

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Weston-super- Mare College

December 1994

**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 81/94

WESTON-SUPER-MARE COLLEGE

SOUTH WEST REGION

Inspected May 1994 to October 1994

Summary

Weston-super-Mare College provides full-time and part-time education and training programmes within the areas of south-west Avon and north-west Somerset. Particular strengths of the college are its broad range of provision aimed at both school leavers and adult students, its effective liaison with local schools and the strengthened systems for students' recruitment, guidance and support. Staff are well qualified. Course programmes in art and design, care, and professional studies are of a particularly high standard.

There are significant weaknesses in the operation of the college's senior management team, and the use of the computerised management information system to inform planning. The quality of provision in science, mathematics, social science, hairdressing and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is poor. Much of the college's accommodation is unsatisfactory, and there are shortcomings in specialist equipment, library facilities and in the provision of information technology. The college should do more to promote its services amongst local employers and in the community. Other issues that should be addressed are the inconsistencies in the application of some quality assurance procedures and the limited availability of some student support services including learning support, and counselling.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision	Grade
Responsiveness and range of provision	3
Governance and management	4
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	2
equipment/learning resources	4
accommodation	4

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science and mathematics	4	Care	1
Construction	3	Hairdressing and beauty therapy	4
Electronic engineering	3	Art and design	1
Business, management and administration	3	Social sciences	4
Catering	3	Humanities	3
Leisure and tourism	2	Professional studies	1
		Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	4

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	5
Responsiveness and range of provision	11
Governance and management	20
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	31
Teaching and the promotion of learning	40
Students' achievements	53
Quality assurance	65
Resources	75
Conclusions and issues	89
Figures	

INTRODUCTION

1 Weston-super-Mare College was inspected between May 1994 and October 1994. The team of full-time and part-time inspectors spent a total of 70 days in the college.

2 During May 1994, a team of 14 inspectors inspected courses in business and management, leisure and tourism, catering, hairdressing, construction, engineering, science and mathematics, humanities and social sciences, professional studies, care, art and design and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors visited 193 classes, met with college managers, teaching staff and students, and inspected a wide range of students' written work and course documentation.

3 During October, a team of six inspectors spent a week in the college inspecting aspects of cross-college provision. Inspectors had access to a wide range of college and course documentation. Meetings were held with governors, parents, representatives from local schools, employers, the local community, college managers and staff, and representatives from Avon Training and Enterprise Council.

4 In response to the findings of the inspections carried out in May 1994, the college has included an action plan to address issues for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in its strategic plan.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

5 The college primarily serves Weston-super-Mare and the adjacent areas of south-west Avon and north-west Somerset. The nearest further education colleges, at a distance of approximately 20 miles, are South Bristol College to the north east, and Bridgwater College to the south. Within the college's catchment area, there are nine schools with sixth forms, including Broadoak School within Weston-super-Mare itself. Approximately 89 per cent of school leavers in the college's catchment area proceed to further study after the age of 16.

6 The population of Weston-super-Mare town is approximately 65,000, of which 4 per cent are in the age range 16-19 and 28 per cent are over 60 years of age. The local economy is heavily dependent on service industries, including tourism, professional services, and public sector organisations. There is also some manufacturing. Wider employment opportunities exist within the Bristol area. There are significant numbers of part-time and casual jobs available in local tourism and leisure. The unemployment rate in Weston-super-Mare is currently 10.1 per cent. This is significantly higher than the Avon county average of 8.7 per cent.

7 During the academic year 1993-94, the college enrolled 11,599 students of whom 2,047 were full time. Seventy-five per cent of the students were aged 19 and over. Percentage enrolments by age are shown in figure 1. Sixty-seven per cent of students were enrolled on programmes leading to nationally-recognised academic or vocational qualifications,

with the remaining 33 per cent following recreation or leisure courses. Enrolments by level of study are shown in figure 2 and enrolments by mode of attendance and programme area are shown in figure 3. The college employed 272 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 179 were teachers and 93 support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

8 The senior managers are the principal, the vice-principal with responsibility for resources, two assistant principals who are responsible for curriculum and staffing, respectively, and a chief administrative officer. Below this level, the college is organised into six curriculum groups: business; adult and continuing education; engineering and construction; hospitality, health and care; creative art and design; and the Woodspring centre, which offers General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level), General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and professional studies work. Each group is headed by a manager and is further sub-divided into schools and/or programme teams.

