

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Exeter College

February 1996

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

By June 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-95

Activity	Inspection grades				
	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 11/96

EXETER COLLEGE
SOUTH WEST REGION
Inspected April-October 1995

Summary

Exeter College is a well-governed and effectively-managed college. There is a highly-effective system of target setting which derives from the strategic planning process and is linked to staff development. A broad range of courses and levels of study is provided. External relationships with schools, higher education, employers and community organisations are excellent. Tutorial arrangements for full-time students are a particular strength. The programme of sporting and cultural activities is a distinctive feature of college life. Most of the teaching and learning is successful, resulting in high levels of achievement at GCE A level and on some vocational courses. Most teaching takes place in suitable, well-equipped accommodation. In order to improve further the quality of provision the college should: continue to rationalise its accommodation; improve the management of information technology for learning; increase accommodation for private study; improve the monitoring of student retention and destinations and the quality of information on students' results; improve pass rates on some vocational courses; and address the inconsistencies in 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	1
Governance and management	1
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	1
Quality assurance	2
Resources: staffing	1
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	2

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics, science and computing	2	Health and community care, and hairdressing	2
Construction	2	Art, design, media studies and performing arts	2
Engineering	2	Social sciences	2
Business and management studies	2	English, foreign languages, and communications	1
Leisure, tourism, catering and sports studies	1	Foundation studies	1

INTRODUCTION

1 The inspection of Exeter College took place between April and October 1995. Student enrolment and induction were inspected in September. The college's nine major curriculum areas were covered. Twenty-four inspectors spent a total of 89 days in the college. They observed 274 classes and inspected students' work. There were discussions with members of the governing body, senior managers, teaching and support staff, students, parents, local employers and representatives of a variety of community organisations including schools, universities and the Devon and Cornwall Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Exeter College opened in 1970 as the first tertiary college in England. It is the only further education college serving the city in which all the state secondary schools are for pupils aged 11-16. Approximately 81 per cent of the leavers from the five 11-16 city high schools progress to full-time programmes at the college. In 1994-95, approximately 55 per cent of its full-time students came from outside the city, including students from 12 schools in the outlying area, two of which are grant maintained and six of which have sixth forms. The nearest further education colleges are North Devon College, Barnstaple (42 miles), Somerset College of Arts and Technology, Taunton (33 miles), South Devon College, Torquay (24 miles), East Devon College, Tiverton (16 miles), and the Bicton College of Agriculture, Bicton (11 miles).

3 The college is on eight sites spread across the city. The main site at Hele Road comprises just over half the total accommodation. The remaining seven sites are: Bishop Blackall, St James', Preston Street, Episcopal, York Wing, Rougemont and Brittany House. Of these seven sites, all but Brittany House are nineteenth-century buildings. Five are former schools. There is also some short-term accommodation at Station Yard, Northernhay House, and an adult basic education centre at 22 St David's Hill. The college has its own playing fields on the edge of the city and hires additional sports facilities as necessary. It owns a small residential centre at Le Molay-Littry in Normandy.

4 The city's total population is currently approximately 104,600. Inward migration is causing the population to grow. Although Devon has the second-highest county unemployment rate in the South West region, figures for Exeter are better than those for the region and the county. Traditional employment sectors such as defence, agriculture and fishing are in decline throughout the region. The largest companies in Exeter are in the service industries, the health service, the post office and insurance. The college itself is a significant employer.

5 During the academic year 1994-95 the college enrolled 11,703 students, of which 3,220 were full time and 8,483 were part time. Higher education accounted for 1,114 of these enrolments and adult leisure and recreation classes a further 884. Enrolments by age, level of study, mode

of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

6 There are 511 full-time equivalent employees of whom 280 are teachers, 69 directly support learning (for example, technicians) and 162 have other support roles. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7 In its mission statement the college states its intention to be the principal provider of further education and continuing education and training within Exeter and the surrounding region and to enrich the lives and sense of achievement of its students by providing high-quality guidance, education and training free from undue obstacles or discrimination.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The curriculum is broad in its range of subjects and the level of its courses which extend from pre-foundation to degree and postgraduate level. About half the college's enrolments are from students attending vocational courses. The college's contribution to the national targets for education and training is carefully planned during the strategic planning and objective setting process.

9 Since 1993, the college has kept pace with the development of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) and now offers 10 programmes at advanced level, eight at intermediate, and four at foundation level. There are plans to offer more foundation and intermediate level courses in 1995-96. A common timetable for full-time courses enables GNVQ students to include one General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) subject in their programmes; 70 students are currently doing so.

10 An appropriate range of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) has been developed in business, computing, professional and management studies, care, construction, engineering, motor vehicle engineering, catering, hairdressing and beauty therapy. New NVQs are being introduced, for example, in estate agency and accountancy. In response to employers' needs, other vocational qualifications are offered, for example in engineering, electronics and business studies, often alongside NVQs and GNVQs.

11 The International Baccalaureate has been offered since 1993 as an alternative to GCE and GNVQ advanced level courses. Twenty-four students sat for the award in summer 1995. GCE A levels are offered as a two-year full-time course, as a one-year intensive programme, and as part-time evening classes. In 1995, students studied for 35 different GCE A levels including some less common subjects such as music, dance and philosophy. Physical education is a popular choice with approximately 260 students at present. There are 12 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects available to students but the college is to review the rationale for offering them. Twenty-eight General Certificate of Secondary Education

(GCSE) subjects are available. Following an analysis of examination results and students' responses, they are grouped into eight separate packages. Full-time students take a package which includes English, mathematics and two other related subjects.

12 Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) higher national diplomas, and part-time degree courses, are franchised from the universities of Exeter, Plymouth and Glamorgan. Subjects include business and finance, management, engineering, sports and recreational studies, building studies and land administration.

13 Adults taking GCE A levels can study on two days per week for a year with start and finish times appropriate for those with family commitments. They can also choose a full-time, one-year intensive course or part-time evening classes. There are access to higher education courses for adults in social sciences, humanities, science and technology and art. Some vocational courses have been developed to fit into the adult daytime programme. Adult students also make use of learning materials designed for individual study in college workshops. Following market research, community sites such as family centres are used for courses in adult basic education and English for speakers of other languages.

14 There are two discrete programmes for students with moderate and severe learning difficulties. Where possible, students join mainstream courses with appropriate support. A new programme for students over 19 who have severe learning difficulties is to be piloted in 1996-97.

15 The development strategy for new courses involves staff at all levels and draws on their local knowledge and expertise. A project providing programmes in social care has been delivered in association with a local employers' consortium. Through the experience gained by the NVQ assessment centre, the college has developed its ability to respond to employers' needs in seven vocational areas. The curriculum support and development unit is improving the flexibility of the college's programmes. The college's open learning provision enables students, including those in employment, to work at a time, place and pace to suit themselves, supported by individual tutorials.

16 Market intelligence is gathered through membership of external bodies such as the local labour market intelligence group and from contacts with employers and high schools. The college develops contacts with employers in many other ways. These include advisory boards, work experience placements for students and NVQ assessor training. Employers are pleased with the service offered by the college but the college recognises that there is a need for more employer liaison on some vocational courses. A new and attractive prospectus has improved college publicity and is to be accompanied by detailed course leaflets for 1996-97.

