from 16-19. The college's intention is to be perceived as at least equal to the best nationally.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 As it states in its mission, the college concentrates on the provision of academic opportunities for students aged 16-19. It offers a range of GCE A level and GCE advanced supplementary (AS) courses primarily as routes to higher education, together with a limited number of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects. The strategic plan specifies that the possibility of offering vocational courses and adult evening provision will be investigated but the college's view is that both developments would currently be difficult to support financially.

9 Students have a wide choice of 35 subjects at GCE A level. A limited range of GCE AS subjects is also available and during the current session three are running. The college is beginning to introduce modular syllabuses at GCE A level, increasing the options available to students. The one-year GCSE course is available for those wishing to improve grades or gain access to the GCE A level course.

10 Secretarial studies is the only vocational subject offered and only a small number of students take courses leading to Pitman or RSA Examinations Board (RSA) qualifications. Exploratory work has been done to establish the feasibility of introducing General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) but the college considers it has insufficient space to introduce GNVQs in 1995. The lack of opportunity in vocational areas limits the options available to students.

11 The college is successful in broadening the skills and experiences of students through a well-planned programme of activities. All lower sixth students follow a compulsory core studies course which includes at least one choice from 46 recreational activities, for example sports, community services and drama. Core studies include general studies which covers careers education, personal education, first aid and information technology. Students can take short courses in a foreign language or participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. In the upper sixth, students must include at least one recreational activity in their programme and may choose to complete the course leading to the GCE A level general studies examination. The majority take up this option.

12 There are regular opportunities for students to participate in musical and dramatic performances, fund raising, public speaking and debating activities. In addition all students in the lower sixth have an opportunity to undertake a period of work experience outside term time.

13 A recent college initiative aims to attract students to subjects that under-recruit nationally. A bursary scheme, designed to encourage able students to study GCE A levels in mathematics and physics, will pay £300 to those entering with seven GCSEs at grade A on successful completion of a GCE A level programme which includes these subjects. The college has also taken positive action to encourage women to take subjects which they do not usually study.

14 Liaison with the 11-16 partner schools in the area is well developed and over 80 per cent of the intake to the college comes from 14 schools. College staff responsible for liaison visit schools frequently. They attend careers advice evenings in the schools and there is a series of well-planned

college open days for prospective students. Links with partner schools at a subject or curriculum area level are more limited and there are currently few links with other post-16 providers in the area.

15 There are good links with parents, many of whom have regular contact with the college. Musical and dramatic performances and other special events are well attended by parents and members of the community. The college also enjoys excellent relationships with a number of higher education institutions.

16 The college is strengthening its links with industry and commerce. Many of these are the outcome of work placements and visits students have made to a number of industrial organisations. Representatives from companies are invited to give talks to students and the college has in recent years participated in the young enterprise scheme. Three or four staff each year have spent short periods of time in industry. Links with the Lancashire Area West Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) are at an early stage of development.

17 A distinctive feature of the college is its computerised information system, which it has developed in-house and now successfully marketed to other colleges. This includes a swipe-card system for recording attendance and contacting students and a networked system of television monitors for displaying college information. A college company was set up in May 1993 and in its first year of operation it achieved a turnover of nearly £250,000. Systems have been installed in 12 other colleges.

18 The college has been particularly effective in promoting itself. Extensive links have been developed with a range of external agencies including the local press. The quality of marketing materials is good. There is, however, little evidence of market research. For example, there has been no research to update information on the adult market gained at the time when the local authority ran evening classes at the college.

19 Teaching staff have little experience of supporting students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A small number of students each year have been diagnosed as dyslexic. During the current session one student has a muscular condition and a further student is statemented for specific learning difficulties. Both students receive appropriate additional support.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 Members of the corporation take an active role in the life of the college and are committed to promoting its interests. The board of 19 members includes those with industrial, professional, commercial and wider community interests. There are two parent governors, a teacher governor and a representative from the TEC. Members have expertise in a number of areas, including law, finance and marketing. Committees have been set up to deal with personnel, administration and finance, remuneration and audit and they have an appropriate schedule of meetings. The board recently established a sponsorship and extra mural committee to seek sponsorship from local firms. Board members monitor parents' and students' perceptions of the college by attending events such as enrolment, parents' evenings and social activities. However, they play a limited role

in strategic planning and insufficient information is provided to help them set performance indicators against which they can measure the college's progress or review its performance.