9 The college's main campus is located in the centre of Weston-super-Mare with five annexes all located within a three-mile radius of the main site. The largest of these is Westcliff, which houses part of art and design and business provision. The Somerset House and Carlton Street annexes are both within half a mile of the main campus and accommodate social science, language work and care courses. Selworthy Road is a small unit catering for brickwork and allied trades. Adult education work is undertaken at the main site, at the college's Worle Further Education Unit, and in over 20 schools, sports centres, youth clubs and halls across the catchment area.

10 The aims of the college are set out in the strategic plan 1994-1997. They are concerned with broadening access and choice in the provision of education and training, contributing to the economic, social and cultural development of the community, maintaining the college's present position as a regional centre for training and education, and ensuring quality across all aspects of its provision. In pursuing these aims, the college has a commitment to increasing its student enrolments by 25 per cent over the period 1993 to 1996, and to making significant changes to the current accommodation, equipment and learning resources.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

11 The college offers a broad range of academic and vocational programmes aimed at school leavers and adult students.

12 For full-time students, the college offers 25 GCE A level subjects, 12 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects and 24 GCSE subjects. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are available in office studies, accounting, management, construction, care, catering, hairdressing, and engineering and motor vehicle. The college initially adopted a cautious approach to the piloting of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). Some programmes are now offered in business studies, leisure

and tourism, health and social care, art and design and construction and the built environment. In vocational areas where NVQs or GNVQs are not yet available, students are prepared for nationally-recognised craft, technician and professional qualifications.

13 Full-time students can participate in sporting and some special interest activities outside formal classes, although timetabling restrictions prevent some groups from participating in the full range of options available.

14 There are opportunities for adults to study both part time and full time. Course fees are waived for unemployed students. There is an access course for adult students seeking to progress to higher education. Most of the GCE A level and GCSE classes include part-time students. Many day-time vocational programmes, for example in business studies, hairdressing and beauty therapy are designed specifically for adults. There are part-time higher national certificate courses in engineering, business and finance, environmental health, and care. It is possible to study a small number of GCSE and GCE A level subjects either at home or by attending the college's open learning centre, at which tutorial support is provided. Another centre provides opportunities for part-time students to develop office and information technology skills. In practice, there is insufficient liaison between these two centres. The college is a sponsoring college for the Nailsea Adult Education Centre.

15 The college is committed to integrating students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into mainstream classes, although at present, provision is separate. Currently 66 full-time and 84 part-time students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are enrolled on college courses designed specifically for their needs. There is active liaison with the local community, including specific links with three local special schools. Provision has also been made in college for seven pupils who have been excluded from compulsory education. College publicity materials lack sufficiently positive messages on the opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

16 The image of the college with external organisations including employers, Avon Training and Enterprise Council and the wider community is one of a traditional provider of courses in education and training. This view is inconsistent with the college's aims. A marketing strategy has been developed, but the production of a new corporate image and its presentation to the community at large is at an early stage. Marketing activities are co-ordinated through a central unit, supported and advised by a cross-college marketing group. To date, the work of the unit has concentrated largely on schools' liaison and publicity activities. Generally, market research activities are the responsibility of individual curriculum groups and are not co-ordinated across the college. Nevertheless, some valuable work has been undertaken by the marketing unit in researching the perceptions of year 11 school pupils about the college.