17 Relationships with the Devon and Cornwall TEC are good. TEC representatives are confident of the college's ability to deliver training according to contracts and see the college as responding to the needs of

employers and the community. In particular they value the college's ability to supply courses, including modern apprenticeships, to students with training credits.

18 All full-time students are entitled to a programme of studies additional to their main courses. This entitlement curriculum is either validated by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network, or through the Oxford and Cambridge Diploma of Achievement. Some students take GCE AS general studies. The layout of college sites prevents some students from taking advantage of some parts of the programme, in particular the information technology elements. Team sports, outdoor pursuits, an orchestra, a big band, a choir, drama and the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme are examples of the many leisure, cultural and sporting activities offered to enrich students' time at the college. The European dimension of college provision is a major strength. Every full-time course has an element of European studies and the college's residential centre at Le Molay-Littry in Normandy is a considerable asset. Students using the centre include those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; it is also used for staff development. Other European links include a 'working in Europe' course involving a 15-week placement in France or Germany and links with schools in those two countries and in Spain and Finland.

19 Relationships with the city's high schools are positive. All pupils are guaranteed a place on an appropriate college course when they leave school. Prospective students and their parents are kept well informed about opportunities at the college. There is a college link tutor who liaises with each high school and works with students from year 9 onwards. There has been some joint work on the 14-19 curriculum, particularly in science and mathematics. This has involved some school teachers working in college for part of the week. Schools are kept informed on the progression and achievements of their ex-pupils, although they would value more information on ex-pupils who do not complete their courses. Despite competition for students, there is some useful collaboration between the college and community colleges outside the city, which incorporate 11-18 schools. They value Exeter College's assistance with vocational courses and adult education.

20 The universities of Exeter and Plymouth value the college as a partner in the development of higher education. They are happy with existing links and are looking forward to planning future joint work to improve access to higher education in the region.

21 The college plays an important part in the life of the community. Exeter City Council regards the college as a major asset, values the training opportunities it provides for new firms attracted to the area, and consults it on ideas for development. The principal is a member of the Exeter Initiative which encourages new investment in the city. The college is the largest single provider of adult education in the city as part of the local education authority's co-ordinating organisation, Exeter Community College.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

22 Exeter College is well governed and well managed. Governors understand their responsibilities, and the difference between their role and that of the chief executive. They have adopted a code of conduct and produced a register of their interests. At the time of incorporation, the college received approval from the secretary of state to amend the instruments of governance in order that governors could manage their own situation more effectively. For example, one of the amendments allows governors to limit the length of service of members.

23 The governing body of 14, including five women, has expertise in finance, law, accountancy and business management, secondary, higher and special education and the work of the TEC. It has taken an active and informed part in the college's strategic planning process. Average attendance at meetings is over 80 per cent. Governors attend many college events. Debates have occurred on a variety of topics including examination results, strategic planning and the code of conduct. Standing committees have appropriate membership, meet regularly and work well. There are two specialist advisory committees on employment and estates which report to the finance and general purposes committee. The governing body has yet to set up a process for monitoring and reviewing its own performance.

24 The principal is a member of a number of national bodies including the National Council for Vocational Qualifications and, more recently, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and BTEC. He has a high profile in the community, for example as a member of the West Country Development Corporation and chairman of the Friends of Exeter Festival. The principal is supported by an able senior management team, which includes a deputy chief executive who is also vice-principal responsible for the curriculum. The leadership and support provided by the senior management team has gained the confidence of staff throughout the organisation. They are seen as a team that gets things done. The senior management team has recently been reduced from eight to seven. This involved an exchange of posts for two assistant principals in accordance with the college's aim to give senior and middle managers experience in a range of roles.

25 There are two vice-principals with responsibilities for the curriculum and for staffing and resources. Four assistant principals have responsibilities for college schools, cross-college functions, finance and management information systems, and estates and personnel. The assistant principal with responsibility for estates and personnel is also clerk to the governors.

26 There is an effective committee structure which includes the curriculum council which serves as the academic board, a recently-established support functions council, a student union consultative council and the college managers' committee. All of these groups report to the

senior management team. Their functions and the relationships between them are clearly understood by staff. All meetings are effectively minuted. Curriculum and cross-college managers come together at the college managers' committee and the curriculum managers' group which ensure that information and views are shared. Membership of these groups enables many staff to feel involved with policy setting and monitoring. Other effective communication channels include the staff bulletins and lunch meetings for senior managers and staff.

27 The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding for 1995-96 is £16.95 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £17.84 and the median for all sector colleges is £18.56 per unit.

28 A highly-effective and well-established system of target setting derives directly from the strategic planning process. Strategic planning is based on wide internal consultation and participation. Progress towards targets is monitored regularly. All staff have personal targets and those for managers are related to performance pay. A clear document sets out the procedures for allocating teachers, accommodation and resources to curriculum areas in proportion to the number of students they attract.

29 Following management restructuring, the number of schools within the college has been reduced. Management costs now represent a smaller proportion of the total staffing budget than they did 18 months ago. Over this period student enrolments have grown by approximately 16 per cent and the proportion of the total budget devoted to teaching costs has remained stable. Accountabilities and responsibilities are clearly allocated, with one exception: the management of information technology for students is ineffective. There is no information technology strategy and no overall planning with regard to service levels and resource distribution.

30 Enrolments over the last three years have increased. Although enrolment targets were not met in 1993-94, in the following year the college's figures indicate that targets were exceeded by 2 per cent. In 1995-96 the college estimates that enrolments will be 13.5 per cent higher than last year. This reflects, in part, an increase in the number of 16-year-old school leavers in the locality.

31 Efficiency indicators such as space utilisation, average class size and unit costs are used. This information helps the planning process and improves the effectiveness of resource allocation. The use of resources is regularly monitored through the management information system.

32 The central management information system provides comprehensive and appropriate information in the areas of finance, accommodation, enrolment and timetabling. Regular reports are provided which are welcomed by the users. September 1995 enrolments were logged on the system within three days, enabling timetabling and class lists to be

generated early in the new term. The system does not yet extend to personnel records or to examination and destination results. During the inspection the college had difficulty in supplying comprehensive and accurate examinations information.

33 Schools keep a check on the retention of full-time students through the tutorial system. Data are collected centrally from registers but the extent to which schools analyse and make effective use of these data vary.

34 The destinations of students going on to higher education are known but destinations data are not always collected for students progressing to employment. Analysis of destination data is limited: there is little evidence of the information being used to inform course planning or as an indicator of the college's performance.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

35 The recent appointment of co-ordinators for specific areas of work has improved the management of student services. Two of these appointments, in counselling and in support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are temporary. Policy statements, which provide guidance on essential tasks, are in place for most aspects of student services.

36 Procedures for admissions and enrolments are thorough, detailed and well implemented. Information is readily available in prospectuses and leaflets. An extensive programme of briefings, open days and evenings enables prospective students and their parents to get to know the college. Training sessions and guidance packs for interviewers help them to achieve consistency.