21 The college's senior management team comprises the principal, deputy principal and vice-principal who have complementary skills and work well together. During the past year the college has suffered the sudden loss of a number of senior staff and temporary arrangements have had to be made, pending reorganisation of the management structure. Responsibility for the smooth day-to-day running of the college is effectively devolved to the vice-principal. All major policy and operational responsibilities including finance, personnel, estates management, curriculum development, marketing and student welfare are controlled by the principal and deputy principal. It is increasingly difficult, however, for them to cover this range of responsibilities effectively. The proposed restructuring should address this in order to allow senior management to concentrate on strategic issues and devolve greater responsibility for operational management to other staff.

22 The middle management structure lacks clarity and there are no specific job descriptions. Four senior teachers take responsibility for communications, examinations, industrial liaison and finance as it relates to resource allocations. There are 10 heads of division, each with responsibility for the management and teaching of subjects in their division, who report to various members of senior management for different aspects of their divisional role. In addition, the structure includes a senior tutor whose main responsibility is for student discipline. There is some overlap between roles and line management is not clear. For example, there is confusion between the roles of the head of division and the personal tutor in monitoring students' progress.

23 Staff teams work well together and responsibilities are clearly allocated to ensure the smooth running of classes. The system of resource allocation for books and equipment is fair and well understood by staff.

24 The flow of information throughout the organisation is effective. In addition to general staff meetings, a senior staff panel, comprising the senior management team, senior teachers, heads of divisions and the senior tutor, meets on the first Tuesday of each month. Minutes from this meeting go to divisional meetings which take place on the second Tuesday. The senior staff panel acts as a sounding board for ideas and it provides staff with the opportunity to express their views. Decision making, however, rests with the senior management team.

25 Strategic planning is at an early stage of development at all levels of the organisation. The college plan does not address all aspects of the mission statement nor does it contain a detailed operational statement. There are no specific targets, dates or named responsibilities. Divisional action plans are often descriptions of current practice and statements of intent; they lack precise targets and clear forward planning. There are gaps in the documentation of college policies and procedures, for example, in those relating to personnel procedures.

26 The financial forecast is an integrated element of the strategic plan. The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is £22.41 per unit. The median for all sixth form colleges is £19.81. The income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Senior managers and members of the board are aware of the financial consequences of not achieving growth targets this year. Contingency plans regarding accommodation and management restructuring are being developed. Unit costs and measures of efficiency are not well understood below senior management level.

27 Senior managers have recognised the need to encourage a positive attitude to change. They have set up a flexible-learning group to introduce new methods of teaching and have begun the process of identifying quality assurance measures and setting targets.

28 A major strength of the college is the effectiveness of its computerised management information systems. They provide high-quality, accurate information and staff have confidence in the outputs. The systems need to be integrated if they are to realise their full potential.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

29 The college provides a well-organised programme of pre-enrolment information and guidance for its prospective students. Talks in schools and open evenings at college are well attended, and offer clear information to young people and their parents. Interviews are subsequently held at school or in college, either individually or in small groups. School leavers value the pre-sixth-form conference held at the college in June each year which provides them with an opportunity to talk to both staff and current students about subject choices and life at the college.

30 Students make a prompt start to their courses in September when well-planned introductory sessions and the friendly and supportive attitude of teachers enable them to settle in quickly. Those who wish to change a subject at an early stage are able to do so through a well-understood procedure which involves counselling by senior staff and consultation with parents.

31 Each student is allocated a personal tutor who is also one of their subject teachers. Personal tutors are described by the college as responsible for general guidance and advice and for regular monitoring of each student's progress. However, responsibility for the support of students is shared between the personal tutors, heads of division, the senior tutor and the senior management team. While the process generally operates successfully, it relies heavily on informal links between staff at all levels. Some tutors are put under considerable pressure at key times of the year because of the number of students for whom they have responsibility and because they do not always know when students have referred concerns to others. Personal tutors would benefit from a more effectively co-ordinated system and from the provision of relevant staff development.

32 Students whose work rate or attendance at classes gives cause for concern are promptly and efficiently referred by subject teachers to the relevant head of division. If the problem persists it is referred to the senior tutor who may interview the student, consult parents, or refer the student to the principal, deputy or vice-principal for further counselling. Help from outside agencies is sought on occasion. There is scope for personal counselling services to be strengthened further.

33 There is a well-managed annual schedule for reviewing and recording students' achievements. Personal tutors help students to plan their learning, review their progress and write personal statements to support their higher education applications. As a result the majority of students leave with an up-dated national record of achievement. However, the documents used in the planning and review sessions are insufficiently detailed or subject specific. Consequently many of the targets which students set themselves are too bland and general. The informal nature of communication between subject teachers and personal tutors in the early stages of the course does not encourage the setting of clearly-defined targets against which progress can be measured.

34 The college maintains close contact with parents. Over a two-year course parents receive three reports and have the opportunity to attend seven parents' evenings at which students' progress can be discussed, or information given about higher education and careers. The college contacts parents whenever there is considered to be a need.