17 The college has specific links with Bath College of Higher Education and the University of the West of England for higher education work undertaken in teacher education and in art and design. Although joint planning has taken place between the college and these institutions, entry to the final year of the university's 'integrating art and design' degree from the college's diploma in higher education in art and design programme is not guaranteed. The college had planned further expansion of higher education and has been approved to run higher national diplomas in business and finance, and early childhood studies, should direct funding from the Higher Education Funding Council become available.

18 Projects funded by Avon Training and Enterprise Council have included a survey of local employers on the need for training in basic numeracy and communication skills in the workplace. This has resulted in more adult students attending courses in basic literacy and numeracy. The college did not renew its youth and adult training contract with Avon Training and Enterprise Council for April 1994 which has caused some reduction in opportunities for students wishing to undertake construction training at the college.

19 Links with employers are undertaken through work placements, employer consultative committees, short courses and directly through informal contacts. Links vary in their effectiveness. Liaison is strong in care and catering. In other areas, for example in engineering and construction, the college is working hard to improve its links with employers. Some employers have little knowledge of NVQs and of college services such as study through flexible patterns of attendance, and the assessment of prior learning. There are a few examples of the college undertaking full-cost courses for local organisations, for example in computing.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 The governing body has a membership of 20, drawn from industry, the local community, Avon Training and Enterprise Council, college staff and students. Currently there are four vacancies. An appropriate range of sub-committees has been established, and the main board and most of these sub-committees meet on a monthly basis. The minuting of meetings is adequate. The flow of information to the board is generally satisfactory, but the governing body does not receive regular reports on the quality of provision and has not developed indicators for measuring its own or the college's performance.

21 There is a lack of clarity about the college management structure, lines of responsibility and reporting arrangements, in particular the arrangements for group managers. The management structure is intended to be supportive to staff and responsive to changing circumstances; in practice, it fails to provide effective direction and leadership. This position is reflected in the wide variation in inspection grades awarded to the different curriculum areas.

22 Senior managers do not work together effectively as a team and there are a number of examples where members are unaware of each others' involvement in key areas. There is an urgent need for the senior management team to review how it discharges its responsibilities for the strategic management of the college.

23 Until March 1994, there were fortnightly meetings of the senior management team. Formal minuting of meetings was erratic. For example, for an eight month period there were no minutes. A separate vice-principal's committee brought together group managers and cross-college managers and these two groups have now been replaced by a college management team which meets weekly. The new group of 11 members brings together the senior managers and group managers, but cross-college managers are excluded. Records of these meetings are too brief to provide a useful record of discussions, decisions and actions taken.

24 Within curriculum groups, planning and communication are more effective. Working relationships between staff are generally positive. However, the gradual phasing in of a new organisational structure has resulted in staff occupying similar roles with different job titles, teaching hours, and salaries. This has added to the general confusion about management responsibilities with some group managers being uncertain to whom they report. Other significant weaknesses were identified at curriculum management level including, in some areas, the lack of dissemination of good practice and the absence of systematic collation and analysis of information on students to inform the setting of priorities, planning, marketing, action or the setting of targets.

25 An extensive strategic plan was prepared during the first part of 1994. This sets out key objectives for the college. The plan was assembled by the principal with specific sections contributed by senior staff. The development of the strategic plan was not discussed by the college management group. The board was kept informed of progress and approved the final draft. Group managers produced three-year development plans in 1991. Since then there has been no clear procedure for updating these plans in response to changing markets and priorities, and the board has made no arrangements for monitoring the plan.

26 Resources are allocated to group managers through a procedure known as the course file system. This allocates staffing and materials, using a formula based on student hours and relative costs, and it enables group managers to track actual enrolments against targets, and to determine how staff hours are being used. Adjustments to budget allocations are made regularly in response to actual students numbers. To date, unit costs have not been calculated. However, senior managers acknowledge the importance of ensuring that management decisions are taken with the full knowledge of all costs.