37 Links with the high schools in the city are strengthened by a regular programme of visits and through joint work on the curriculum by school and college staff. A college link tutor is allocated to each high school and these tutors provide impartial guidance on all the opportunities open to school leavers.

38 The first stage of induction is to the college as a whole. When this process was evaluated, the majority of students consulted described the experience as useful and enjoyable. The second stage of induction, to a particular course, includes completing a student learning agreement and developing study skills. Extended programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities emphasise group activities and individual action plans. All full-time students receive a copy of the student handbook which contains much useful information, including the college charter.

39 The adult guidance unit, on the main college site, has well-qualified and experienced staff. Its services are extensively advertised and it provides drop-in arrangements as well as daytime and evening appointments. The adult basic education centre on St David's Hill provides an alternative access point for adult students.

40 Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on some mainstream courses is well developed, such as the GNVQ foundation programme in leisure and tourism. In art and design a member of staff has been given the task of liaising with the unit for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Five profoundly deaf students have been integrated into courses and two groups of students and their tutors are being trained in basic sign language. In health and community care, timetables are arranged so that students with restricted mobility are ensured access to all classrooms. A profoundly deaf student attending a day-release course in social care has an interpreter paid for by the college. There is specialist software available for visually impaired students on computing programmes.

41 The tutorial programme is effectively managed and provides good-quality guidance and support. All full-time students have a personal tutor. There is a comprehensive and helpful tutors' handbook, a programme of training for tutors and an opportunity in the summer term to share good practice. All tutor groups have timetabled meetings. Three hours per week are allocated to GCE A level students in order to provide personal tutoring and a curriculum support programme. Vocational groups have an hour and a half per week for personal tutoring; curriculum support including core skills is expected to be delivered within the vocational programme. Parents commented favourably on the ease with which they can contact tutors and the quality of the responses they receive. The national records of achievement for full-time 16-19 year old students are firmly established as part of tutorial support in most areas. Records of achievement from school are used during interviews and for subsequent individual action planning. Students are encouraged to use appropriate information technology to maintain their records. There is a three-stage process of review in the first year of two-year courses which includes reports to parents timed for discussion at parents' evenings. Use is made of records of achievement when tutors are preparing references for entry to employment or to higher education.

42 Adult students on access to higher education and GCE A level daytime programmes receive effective tutorial support. A notable development has been the use of records of achievement for adults on basic education programmes and for students released from employment to attend college part time. Tutorial support for part-time students, especially in evening classes, is less well developed, although many teachers respond willingly to individual requests for support. Tutors are able to refer students to the learning support centre and the study skills tutorial centre for additional learning support. A pilot project involving over 700 students is currently exploring the benefits of routinely assessing students' learning support needs once they have started their courses. Findings so far suggest a particular need for more numeracy support.

43 Five well-qualified counsellors and two college nurses are located on the main college site. Counsellors keep in close touch with tutors and use

written information and tutor-training events to raise awareness of their services. There are useful links with external agencies. All counselling staff are part time, which makes team work difficult to organise and restricts the opening hours of the service.

44 The higher education guidance co-ordinator works closely with all personal tutors. Guidance packs for staff are detailed and assist in the process of applying for higher education courses. The resource centre in the library provides a good supply of information about higher education. Tutor training and updating sessions take place at least twice a year, with specific events for GNVQ tutors. All university references provided by tutors are checked and monitored before they are sent off. Four careers advisers from the Devon and Cornwall Careers Service are available on two days per week in a conveniently-located interview room. They take part in some tutor training events and produce a bulletin to advertise employment opportunities. Links with the admissions officer and with tutor groups are good. Their work does not extend to adults.

45 The student union is very active. A member of staff acts as liaison officer to provide support and training for union officers. The principal is a member of the student consultative committee. The attractive nursery on the main site, with over 50 places available throughout the week, is partly financed and operated by the student union. At present the take-up is entirely by students' children, at reasonable cost. The union has a disability officer and encourages representation from students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

46 Inspectors observed a total of 274 teaching sessions. The number of sessions inspected by type and grade are given in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		23	48	27	6	1	105
GCSE		2	12	3	1	0	18
GNVQ		8	14	15	5	0	42
NVQ		3	22	10	3	0	38
Other vocational		10	26	6	5	0	47
Higher education		0	2	1	0	0	3
Access to higher education		2	3	1	0	0	6
Basic education		1	1	0	0	0	2
Other		3	7	2	1	0	13
Total		52	135	65	21	1	274

47 Sixty-eight per cent of all sessions observed by inspectors had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. Eight per cent had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. The grade profile is slightly better than the national average for further education sector colleges as published in the chief inspector's most recent annual report.

48 The planning and design of courses is generally thorough and effective. Most work schemes are carefully written but a few are little more than a list of topics taken from the syllabus. In engineering, staff make good use of industrial contacts in the planning of programmes and course aims are appropriate and clearly stated. In business studies there are good schemes of work which help the school to cope effectively when staff are absent. Hairdressing programmes of work meet the needs of employers and lead bodies. Programmes of work for history and geography have well-defined aims. Schemes of work for individual units on construction programmes set out clearly the work to be covered and identify the competencies to be achieved.

49 Students studying mathematics on GCE A level and International Baccalaureate programmes enjoy their lessons, which are characterised by enthusiastic teaching and lively oral work. Staff have prepared high-quality materials for students to study independently and assessment material which identifies weaknesses and helps students to progress. Most teachers on computing courses use an appropriate range of teaching styles but there is little variety for those students who work exclusively from self-study materials. Science teaching makes effective use of question and answer sessions and most practical work is well planned, well resourced and effectively linked to theory work. A few science classes take place in laboratories which are not well suited to the size of the group or to the purpose of the class.

50 A strength of construction teaching is the use of well-produced study packs to support programmes of learning planned for individual students. When groups of students are taught together, teachers are responsive to students' differing levels of ability. Students generally understand what they are required to do to achieve their individual learning targets and they participate in the recording of their progress. In a few sessions teachers did not check that students had understood the work being undertaken.

51 In engineering, excellent use is made of some thoughtfully-designed resource areas close to laboratories and workshops. Teachers use their expert knowledge effectively and involve students in discussion. Students are made aware of the criteria by which their work will be assessed. Staff mark students' work fully and carefully and many follow up their marking by discussing strengths and weaknesses with individual students. Tests and deadlines for different assignments sometimes coincide, causing unreasonable peaks in students' workloads.

52 Introductory work on basic secretarial skills and techniques is thorough and supports subsequent studies. In business administration,

individual learning is well supported. The business centre provides realistic simulated work experiences. The importance of Europe is being actively promoted in the business curriculum. Almost all full-time business students take a modern European language. There is a programme of staff and student exchanges and good use is made of the residential centre in Normandy. GNVQ foundation and intermediate level business courses have challenging business-focused assignments which require students to undertake research. Students participate well in question and answer sessions. On the GNVQ advanced course, core skills programmes are effectively delivered by group tutors, there are frequent opportunities for independent learning and subject integration is achieved, for example, between accounting and information technology. In professional and management studies, students are well prepared and participate appropriately. A few business classes in GCE A level and GNVQ courses were ineffective. They featured unclear objectives, unvarying teaching methods, no checks to ensure that students had mastered the content of the lesson and poor supporting information.