35 Students receive helpful guidance on their careers and higher education choices through a systematic programme of talks, events and individual interviews. Careers and higher education information is available in the library but the college lacks a dedicated careers base. Staff work in close collaboration with members of the Lancashire Careers Service who attend college regularly to give guidance to students. They do not, however, attend enrolment or the pre-sixth-form conference when students are considering their post-16 choices at the college.

36 A positive feature of the college's support for students is its system of voluntary weekly subject clinics, where students can obtain help with difficulties they may be experiencing with their work. The college should consider ways of increasing attendance at these clinics and of using them more effectively to support students in their learning. Insufficient attention is given to diagnosing and meeting the individual learning support needs of students early in the course.

37 The student council plays an active role in representing student opinion. It meets weekly with the vice-principal and has been successful in effecting changes in areas such as the frequency of assemblies and the content of the pre-sixth-form conference. The college is meeting its statutory obligation to provide collective worship and religious education for those who wish to receive it. The Christian union meets weekly and religious education is provided at GCE A level and GCSE.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

38 Of the 114 lessons seen, 57 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. Only 9 per cent were judged to have more weaknesses than strengths. The following table shows the grades given to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		17	36	26	7	1	87
GCSE		3	6	11	1	0	21
Other		0	3	2	0	1	6
Total		20	45	39	8	2	114

39 Teachers display a good command of their subject and many communicate their enthusiasm for it. Explanations are given clearly and authoritatively. Staff-student relations are good.

40 Most lessons are purposeful, well planned and have clear objectives. In the best lessons teachers use a range of strategies to help students explore ideas and consolidate their understanding. In modern languages students are encouraged to think and respond in the language being studied. In GCE A level textiles, well-designed tasks encourage students to experiment and explore ideas imaginatively. History lessons include well-targeted questions which ensure that all students contribute to debate. In a GCE A level English lesson students were able to support their contributions to a discussion on Hamlet's madness, with mature views and relevant details from the text. The teacher gave them scope to explore their ideas and then drew out the key points from their discussion.

41 Science students work effectively both as individuals and in groups and they are encouraged to support each other, for example, during an exercise checking the layout of circuit boards. They also implement health and safety practices confidently. Textiles and ceramics students develop a wide range of subject-specific skills. Art students draw, paint and apply colour competently, although they use a limited range of media and materials. Theatre studies students are taught a broad range of performance skills. However, a significant number do not apply themselves sufficiently and are too easily distracted in class.

42 In some lessons a narrow range of teaching strategies is used and there are insufficient opportunities for students to develop and consolidate their own understanding, to ask questions or to improve their research skills. Extensive notes are dictated or copied from the board. On occasions opportunities are missed to develop students' knowledge, for example in modern languages where the range of students' vocabulary could be more systematically extended.

43 The college has recognised the need to broaden the range of teaching and learning methods and has established a working group on flexible learning. This aims to encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning. As part of this strategy technology facilities are being

increased to develop the use of computer-based learning. Supported self-study packages are also being introduced.

44 In some subjects students are given responsibility for organising their own work and are encouraged to work independently with appropriate support. In further mathematics students in the upper sixth are set challenging questions to tackle on their own, help being provided if needed. In business studies, sociology and psychology students are encouraged to undertake research and to explore and evaluate theories. In theatre studies students are required to work both independently and co-operatively on a variety of tasks and assignments. More able students cope well with this challenge but less-confident and less-well-organised students would benefit from more precise objectives for their work.

45 In the majority of subjects the teaching is based on detailed schemes of work or course handbooks. For example, the course file for physics sets out clear aims and objectives and guidance on marking and assessment. The scheme of work for history contains details of resources, teaching approaches, assessment and homework. Documentation for the mathematics curriculum ensures that a good balance of topics is covered in both years of the GCE A level course. Law students are given helpful course guides. A minority of schemes of work contain only outlines of topics to be covered.

46 Information technology skills are not developed systematically in all subjects. In mathematics and humanities information technology is rarely used in lessons. Social science students develop appropriate skills, particularly in GCE A level sociology. In science subjects a member of staff has been allocated responsibility for information technology and effective use is made of computers in some lessons. However, the use of computer skills is still generally underdeveloped in science.

47 Staff assess students' work regularly and keep records of progress. Marking varies, both across subjects and between teachers, from that which provides little specific guidance to that which is thorough and helpful. In business studies the written comments on students' work offer constructive criticism. In geography marking is accurate but does not often give guidance on how improvements could be made.