27 The college's average level of funding per funded unit of activity for 1994-95 is £16.33. This is well below the median of £18.17 for general

further education colleges, and places the college in the bottom 25 per cent of the sector. Summaries of the college's income and expenditure for the 16 months from 1 April 1993 to 31 July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

28 The management information system in the college is developing quickly from a very low base, but much remains to be done. Although there have been significant improvements in the accuracy of the information provided, group managers cannot access the system, and information has to be provided on request. The college's financial management system is separate. This means, for example, that reconciling fee income with enrolments can only be undertaken manually. A third system, managed by the vice-principal, is used for the course file procedure. The college should consider the total information it requires to manage its operation and develop a strategy to gather and manage this information appropriately.

29 There are comprehensive college policies on equal opportunities (including a recently-approved policy on disability equality), student support, quality, personnel and environmental matters. There is an extensive health and safety manual, and management and liaison committees for health and safety. Arrangements for implementation and monitoring are variable.

30 Enrolment targets are set and monitored through the course file procedure. In 1993-94 the college exceeded its growth target. At the time of the inspection, planned full-time enrolments in art and design, GCE A level and GCSE were below target. However, the college plans to enrol students throughout the year, and the full picture of progress against enrolment targets is incomplete.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

31 During the past year the college has made major changes in arrangements for students' recruitment, guidance and support. A newly-appointed head of student support services reports to the assistant principal (curriculum) and leads a central team of staff with responsibilities for a range of services including course information, admissions, careers, student counselling and learning support. The central service is also responsible for co-ordinating the assessment of prior learning, induction and tutorial developments. The service is new and not all staff and students are aware of the full range of services offered and of the identity of the individual staff.

32 There is an active programme of schools liaison which involves close co-operation with the Avon careers service. There are visits by college staff and students to local schools, supplemented by open days, taster sessions, career conventions and link programmes for pupils with learning difficulties. The college prospectus provides information on full-time and part-time courses which is supported by a range of additional course

leaflets and pamphlets. Information is readily available in a wide range of outlets and clearly presented. Once received, full-time applications for courses are recorded centrally, and advice and guidance interviews arranged with specialist teachers.

33 An information officer is responsible for dealing with initial contacts with part-time students and for overseeing their entry onto courses. During July and August the college operates an effective advice and guidance service, and links with course managers and the careers service are maintained during this period. An assessment of prior learning service is provided, for example in care, hairdressing, construction and business studies. However, the quality of written information available to prospective candidates on assessment of prior learning is in need of improvement.

34 Overall, arrangements for students' induction are effective. The quality assurance group has produced quality standards, monitoring documents and tutor guidance notes for use by course teams, and there is evidence of good practice on many courses. For example, in art and design and in leisure and tourism, information on assessment and course structure is interspersed with relevant assignments and exercises.

35 All full-time students have a personal tutor. Within curriculum groups, programme team leaders are responsible for co-ordinating tutorial arrangements. A tutorial handbook provides a college statement of the roles and responsibilities of personal tutors and programme team leaders use this as a basis for designing a specific tutorial programme. Tutorial support is provided in three main ways. On many courses, time slots are identified on staff and student timetables. On GCE A level and GCSE programmes, tutorials take place by arrangement between teachers and students. Within art and design, tutorial support is integrated into the teaching programme. Although tutors are committed to their role, closer links could be established between the tutorial system and student support services. The college needs to ensure that the overall effectiveness of tutorial support is monitored regularly.

36 Students in need of additional learning support are identified from enrolment forms, through pre-entry interviews, through course tutors, and through a test devised by an Adult Literacy Basic Skills Unit. Such students are referred to an experienced member of the student support services team who makes arrangements for an appropriate programme of support. However, for a college of this size the number of students receiving support is low.

37 A female student counsellor is available for 25 hours a week over two full days and two half days, but there is no male counsellor. There is a designated counselling room on the main site.