53 Leisure and sports studies teachers have extensive and up-to-date specialist knowledge of their subjects. Sports studies teachers make valuable contributions to their students' experience by running a highly-successful programme of sporting and outdoor pursuits activities. Students' progress is monitored effectively, particularly on GNVQ and GCE A level courses. Work is regularly set and helpfully assessed. Across leisure, sports studies and catering courses, staff are sensitive and responsive to the differing levels of ability amongst their students. Sports teachers, for example, are successful in developing less-skilful students as well as the outstanding performers. Practical catering sessions are of a high standard; teachers provide valuable verbal feedback for individual students and encourage self-assessment. However, their marking provides insufficient comments and guidance. Strong links with the catering industry generate valuable work placements. NVQ level 3 catering students have effective individual learning plans. Some catering classes did not sufficiently challenge or motivate students.

54 Health and community care students participate in a wide range of work placements across 90 different organisations. French schools are visited during residentials at the college's Normandy centre. Staff are well informed about GNVQ courses. Although most class teaching is well prepared and delivered, a few sessions are slow and place too much reliance on dictation and copying notes; students find it difficult to maintain their concentration in these sessions. Hairdressing students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own action plans and the tracking of their own progress. Some classes do not make enough demands on the students. The lack of models in beauty therapy classes restricts the development of students' skills.

55 The long-established GCE A level courses in art and design provide well-organised sessions using a variety of teaching and learning methods.

Staff have good working relationships with students, who respond by producing work that is usually of a good standard. The GNVQ work in art and design is developing well but the poor accommodation and resources are restricting the depth and breadth of students' experiences, particularly in the area of professional practice. In the performing arts and media studies contributive and attentive students make good progress on demanding topics but some poorly-managed discussions lack stimulus and focus. Independent learning is supported by some high-quality specialist equipment and expert staff.

56 Throughout the humanities, teachers are secure in their specialist subject knowledge. The teaching frequently involves students in well-managed discussions and lively questioning. There is some good use of visual aids. Marking of students' assignments is regular, thorough and contains constructive and helpful comments aimed at improving students' work. The history team has worked hard to develop alternative teaching approaches to the lecture, to the benefit of their students. The historians have also given particular attention to the poor use of English by students.

57 Foreign language classes are exceptionally well managed. They demonstrate confident use of the target language and make good use of modern technology to enhance teaching and learning. Assignments are suitably demanding and are positively and carefully marked. Teaching benefits from the use of up-to-date, relevant and entertaining materials. These have been created by the staff and include material gathered during visits abroad. Imaginative teaching materials and worksheets are also widespread in English and communication studies. Throughout all these areas, there is a productive variety of teaching and learning styles. Communication studies teaching is supported by individual learning packs. Creative writing and personal development are valued elements of English and communication studies courses.

58 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities work well individually, in pairs and in groups. They are assessed in order to provide effective individual learning programmes. Targets are set, reviewed and updated. Classes are well paced and use resources imaginatively to meet the different needs of class members. Some teaching for students with more complex needs lacks purpose. Adult basic education classes have a strong focus on personal development. The content of the course is negotiated with the students which helps to increase their confidence. There is some effective individual tuition and clear guidance. Marking identifies areas for attention and further development.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

59 The majority of GCE A level students at Exeter College achieve good examination results. The pass rate for all subjects in 1995 was 84 per cent. This compares favourably with the average pass rate for further education colleges (not including sixth form colleges) of 72 per cent in 1994, the last year for which this figure is available. In 1995, 61 per cent

of all Exeter College's students entered for GCE A level examinations achieved grades A-C against a national average of 52 per cent. Students aged 16-18 entered for GCE A level examinations scored, on average, 4.7 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1995 tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. In over half of the subjects offered, full-time students achieved pass rates of over 90 per cent. Many of these subjects had pass rates which were better than national averages for all centres, including computer science (93 per cent), dance (100 per cent), English literature (97 per cent), French (94 per cent), German (100 per cent), Italian (100 per cent), law (88 per cent), mathematics (100 per cent), statistics (100 per cent) and theatre studies (90 per cent). Amongst the few subjects with weaker pass rates for full-time students were business studies (69 per cent), chemistry (63 per cent) and sociology (68 per cent).

60 The GCE AS provision is small. In 1995, 165 subject entries resulted in a 63 per cent average pass rate, well above the 1994 average pass rate for general further education colleges of 55 per cent. Students in some subjects achieved high pass rates, for example general studies at 90 per cent and technical science at 93 per cent.

61 The college is one of the largest centres for the International Baccalaureate in the state sector. It requires students to take more subjects than they would on a GCE A level course. The first group of students to complete the course, in 1995, achieved a high level of success. Out of 25 candidates, 23 gained the full diploma and two gained a certificate. All of the students gained places in higher education.

62 In 1995, there were 579 entries for GCSE subjects from full-time students and 336 entries from part-time students. Full-time students include those on vocational or GCE A level courses taking one or two additional GCSEs, frequently retaking English and/or mathematics. They achieved a 50 per cent pass rate at grades A-C, which is similar to the national average of about 50 per cent for schools and colleges. Part-time students achieved a high pass rate at 72 per cent of grades A-C. The 1994 figure for candidates over the age of 18 at further education colleges in England was 60 per cent. The college pass rate for English (grades A-C) was 50 per cent in 1995. The figure for all types of school, college and candidate was 52 per cent. A notable achievement was the pass rate for mathematics at 54 per cent compared with the national figure of 45 per cent.

63 The pass rates for vocational courses are more variable. In 1994-95, 159 students aged 16-18 were entered for full-time vocational courses at GNVQ advanced level or its equivalent. This is a small proportion of the total number (1,583) of full-time vocational students. Eighty-one per cent achieved their qualification, placing the college in the middle third of all further education sector colleges as recorded in the 1995 performance

tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. Pass rates for students completing advanced GNVQ programmes ranged from 80 per cent in business studies to 58 per cent in leisure and tourism. At intermediate level, pass rates ranged from 100 per cent in the built environment to 24 per cent in leisure and tourism. At foundation level, students of business achieved a pass rate of 89 per cent, built environment 80 per cent, health and social care 78 per cent and leisure and tourism 57 per cent. All the part-time GNVQ advanced business students achieved their qualification. Results for students completing BTEC national diplomas are generally good. Higher pass rates include nursery nursing (97 per cent), computer studies (94 per cent) and art and design (88 per cent). Only engineering achieved a low result at 48 per cent. RSA Examinations Board (RSA) single-subject awards in secretarial studies achieved an 83 per cent pass rate. There were 815 entries for City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) qualifications in all subjects: 61 per cent passed with a further 28 per cent gaining a record of achievement.

64 Adults on the access to higher education course achieve good results. Eighty-four per cent passed and 80 per cent progressed to higher education. Adults on BTEC higher national certificate courses achieved a 76 per cent pass rate in all subjects with the highest pass rates in mechanical and production engineering and business and finance. Adult business and management students also did well in some professional areas, the pass rate for all advanced and higher level part-time management qualifications was above 90 per cent.