48 Opportunities are taken in a number of subjects to broaden students' experiences. Occasional visits from artists enrich the provision in art. Theatre studies students take part in a variety of performances and all students are given the chance to attend the theatre regularly. Field work is used effectively to enrich learning in science and geography and modern language students are able to extend their learning through visits abroad.

49 Teaching on the recreational studies programme encourages active participation by students and provides tuition at an appropriate level. The general studies programme provides opportunities for students to develop oral and presentational skills although the extent to which they are engaged in activity and debate varies from subject to subject. In the first-aid course, for example, students learn basic life-saving activities. In communications they develop interviewing skills.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

50 The majority of students at the college enjoy their studies and make good progress. They develop appropriate skills and knowledge, achieve good results in examinations and secure places in higher education. However, a significant minority are less well motivated and do not achieve their full potential during their time at the college.

51 In 1994 the college entered 458 students for GCE A level examinations, excluding general studies. The pass rate at grades A-E was 80 per cent which matches the average for all sixth form colleges in 1993 but is slightly below the provisional national average for 1994. Students aged 16-18 years taking GCE A level and AS examinations in 1993-94 scored, on average, 4.5 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college among the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1994 tables published by the Department for Education.

52 The percentage of GCE A level students gaining grades A-C in 1994 was 45 per cent, compared with an average for all sixth form colleges in 1993 of 46 per cent and a provisional national average of 48 per cent for 1994. Particularly high pass rates were achieved, for example in art and further mathematics (100 per cent), business studies, computing and English language (91 per cent) and law (85 per cent). Weaker GCE A level examination results were recorded for social biology (56 per cent pass rate) and theatre studies (67 per cent pass rates). Poor results have been recorded in languages for the last three years with the exception of German in 1993. In 1994, in German 71 per cent of entrants passed compared with a provisional pass rate of 85 per cent in all sixth form colleges and in French 59 per cent passed compared with a provisional sixth form college pass rate of 84 per cent.

53 In 1994, there were 413 entries for GCSE examinations across a range of subjects. The pass rate at grades A-C was 49 per cent, compared with an average of 50 per cent for sixth form colleges nationally in 1993. Pass rates significantly above the national average were gained in art, human biology, religious studies and French. Results in biology, business studies and sociology were more than 20 per cent below the corresponding national average A-C pass rates for 1993. English results for students on the one-year GCSE course were disappointing. The college is beginning to introduce a value-added approach to compare students' attainments on leaving the college with a prediction based on an individual's GCSE results at entry. The college also monitors students' performance across different subjects.

54 In all subjects some students achieve high standards of knowledge and understanding. For example, GCE A level computer studies students are well motivated and purposeful. Their files contain comprehensive notes and project work is of a high standard. The projects allow the students to tackle real problems, for example, the computerisation of a local farm's activities. Students display considerable research skills in English project work. Science students have appropriate knowledge and understanding of their subjects. Their assignments are well presented and show an ability to draw sensible conclusions for the work they have done.

55 Written skills are well developed in all subjects. GCE A level English students write confidently and thoroughly. The more able students on theatre studies courses demonstrate considerable ability to analyse texts. Written work produced by humanities students shows a good command of the subject. Social studies students write with skill, knowledge and understanding. However, a significant proportion of GCSE and a minority of GCE A level students have difficulty in writing to the required standard.

56 Students' oral skills are not so well developed. In some English classes many students do not actively participate, although those who do contribute have well-expressed, thoughtful ideas. Oral skills are poorly developed in some humanities lessons and there is insufficient encouragement for students to acquire a vocabulary that they can use with confidence to explain their point of view. Science students have limited communications skills. The college has recognised this problem and is seeking to address it, in particular by including communication skills as a compulsory element in the general studies programme.

57 The majority of business studies students express ideas clearly in speech and writing. They calculate well and adopt an ordered approach to solving problems. Numeracy skills are well developed in science subjects. In humanities there is little evidence of attention to numeracy or graphicacy skills, except in geography.

58 Attendance and retention rates are generally good. The college recorded 91 per cent attendance in the period September 1994 to January 1995. A student drop-out rate of 5 per cent is recorded for the same period. Monitoring of destination information is thorough for GCE A level students. In 1994 the proportion going to higher education was 72 per cent. Of the remainder, 2 per cent went on to further education courses, 20 per cent gained jobs, 2 per cent are unemployed and the destinations of 4 per cent are not known. For GCSE leavers the statistics are less complete. Out of a group of 52 the destinations of 30 are unknown.

59 In addition to academic achievements students have gained success in other ways. Individual examples include silver medals in national badminton and table tennis competitions and national champions, representing Great Britain, in judo and tenpin bowling. College teams are national finalists in a range of sports. Law students reached the national finals of a mock trial competition.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

60 A college policy on quality assurance has only recently been formalised. At present the main focus of the quality process is on course review procedures but the college has plans to widen its scope to include all areas of its work.