38 Careers advice is shared between a designated college careers co-ordinator, who is also the librarian, and a careers adviser who attends the college for 1½ days a week. There are also significant inputs from course tutors. Students are informed about the service through the

induction programme, notices, lunchtime talks and course handbooks. The careers adviser maintains a job vacancy information system, and part of the library is devoted to a range of careers resources. In addition to general guidance sessions, careers staff are available to visit course tutor groups. However, take-up of this service is low. For example, the careers co-ordinator has not visited GCE A level tutorial groups to advise on higher education opportunities.

39 Following a pilot exercise which included a programme of staff training, the college has introduced its own record of achievement format for all 16-19 year old full-time students. Guidelines are provided for all tutors, and completion is undertaken within the tutorial system. With a few exceptions, the procedure is being followed.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

40 The inspection grades for lessons observed by inspectors are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		1	10	11	4	2	28
GCSE		0	10	5	2	0	17
GNVQ		4	2	1	0	0	7
NVQ		2	8	10	9	1	30
Other		23	42	29	14	3	111
Total		30	72	56	29	6	193

41 In 53 per cent of sessions, strengths outweighed weaknesses, with the highest standards of teaching and learning achieved in art and design, care and professional studies. In 18 per cent of sessions, the weaknesses outweighed the strengths. In science, mathematics, hairdressing and on discrete courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, inspectors observed a significant number of weaker sessions.

42 In art and design, programmes of study were carefully devised by course teams. Aims and objectives of teaching sessions and assignments were clear to students. Learning activities were challenging and there were many opportunities for students to work in small groups and to contribute to their own assessment. Teachers provided expert and skilful support. Monitoring of individual students' progress was thorough.

43 Within all business, management and administration courses, teaching was matched carefully to the requirements of examining and validating bodies and to the needs of students. Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national business and finance core activities were well designed and delivered, but work undertaken in option units was sometimes dull and lacking in vocational relevance. Teaching on professional accounting programmes was thorough and effective. In

typewriting and word processing classes, the use of workbooks encouraged students at different stages to proceed to more advanced exercises; however, a shortage of workbooks on some computing courses adversely affected the progress made by individual students. Some computing assignments were insufficiently challenging and lacked a strong commercial focus. A small training office provided practical work experience for NVQ business administration students, but the range of activities undertaken was narrow.

44 Supporting documentation for leisure and tourism programmes was comprehensive. The relevant industrial experience of teachers was evident in the design of teaching and learning activities and in coursework assignments. For example, some tasks included inputs from external speakers and made use of industry brochures and materials. There were widespread references to industrial practice within many teaching sessions.

45 Theory classes on catering courses and in hairdressing and beauty therapy relied too heavily on note-taking and provided few opportunities for other student activities. During practical catering sessions, clear progress was made by students in mastering cooking techniques, but there were insufficient opportunities for students to experience the commercial pressures of working in a busy production kitchen.

46 In hairdressing, students were under-occupied in practical salon activities owing to a shortage of customers. At times, when customers were present, the hair-styles requested provided insufficient variety for students to extend their experience.

47 Teaching and learning programmes in health and social care were designed to include group activities, individual research, presentations, short residential courses off site, and relevant work experience. Assignments were demanding and varied. Work was marked carefully and returned to students promptly. Detailed records of individual students' progress were kept and shared with both students and their parents.

48 The quality of teaching within GCE A level and GCSE programmes was variable. In most of the sessions observed, teachers worked to clear teaching schemes, had prepared thoroughly for classes, and demonstrated sound subject knowledge. In humanities and social sciences, work was regularly set and marked, with some good examples of projects and extended essays.

49 Improved day-time access to GCE A level and GCSE programmes for part-time students has been provided through the organisation of the timetable in two to three-hour teaching blocks. Full-time and part-time students are taught together. However, in some cases there was little change of activity within these long teaching blocks and little use made of teaching aids. Some sessions were dominated by the teacher with insufficient checks to ensure that students had understood the material presented. The standards of note-taking and organisation of student folders were frequently poor. Practical work in GCE A level science subjects

failed to extend many of the skills developed at GCSE, and in some science sessions insufficient attention was given to aspects of safety.