65 Much of the students' coursework is of a good standard. In art and design, for example, most students are developing skills appropriate to their level of study, with a generally good standard of work across the various courses. In media studies, there is a high degree of creative ambition and accomplishment in practical video work. Students of government and politics discuss controversial subjects such as nationalism and racism with unusual maturity. In foreign languages classes, students show evidence of wide reading and understanding which helps develop their cultural awareness. In most language classes the target language was the natural means of communication for the students. Students of English reach high standards in coursework which reflects a wide range of writing skills. In NVQ business classes, the content of portfolios is generally good and some are especially well presented. GNVQ business folios are less well presented, although they demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge and skills. Some engineering assignment work is of a high quality. Students on motor vehicle body repair courses have won a C&G silver medal three times in the past five years. Mathematics students generally have a good level of knowledge and understanding and can apply ideas to solve complex problems. Levels of achievement in mathematics classes are high. Health and community care students' work is sound and well presented but it would benefit from wider reading and a more evaluative approach.

66 The great majority of students are positive about their studies and fully engaged in them. Sports and leisure students, for example, show a high level of commitment, especially to practical activities. They work effectively in groups. They are able to discuss their own progress and the nature of their studies knowledgeably and with confidence. Students on GNVQ foundation programmes in leisure and tourism display a high level of confidence and enjoyment in core skills workshops. They gradually gain the confidence to leave a supportive group and enter a wider working environment through the work placement scheme. Performing arts students show a high level of concentration and application. Art and design students learn to work individually and in groups. They develop the critical skills to enable them to assess their own and each others' work. Poorly-motivated students were observed in a few business sessions as a consequence of inappropriate teaching and learning methods. Some catering students were unable to comment clearly on their progress, but generally Exeter College students are well informed and knowledgeable about their programmes of work.

67 The retention rates on most courses are satisfactory. The retention rates for all students in 1994-95 was 91 per cent. The college records the most frequent reasons for leaving as personal or family reasons, or withdrawal of employer support. The completion rate for full-time students in the final year of their course is 85.5 per cent. This masks some very good completion rates and some poor rates, in particular some GNVQ programmes at intermediate level, and GCSE English.

68 The college has comprehensive information on the large number of students who progress to higher education. In 1994, of 1,166 full-time students, 50.7 per cent progressed to higher education institutions. The intended destination of the remaining students showed that 20 per cent went to other further education courses and 16.7 per cent to employment.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

69 The senior management team encourages an approach to quality which involves a continuous process of incremental improvements. A course review and evaluation process was introduced in 1991. Since then there have been a number of developments. For example, in 1994 the college carried out a student perception survey.

70 A positive aspect of quality assurance is the link between the strategic planning cycle and the establishment of targets throughout the organisation. As part of the annual planning process each member of staff agrees targets compatible with the strategic plan. Line managers regularly review achievement of these targets. Staff understand the principles underpinning quality assurance and take seriously their responsibilities for it.

71 Many interlocking and effective processes for assuring quality are in operation. Senior staff recognise the need to improve monitoring of these

processes. Consequently, since June 1995, quality has become the responsibility of the vice-principal (curriculum) and a quality manager has been appointed to lead a newly-established quality unit. The quality team comprises a manager, two officers and an administrator; it has a broad remit to develop and maintain an effective quality framework. Particular responsibilities include quality assurance, external awards, internal audit of existing processes and the student charter. The team has attended course team meetings and has begun to provide support to staff. Members of the quality team have had other development roles in the college and view their responsibilities for quality as a development of their previous work. Middle managers welcome the establishment of the unit.

72 Three committees are involved in quality assurance: the curriculum council, the support functions council and the curriculum quality committee. The curriculum quality committee advises the curriculum council on the standards, planning, co-ordination, development and oversight of the college's work, with special reference to the quality of teaching and learning. The vice-principal (curriculum) and the quality manager are members. Agenda items are appropriate and detailed papers are presented.

73 There are two quality frameworks, one for the curriculum and one for the business support units. The curriculum framework involves two distinctive reviews: course/subject reviews, and general cross-college reviews. The course review process generates an action plan which includes staff-development requirements. This plan records what is to be achieved, by whom and by when. A summary of the review process, the action plan and supporting statistics are used to complete a recently-revised report form. These reports require the approval of the head of school, who is responsible for monitoring and reviewing actions taken. A copy of the report goes to the quality unit. There is clear evidence of improvements arising from responses to issues identified through this process. The process itself is now being reviewed by the quality unit as a result of a thorough analysis of reports produced this year. The unit has reported its findings and recommendations to the curriculum council and to managers.

74 The best examples of course reviews include accurate and complete statistics and show that monitoring of the previous year's action plan has taken place and students' views have been systematically gathered. Although review reports are produced for all courses, their rigour and the degree to which they include student views is inconsistent. The standard of critical self-evaluation varies.

75 It is easy for students to raise matters of concern through tutorials, as representatives of course teams and through the student council. There are also several formal approaches and formats used to gather students' views of their courses and of the college. For example, some course teams ask students about induction, some survey students after six weeks in the

college, and some not until the end of the year. Some of these differences are justified by the variety of different courses and modes of attendance. However, the inconsistencies in practice mean that information cannot be aggregated effectively and useful comparisons cannot be made. Most areas of the college ensure that students are told about any action taken as a result of their comments.

76 Course files for all courses are held by the teaching teams, the head of school and the quality unit. A minimum list of contents has been agreed which includes the scheme of work, record of classes held, the assessment policy, minutes of team meetings, verifiers' reports and statistics on student progress and completion. The files inspected were up to date and complete.

77 Before September 1995 there was no common review system for business support units, although some units did effectively review their work. A new system based on the course review model is planned.

78 Policy statements include a list of activities which staff are required to carry out. Heads of schools are responsible for implementing policies. Cross-college working groups meet to review policies and most have been revised in the last two years. Where policies have been reviewed the quality of service offered to students has improved. For example, a policy review resulted in the establishment of the admissions unit in July 1995. The implementation of policy requirements is not systematically monitored.

79 The setting of quality standards is not yet widespread, although some are emerging. For example, the time students have to queue at enrolment has been measured and, following analysis, the average has been reduced from three hours to 12 minutes.

80 The principal reviews all external moderators' and verifiers' reports before they are passed to heads of school for comment and inclusion in course files. An internal verifiers' group was established in October 1994 to support GNVQ verifiers across the college. NVQ verification has been recently included within the remit of this group. Its terms of reference are being modified to focus on the development of standard documentation and verification procedures across the schools. This work is at an early stage.

81 The achievement of students undertaking three GCE A levels is analysed rigorously against their anticipated performance calculated from GCSE results. Value-added analysis of this kind is being piloted with some GNVQ students. Similar analysis of the performance of part-time students taking individual subjects is also under consideration.

82 Staff development has a high profile. The many and varied staff-development activities are effectively evaluated and well managed. The induction programme for all new staff has been carefully evaluated and revised. It includes mentoring and formal review. Full-time teachers appointed without a teaching qualification are encouraged to obtain a

certificate of education. Teachers new to the profession and to the college are supported by a thorough probationary programme.