61 Solid progress has been made in establishing the foundations of a more consistent approach to course review and of a college action plan to monitor the implementation of the quality assurance policy. A quality assurance panel has been set up to steer developments. It is well led and contains an appropriate cross-section of staff including senior management, division heads, subject teachers and support staff. Effective use was made of the preparation for inspection to give added momentum to the efforts of the group.

62 Staff response to the full implementation of new quality procedures has been uneven. This is recognised by the college and the new quality procedures are being introduced gradually in an attempt to secure the wider support of staff. The status of the quality assurance panel and its objectives require stronger promotion to ensure that its role and importance in maintaining standards of achievement is understood by all staff. At present the person responsible for quality has insufficient time to oversee the introduction of the processes. The contribution from division heads and subject teachers to quality matters is insufficiently defined and unlikely to ensure that quality procedures are implemented consistently.

63 Subject teams are required to review their courses against agreed quality criteria. There are wide variations in the detail and thoroughness with which the course reviews are being completed. Some reviews have been well carried out and include statistical monitoring of a number of performance indicators including enrolments, retention rates and examination results. However, targets are not routinely set to measure effectiveness and not all subject teams regularly evaluate examination results against national averages. The college could improve the review form to ensure a more consistent response and to aid the collation and analysis of course reviews.

64 A new handbook for staff provides a comprehensive filing system for a wide range of documentation including cross-college policies, schemes of work, pastoral information, course review procedures and the student charter. This is well conceived both in terms of effective communication to staff and its potential contribution to helping the college achieve more consistent quality procedures. The handbook could be further developed into a quality manual for staff.

65 A number of courses use questionnaires and student evaluation forms to monitor students' satisfaction with general aspects of college life. These are analysed and, in some instances, identifiable action has resulted. At present, however, students are not formally involved in course review procedures. There is general support for the idea of the student charter from both staff and students. The relationship between charter standards and the emerging quality assurance framework has yet to be addressed. The charter links student responsibilities to standards they can expect and includes sections on enquiries and applications, enrolment and admission, learning, support and guidance, and decision making. There is also an appeals and complaints procedure. Some targets are specific but others are too vague.

66 There are well-established procedures for staff training and subject up-dating and the college helps both teaching and support staff to attend training events. Uptake is largely based on individual needs and the majority of applications are approved against general criteria. A systematic needs analysis to identify college priorities has not been customary. Recently each division has conducted a training review and senior managers are now analysing the outcomes to develop a more formalised approach to planning. This process has been extended to include support staff. Priorities identified include the management of change, management training for divisional heads, the implementation of quality procedures

and training for personal tutors. There is no appraisal scheme in operation at the college but a staff review and development working party is currently exploring this issue.

67 The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) requires colleges to produce their own self-evaluation report in preparation for the inspection process. The report produced by the college presents a brief summary of perceived strengths and weaknesses and conforms to the broad headings contained in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The evaluations are concise and in some instances are supported by reference to evidence, but cross-referencing to supporting college documents is not always included. Judgments made are generally one grade higher than grades awarded by inspectors.

RESOURCES

Staffing

68 There are 87 full-time equivalent staff of whom 71 are full time. Teachers are well qualified. Almost all are graduates, some have post-graduate qualifications and the majority also have formal teacher qualifications. Staff are enthusiastic and committed and there are numerous examples of effective teamwork, including valuable contributions from part-time staff on some subject teams. In general the deployment of staff is well matched to curriculum needs. There are, however, a few instances where an uneven distribution of teaching commitments and other responsibilities has caused some staff to be overloaded.

69 Levels of technician support are generally adequate in most areas of the college's work. There are some shortfalls in non-teaching support, in particular the inadequate level of technician cover in computing and the lack of language assistants for French and German. Ancillary staff work in close collaboration with teaching colleagues. Many are well qualified and a number are pursuing further qualifications and up-dating their skills with the full support of the college.

70 The college has a significant number of teachers with long service which has contributed to good staff cohesion and continuity of relationships. A bonus system was introduced in 1992 when significant increases in student numbers affected workloads. A bonus of £600 per year is paid to all teaching staff and £900 to teachers with additional responsibilities.

Equipment/learning resources

71 Most subjects have sufficient textbooks and equipment. Teacher-produced resources are generally of good quality, notably in computing, sociology, psychology, history and law. Science has sufficient up-to-date equipment for its courses and all students who take the electronics option are provided with their own electronic kit. Students who take art are expected to buy their own consumable materials and in some cases this restricts the range of work they experience.