50 Within engineering and construction programmes, teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge and showed a willingness to support individual students who were experiencing problems. Practical work in construction included experience on actual building projects. Coursework was appropriate, marking was consistent, and records of progress maintained accurately. In a few instances, progress in class was too slow and some students lost concentration.

51 The professional studies course group includes initial teacher training, counselling and access to higher education provision. The teaching and learning styles used matched the maturity and experience of the students, and provided opportunities for students to contribute to the content of some sessions, to engage in small group work and to make oral presentations. Course documentation was thorough.

52 Teaching and learning for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities varied in its effectiveness. In a few sessions, work was closely matched to students' individual needs, promoting choice and the development of relevant life skills. However, the aims of many classes were unclear and there were insufficient opportunities for students to work at their own pace. Some activities undertaken on vocational courses were poorly designed and unrelated to the requirements of employment.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

53 Many course programmes included appropriate and successful small group activities. For instance, on business studies courses, small groups of students were required to develop and present a plan for a new business venture. Groups of carpentry and joinery students, working on the conversion of an old chapel into a theatre, managed their time and the tasks set effectively.

54 The college's open-access centre provides opportunities for part-time students to acquire a range of information technology skills relevant to office employment. However, the use made of information technology by full-time students is variable. Access to computers outside timetabled hours is restricted largely to the open learning centre on the ground floor of the main building. Students based at other sites are disadvantaged.

55 Students on vocational courses, including NVQ and GNVQ programmes, are often required to submit portfolios of work as a major part of their final assessment. Overall, the content and presentation of portfolios inspected were appropriate, and some excellent work was produced in art and design, health and social care, business administration and professional studies. The recording of achievements for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was generally poor.

56 Statistical information about students who withdraw from courses is provided, on demand, through the college management information

system. There were considerable differences in student withdrawal rates between curriculum groups and in attendance patterns. For example, the percentage of students withdrawing from full-time courses ranged from under 8 per cent in art and design to 19 per cent in hairdressing, hospitality and care. The withdrawal rates for part-time evening students were generally below those of part-time day students. However, inspectors noted a number of discrepancies between the data provided centrally and class registers. The college needs to ensure that student withdrawals are recorded quickly and accurately, and that information is collected in sufficient detail to assist with course planning.

57 Student withdrawal figures are available for individual courses. However, for 1993-94 they were not broken down into separate subjects for GCE A level and GCSE, making it impossible to track back final examination results to the numbers of students who originally enrolled on individual subjects.

58 In 1994, there were approximately 560 examination entries for GCSE subjects, with an overall pass rate of 66 per cent. This compares with a national pass rate, grades A-C, of 50 per cent in 1993. However, these entries represent approximately 70 per cent of the initial student enrolments on GCSE courses. Success rates for students aged 19 or over who sit GCSE examinations are often significantly higher than for 16-18 year olds. For example, in 1993, 96 per cent of students aged 19 or over who entered for GCSE English language achieved grade A-C, compared with 75 per cent of 16-18 year olds. In 1994, the percentage of all entrants achieving grades A-C was 77 in English language and 79 in mathematics.

59 In 1994, approximately 470 candidates entered for GCE A level examinations in 27 subjects. They achieved a pass rate of 65 per cent which compares with a pass rate of 66 per cent for all general further education and tertiary colleges in 1993. The numbers of students who originally enrolled for GCE A level courses was not available. The best results were achieved in art (89 per cent), theatre studies (80 per cent) and environmental studies (92 per cent). Some subjects achieved pass rates of less than 60 per cent, for example, English language (48 per cent), business studies (56 per cent) and psychology (53 per cent). In some subjects very few students entered for GCE A level examinations. For example, there were four entries in economics and two in each of chemistry and physics.

60 Results varied significantly from those in 1993, when all candidates sitting GCE A level examinations in government and politics, theatre studies and mathematics achieved a pass grade. However, in common with GCSE examinations, students aged 19 or over consistently achieve better results than those in the 16-18 age group.