83 Staff development is clearly linked to appraisal and to strategic objectives. A staff review process for full-time staff was introduced in September 1994. Following evaluation, significant improvements have been made. All except hourly-paid staff will have had an annual review by December 1995. Staff are positive about the review process, understand it and feel that their development needs will continue to be met.

84 The college charter, published in July 1994 after some consultation with staff and students, has been distributed to all staff and is included in the student handbook issued to every full-time and some part-time students during enrolment. Copies of the charter are readily available in the reception area. The college has responded to the commitments expressed within the charter. Whilst staff are aware of the charter, their knowledge of its contents is limited. The charter itself is not being reviewed. It is seen by the college as a signpost to other policies and processes which are reviewed. There is an established complaints procedure.

85 The college's self-assessment report closely follows the headings of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. It contains much useful descriptive material and is well written and clearly presented. Areas in need of further development are identified, although the specific nature of the concern does not always emerge clearly from descriptions such as 'sporadic weaknesses' and 'problematic'. Where progress has been made on an issue the report sometimes does not indicate the scale of problems remaining to be dealt with. For example, the report describes the information technology base as greatly increased, but the inspection showed that the ratio of students to machines is still relatively high. Some weaknesses, for example those associated with reporting examination results, were not identified.

RESOURCES

Staffing

86 The quality of the staff is a particular strength of the college. Their commitment and enthusiasm is demonstrated in teamwork, for example working together to create specialist resource centres and course materials. Non-teaching staff operate flexibly in order to support the work of the college. There are good working relationships between different groups of staff.

87 Permanent teaching staff are, in general, well qualified for the work they undertake. Over 90 per cent have degrees or advanced level professional qualifications relevant to their teaching commitment. Most staff have had some teacher training. Seventy-nine per cent hold a professional teaching qualification. Teachers of vocational subjects generally have appropriate industrial and/or commercial experience. There is a programme of industrial updating in conjunction with Devon

Business Education Partnership in which some staff have recently participated. Approximately 100 teachers have completed assessor awards and a further 70 are in the process of being trained.

88 Approximately 20 per cent of teaching is by part-time staff. In no school is the overall figure above 35 per cent. The qualifications and experience of part-time and full-time teachers are comparable.

89 Well-qualified and experienced technical, professional and clerical staff support the teaching. They are allocated to schools or cross-college units and report to the heads of school or unit on a day-to-day basis. Technicians are also co-ordinated across the college through a team structure, managed by a principal technician. Each school has its own administrator who provides clerical and support services. A system of internal cover copes with clerical staff absences.

90 Accurate information on college staff is not readily available to managers. In September 1995 a professionally-qualified personnel manager was appointed. Priorities for action have been identified for this year. They include the revision of existing policies and procedures, and the establishment of a computerised personnel management system.

Equipment/learning resources

91 There are sufficient general materials and equipment to support the teaching. Reprographics are provided to a high standard from centralised college units based at the main site. The media unit is a well-equipped source of expertise for the whole college and provides support services, including equipment loans, for large numbers of staff and students. The recently-established publications unit provides a high-quality service for the production of marketing information, handbooks and course materials. A well-resourced graphics workroom at the main site helps students in the production of their assignments.

92 The quality of specialist equipment is generally good in areas such as construction, business administration, print making, catering and computer-aided engineering design. In foreign languages and media studies the standard is particularly high. Realistic working environments for the assessment of NVQs, for example in catering and business administration, are appropriate. Several curriculum areas, for example mathematics and foreign languages, have developed high-quality specialist resource bases. There are shortages of specialist equipment or materials in care, hairdressing and in vocational areas of art and design.

93 The central library and the learning resources centre provide many facilities including paper-based and computer-based learning resources, audio-visual material and a well-stocked careers and higher education library. Compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database machines are available at all five sites. In most subjects there are adequate learning resources and numbers of books. However, the recent reorganisation of schools and the revised location of courses has resulted in imbalances and

shortages of material in some subject areas, for example, business, management and information technology.

94 The library and learning resources service has, in addition to the Hele Road facilities, smaller bases at four other sites. Opening hours vary between sites. The main site is open four evenings per week. Brittany House facilities are open during the evenings and on Saturday mornings for the convenience of part-time and higher education business and management students.

95 Approximately 290 computers of recent manufacture are used by students, giving a comparatively high ratio of 14.5 students to each machine. Approximately 75 per cent of these machines operate the college standard software package of wordprocessor, spreadsheet and database within a windows environment. A central team of eight specialist staff provide an effective advisory and support service and co-ordinate purchases.

96 Most computers are in school-based resource rooms or in specialist facilities and therefore only available to particular groups of students. Computers on which students can work independently are readily available outside class hours at some sites, for example, at Bishop Blackall. However, open access to computers for all students, and particularly for those at the main site, is limited.

Accommodation

97 Most general purpose teaching rooms are in good decorative order, well lit and comfortably furnished. Some in the Hele Road centre have been modified to provide excellent workshop facilities for foreign languages and GCSE mathematics.

98 Specialist practical workshops are generally of a good standard, for example, those in engineering, construction, catering and science. Most are spacious, properly ventilated, well planned and lit, clean and organised to professional standards. The St David's restaurant is pleasant and appropriate for functions. The newly-acquired premises for the business school provide a high-quality modern commercial environment. In a few cases, such as art and design, vehicle repair and maintenance and health and beauty the specialist accommodation has shortcomings. For example, facilities for beauty therapy lack privacy and the motor vehicle body repair shop is cramped.

99 The main annexes are, at present, dispersed across the northern side of the city. This results in duplication of some resources and inadequate access to others. It also impairs the cohesion of some courses, most notably those in sport, leisure and recreation, and visual and performing arts. Time is wasted because students have to travel between sites.

100 There is a lack of storage areas in several schools. This is especially noticeable for some of the studio and workshop-based courses in visual arts and construction. The result is a proliferation of ad-hoc solutions such as small sheds.

101 Centrally-located social facilities include a bright self-service refectory, student-run restaurants, a student union cafe, a large sports hall and a thoughtfully refurbished creche. Outlying sites have far fewer amenities, but include a creche and nursery, resources for musical activity and a fitness centre.

102 There is a shortage of space for private study. The main library and learning resource area at Hele Road is congested. On some other sites the library and learning resources are located in poorly-modified rooms. The careers base room in the library is unappealing and does little to raise the profile of careers advice.