72 The library plays an increasingly active role in supporting students' learning. The range and quantity of books, periodicals and other resources have recently been improved. Its facilities are well promoted and use of the library is being monitored more closely with the help of a computerised system. Levels of borrowing and use have risen significantly but there is still substantial variation between subjects in the quality and quantity of stock, in the rate of acquisition and in levels of use. The number of study places in the library has been increased, including the number of computer workstations. The library is well used for private study.

73 The college has sufficient computers to support teaching and learning in computing and business studies. Equipment has been provided to enhance the use of information technology in a wider range of curriculum areas. The number of machines available for independent study has been increased as part of a strategy to improve access and use and there are plans for further development. The strategy has yet to have full impact on students' experience. There is access to a compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database in the library. In modern languages good use is made of satellite broadcasting equipment.

Accommodation

74 The college is situated on the outskirts of Blackpool and consists of a main building, which is mostly single storey, and some temporary accommodation which provides four classrooms. In addition, a large sports hall and a field of about seven hectares are shared with the nearby 11-16 comprehensive school. The ownership of the sports hall and the division of the land has not yet been resolved by the Assets Board.

75 The college provides an attractive environment. Imaginative ideas have improved the use of the site and the principal takes a personal interest in these projects. For example, a traditional red phone box has been installed outside the main entrance. This is eye-catching but also serves the practical purpose of enabling students to telephone home when they return from visits. Recent refurbishment has created excellent dining and social spaces. Toilets have been modernised to a high standard and courtyards and other public spaces are attractively laid out. Wheelchair access has been improved and is now available to most of the building.

76 The college has a good range of rooms and spaces and these are well used throughout the college year. Decoration and furnishings are excellent throughout the college. Specialist accommodation for drama is good and for art it is of good quality but limited in space. There are insufficient laboratories for science and as a result a significant proportion of biology lessons and some chemistry is taught in non-specialist rooms.

77 The college has undertaken a systematic review of its accommodation and has made many improvements. The accommodation is heavily used and the college has plans for further developments as funds allow.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

78 The college is meeting many of the aims set out in its mission statement. Particular strengths include:

- a positive image in the community and a high level of responsiveness to its current clients
- an extensive range of GCE A levels and a well-developed enhancement programme to broaden students' skills and experiences
- sound examination results in some subjects
- good staff-student relations and a high degree of support given to individual students by staff at all levels
- well-qualified and experienced staff in terms of subject expertise
- generally good accommodation
- innovative computerised management information systems.

79 In order to build on these strengths the college should address the following issues:

- underdeveloped strategic planning, particularly in relation to financial forecasts
- the lack of a clear management structure enabling efficient delegation of operation matters
- insufficient adaptation of teaching to meet individual students' needs
- underachievement by a significant minority of students
- the need for coherent and systematic quality assurance procedures.

FIGURES

-
- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)

 - 3 Enrolments by curriculum area (1994-95)

 - 4 Staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)

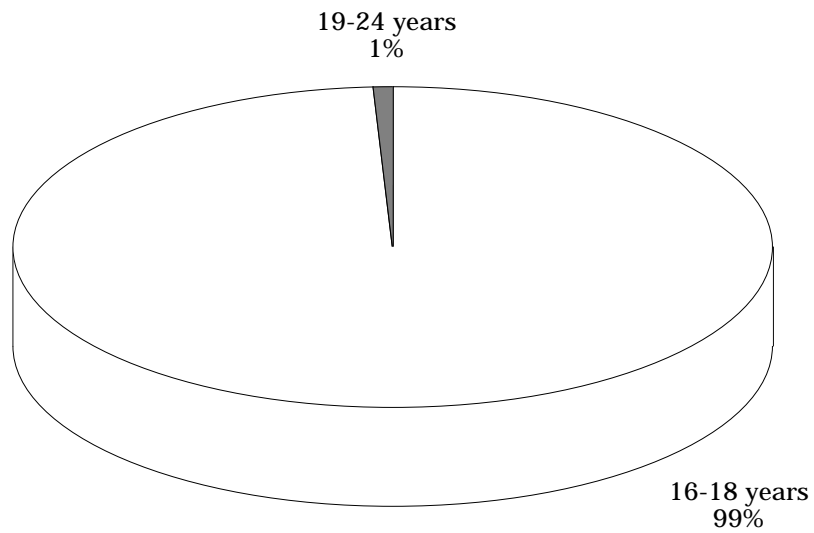
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 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

The Blackpool Sixth Form College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