61 Sixty-nine students entered for GCE AS level subject examination in 1994. The pass rate was 59 per cent, and the best results were achieved in English literature (80 per cent).

62 Many full-time and part-time students who complete NVQ courses and BTEC first and national diplomas are successful in achieving their

target qualifications. In 1994, pass rates of 100 per cent were achieved in BTEC national diplomas in performing arts and hotel and catering and in NVQ business administration. Pass rates for the new GNVQ intermediate qualifications in health and social care and leisure and tourism were 38 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively.

63 Results obtained by part-time students on vocational courses vary. For example, there are high pass rates in professional qualifications in community care (90 per cent) and the Further and Adult Education Teachers Certificate (87 per cent). By contrast, the overall success rate for City and Guilds (C&G) electronic servicing qualifications is 38 per cent. Single-subject secretarial examination results in typewriting and word processing are above 80 per cent, although achievement in shorthand is generally poor.

64 The college collects information on the intended destinations of full-time students. In 1993-94, 270 students entered higher education, with a further 245 seeking to enter the job market. Destination data for students completing courses in summer 1994 are still being collated, but there are indications that a greater proportion of full-time students were seeking jobs rather than opting to proceed with further full-time study.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

65 A statement on the quality assurance policy in the strategic plan refers to the regular reviewing and updating of quality provision. However, awareness of this policy among staff is limited. Present quality assurance procedures rely chiefly on a two-stage course review process and on a total quality management initiative. Significant work on quality assurance has been undertaken over the last 12 months, and the systems in place are beginning to raise standards in many areas of college activity.

66 Each year, a sample of courses from each curriculum group is reviewed in depth by the assistant principal and a member of staff from another curriculum group. In the review, the views of students are canvassed. A detailed report is presented to the academic board. The process is rigorous. It is respected by staff and has yielded improvements in course quality. Each course/subject can expect to have one such review every three or four years, and new courses are reviewed within the first two years of operation.

67 In addition, during 1993-94, programme teams were required to review all their courses. This process included the use of an approved student questionnaire. Group managers summarised the findings and presented an action plan to the academic board. However, there were inconsistencies in the application of this process. For example, one group manager provided a verbal report to the academic board. In another group, the system was regarded as a pilot and many courses were not reviewed. As a result of this, students and staff on some programmes have not had a formal opportunity to review provision for at least two years. On part-time programmes, employers are not systematically asked

for their opinion on the quality of provision provided for their employees.

68 Course managers have little comparative information on student performance such as retention rates. The college examination results booklet for 1992-93 was not distributed until March 1994. There is no regular calculation of the value added to students' qualifications as a result of their time in college.

69 Following initial training in total quality management, cross-college quality teams of staff have been set up to develop standards and procedures, initially in four areas. These areas are induction, student guidance, part-time mature students and learning resources. Although the process is in its early stages, significant improvements in student induction are already apparent.

70 A working party has produced a practical college charter. This is published in a student handbook together with general data about the college and course-specific material. Staff awareness of the implications of the college charter is generally high and it has improved communications within the college. Another positive impact of the charter has been the development of some service standards, such as the time within which candidates should expect to receive a response from the college after being interviewed for a place.

71 The college's staff-development plan details training priorities for the year. These priorities are matched to strategic objectives and tightly linked to the approval of individual staff development requests. This year, approximately 1 per cent of the college's budget has been set aside for staff development. Although individual activities are evaluated by participants there is no overall report which evaluates the success of the college's staff-development programme.

72 Appraisal of teachers, including classroom observation, has been in place for two years. The training needs identified in line managers' appraisal reports are used to draw up curriculum groups' staff development priorities. A parallel appraisal scheme for support staff started in February 1994. Most support staff and a significant minority of teaching staff have yet to be appraised. Staff who have not been appraised have had no recent formal opportunity to discuss their staff development needs with line managers.