103 The college has made serious efforts to provide access for students with physical disabilities, on occasion introducing special facilities to meet an individual's particular needs. A useful leaflet gives details of wheelchair access to each of the college's sites. Nevertheless, 23 per cent of teaching areas are accessible only by climbing stairs. Timetabling has been adjusted where possible so that classes take place in suitable locations. However, people with restricted mobility are, in effect, denied access to some courses with dedicated specialist accommodation which they cannot reach. Examples include art and design, vehicle maintenance and dance. Access to the library and learning resources centre is dependent on help from students or tutors.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

104 The particular strengths of the college are:

- a broad range of courses and levels of study
- the productive relationships with employers, schools, universities, community organisations and the TEC
- the highly-committed, well-informed and supportive governing body
- the highly-effective senior management team
- the strategic planning process linked to target setting and staff development
- the admissions, enrolment and induction processes
- the effective tutorial and guidance arrangements for full-time students
- the generally successful teaching and learning
- the high levels of achievement at GCE A level and on some vocational courses
- the well-qualified, enthusiastic and experienced staff who work well in teams
- the many interlocking and effective processes for assuring quality
- the well-equipped general teaching and specialist practical work areas.

105 In order to improve further its provision the college should:

- continue to rationalise the accommodation
- improve the strategic management of information technology to support learning
- increase the number of computers available to students for independent study
- increase the number of private study spaces for students
- improve the monitoring of, and response to, student retention and destinations
- improve the quality of information on students' examination results
- improve pass rates of some 16-18 vocational courses
- deal with inconsistencies in quality assurance.

FIGURES

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

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

 - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

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

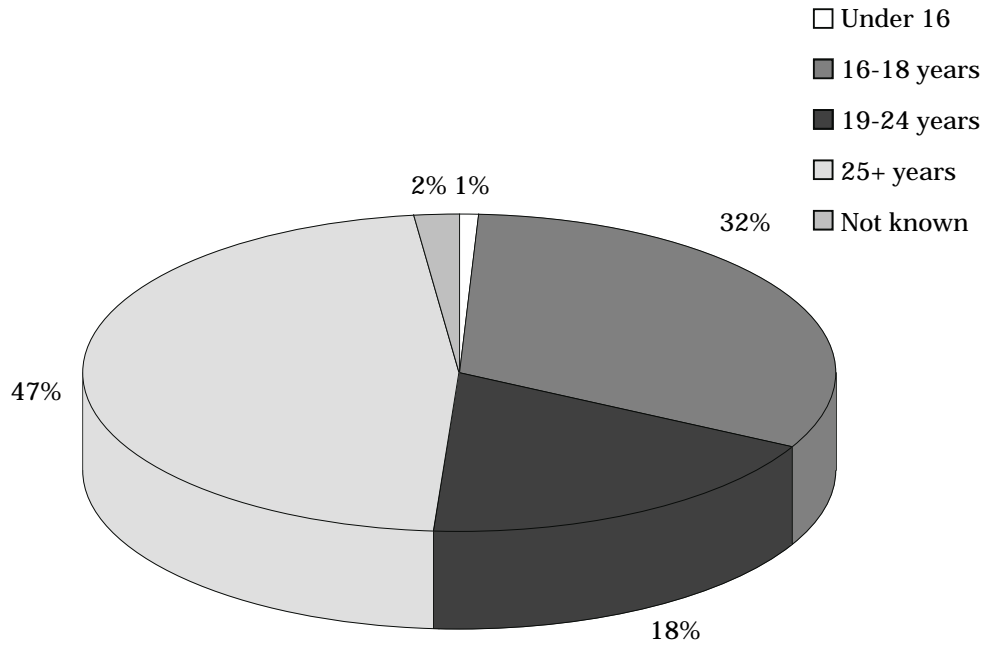
 - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

Figure 1

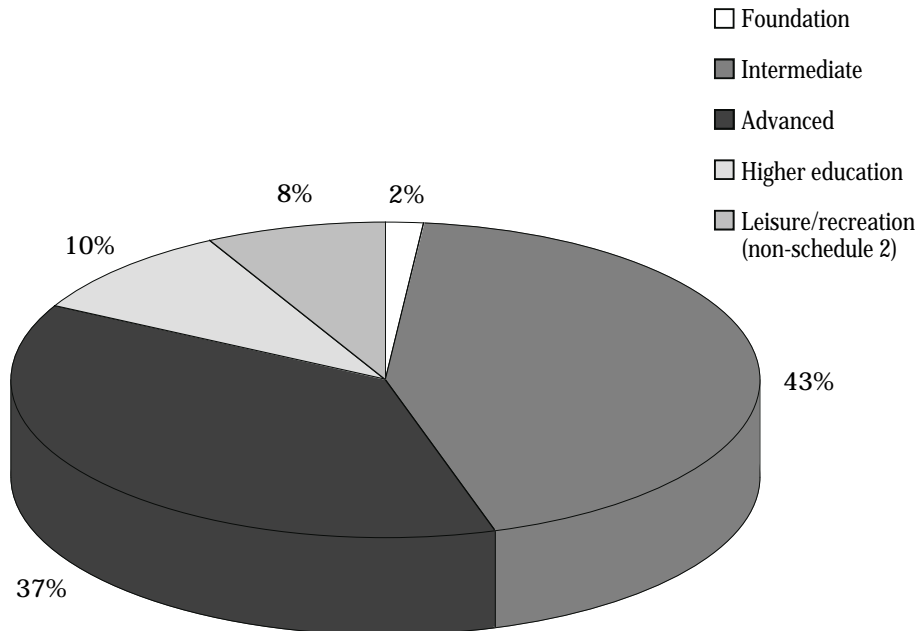
Exeter College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 11,703

Figure 2

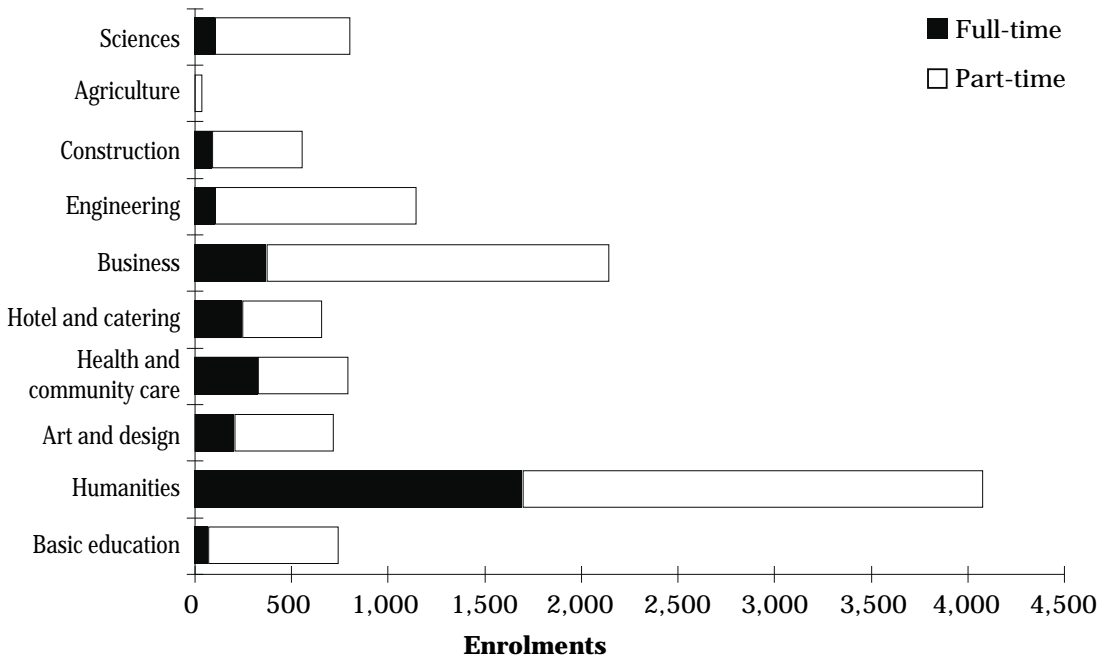
Exeter College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 11,703