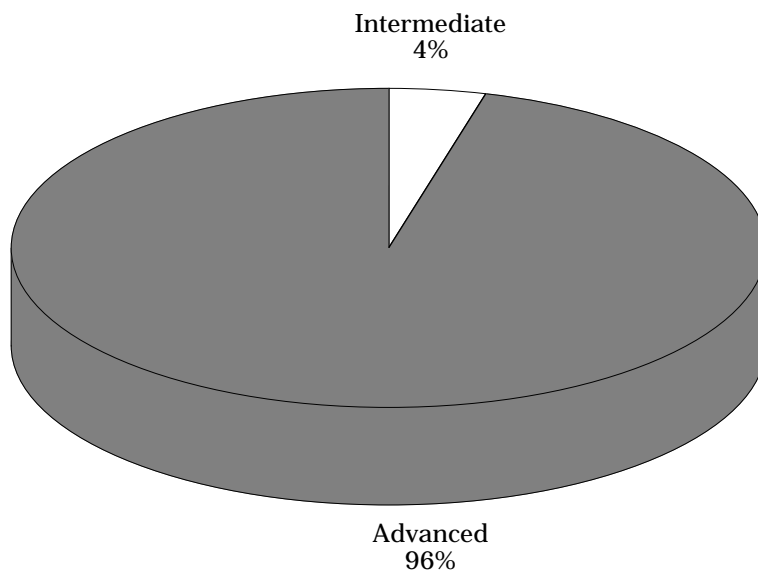


Enrolments: 982

Note: this chart excludes one enrolment under the age of 16.

Figure 2

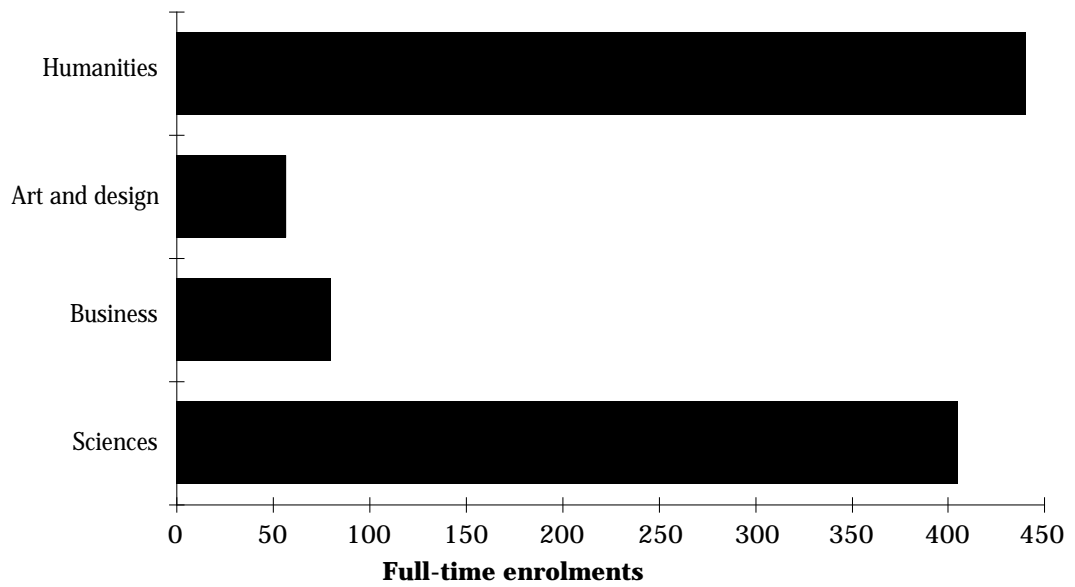
The Blackpool Sixth Form College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 982

Figure 3

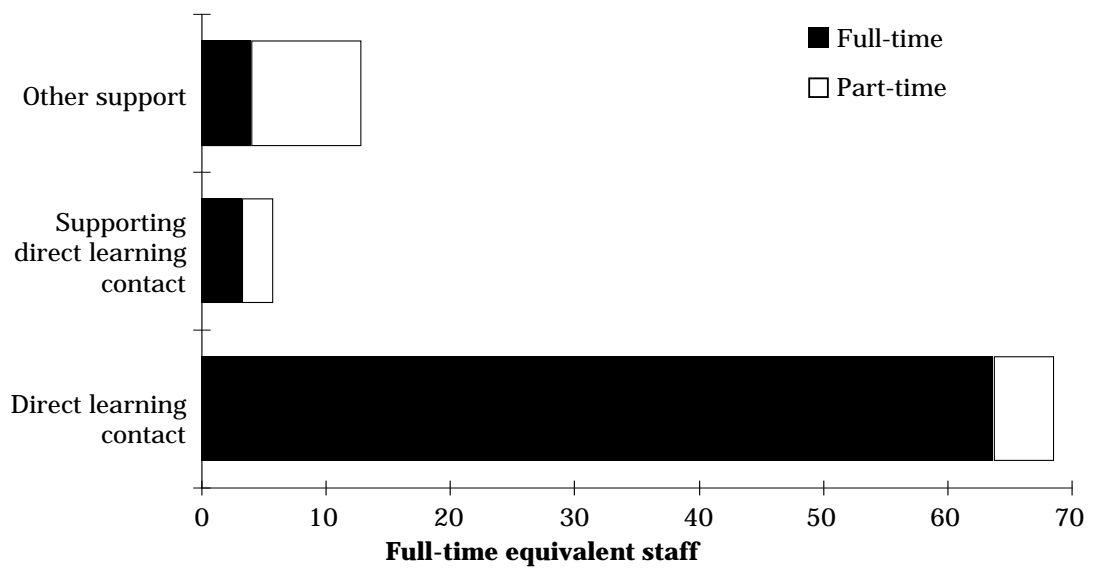
The Blackpool Sixth Form College: enrolments by curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 982