Figure 3

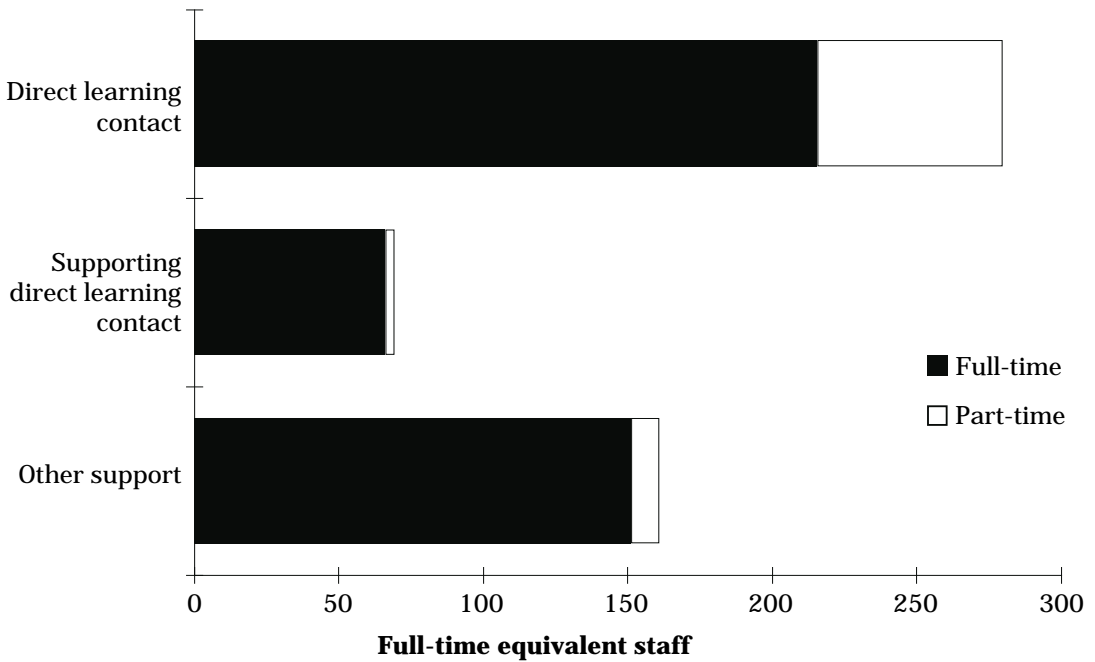
Exeter College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 11,703

Figure 4

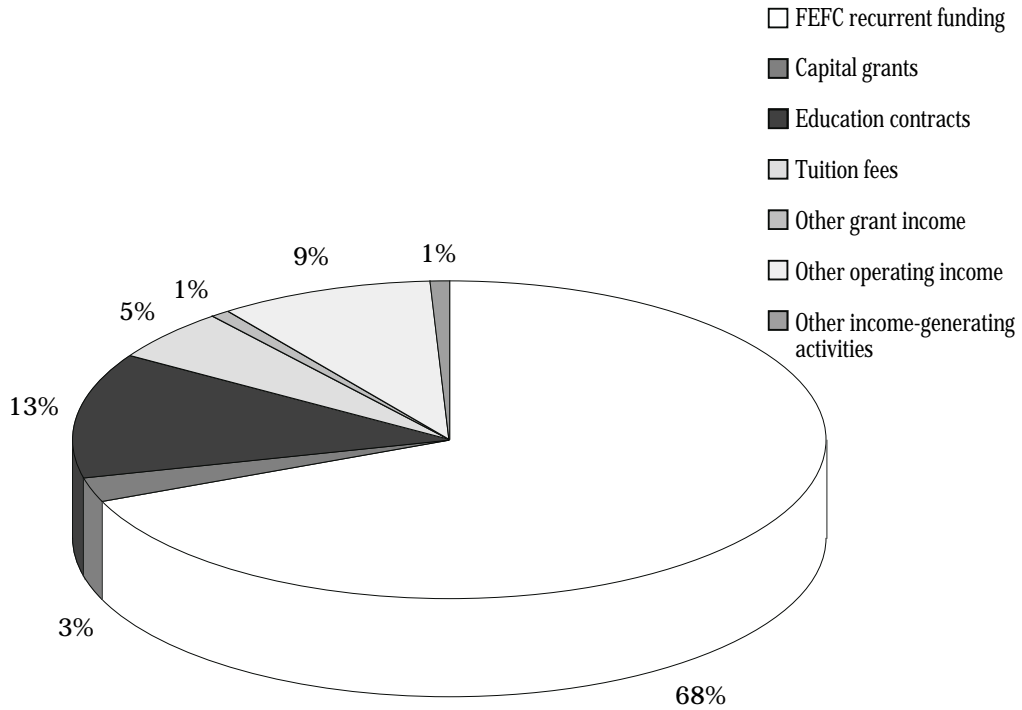
Exeter College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 511

Figure 5

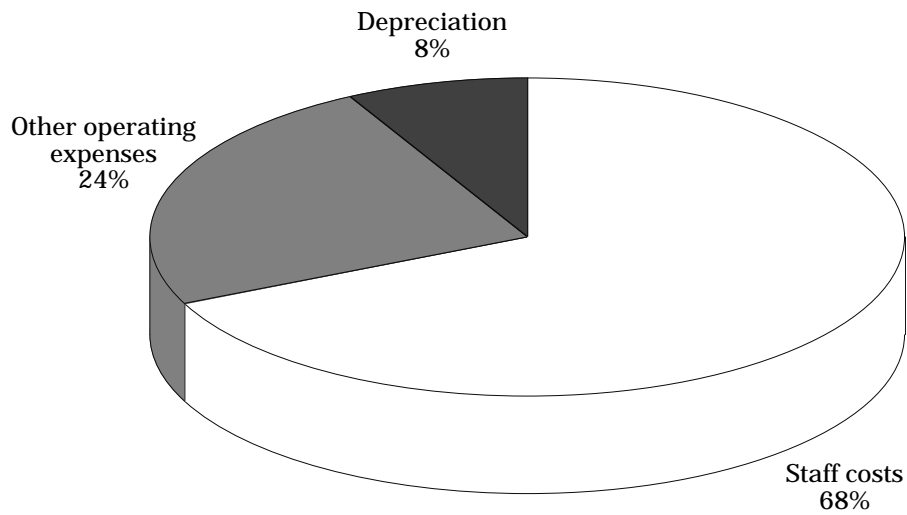
Exeter College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)



Income: £13,888,000

Figure 6

Exeter College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Expenditure: £14,108,000

Note: this chart excludes £17,000 interest payable.
The historical cost surplus for the period is £363,000.

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