Figure 4

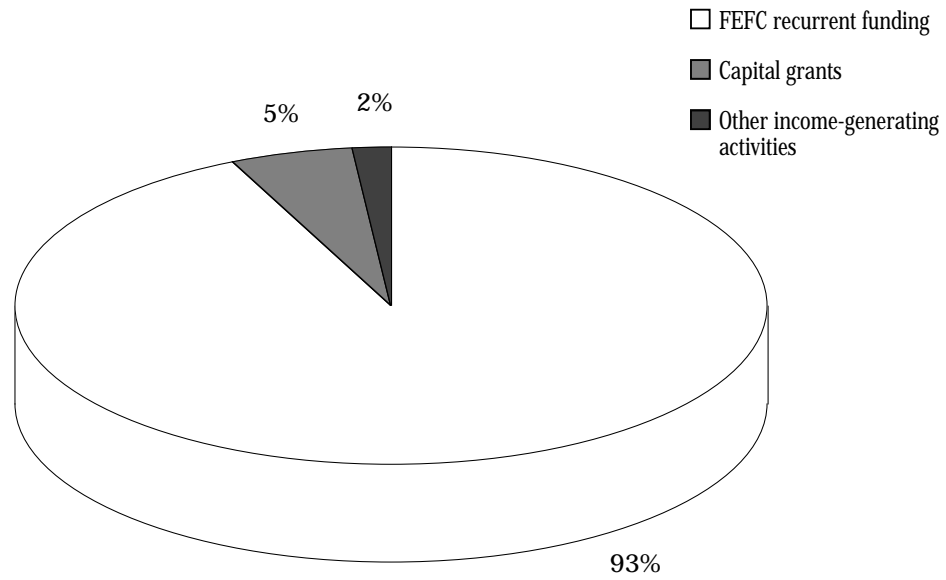
The Blackpool Sixth Form College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 87

Figure 5

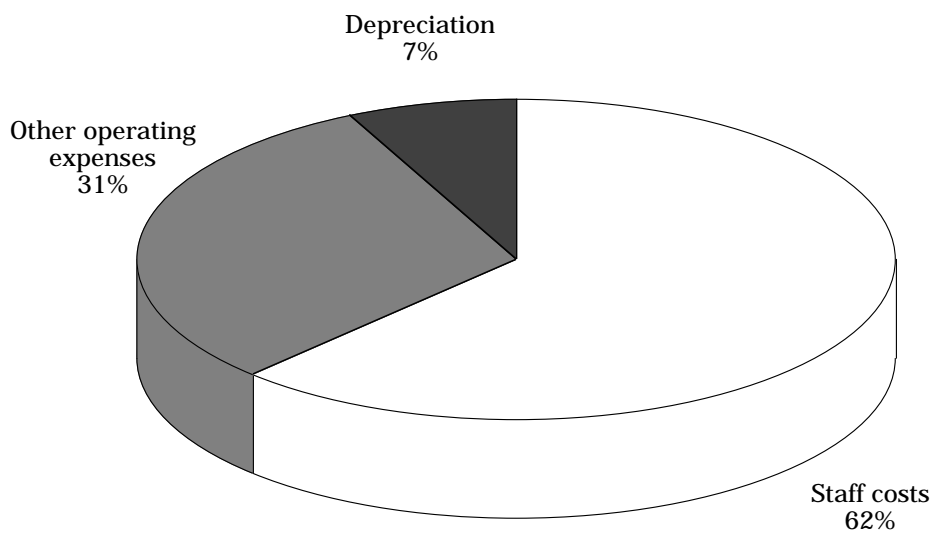
The Blackpool Sixth Form College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £4,437,586

Figure 6

The Blackpool Sixth Form College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £4,464,000

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
May 1995