73 The college has a target date of March 1995 for achieving the Investors in People award. Staff awareness of the purpose and significance of the award varies. Awareness is stronger amongst teaching than support staff.

74 New full-time and part-time teachers and full-time support staff go through a well-documented and thorough induction process. Comments made by this year's participants have influenced the structure and content of future programmes.

RESOURCES

Staffing

75 Most full-time and part-time teachers have academic and/or vocational qualifications relevant to the courses on which they teach. In some cases, for example in hairdressing, catering and business studies, teachers have broadly-based qualifications which enable them to teach across a range of different courses. Many full-time teachers hold a professional teaching qualification and are working towards assessor or verifier awards. Teachers working on vocational programmes generally have appropriate industrial experience, although in some instances this is dated. New full-time appointments in mathematics, science and computing are helping the college to address specific staffing deficiencies.

76 In care, art and design and leisure and tourism, the specialist skills and expertise of part-time teachers add significantly to the students' experience. However, in some subject areas, part-time teachers need to be encouraged to train for, or improve their professional teaching and/or their assessment qualifications.

77 Clerical support to groups and central services is adequate, although there is some inflexibility in the organisation of this support to cope with short-term fluctuations in workloads.

78 Following a recent reorganisation, specialist technicians are now allocated to groups. This has resulted in a closer working relationship between teaching and technician staff, although there has been some loss of flexibility in overall deployment. There is no direct technician support for business studies, media, languages or leisure and tourism.

79 Small central technician teams provide audio-visual services, information technology support, reprographics, some general technician support and general maintenance. College caretaking staff provide a flexible and highly regarded range of services, including some maintenance and decorating work. There are some overlaps in responsibilities between the central technician and caretaking teams.

Equipment/learning resources

80 The quality of general teaching materials and equipment is variable. In the areas of office studies, care, computing and in some areas of art and design, the quantity and quality of specialist equipment are appropriate. In leisure and tourism, and construction, limited college facilities are often supported by access to sites away from the college. In hairdressing, photography and science, equipment is old and no longer reflects current industrial practice. There are equipment shortages in motor vehicle engineering, modern foreign languages and for students with learning difficulties. Reprographic facilities are working satisfactorily, but there is a shortage of overhead projector and video playback equipment, particularly at the college's annexes.

81 The college is in the early stages of developing a new strategy for the co-ordination and development of information technology. At present, there are approximately 250 computers available for student use, but many of these are either old or reserved for use by particular groups of students. There is limited standardisation of software across the college. A small open-access area adjacent to the library has 22 computers with quality printing facilities; this area is well used by students and supported by a small team of staff. A further centre on the fifth floor provides information technology training for part-time students at times which suit their patterns of study.

82 The library provides a poor environment for study and fails to meet the needs of many student groups. There are no library facilities within any of the annexes. There are weaknesses in book stock and material to support project work in many subject areas including business and management, leisure and tourism, care, engineering, science and mathematics. The library is overseen by a tutor librarian, who also has responsibility for careers work, a professionally qualified assistant librarian and two assistants. There are two CD-ROM stations, with a growing range of disks. However, current management arrangements do not allow students to take disks from the library to the adjacent open access computer centre where additional viewing stations are available.

Accommodation

83 Accommodation at the main site varies in its suitability. Many teaching areas are too small or insufficiently flexible to cope with changing demands. For example, the small students' training office is separated from an adjacent computer room and the open-access centre. There are insufficient catering outlets to cover the complete range of NVQ catering requirements. Noise between teaching rooms is a frequent problem in performing arts and in classrooms on the upper floors of the main block. The separation of the library, the open learning centre and the open-access centre does not encourage close co-operation between these important cross-college resource bases.

84 Although there have been efforts to improve the internal appearance of the building through redecoration of, for example, the travel shop, hairdressing reception area and some teaching accommodation, much remains to be done. Routine cleaning of teaching rooms is generally good, but other parts of the buildings are sometimes neglected.

85 Teaching accommodation at annexes is often unsatisfactory. The Somerset House annexe is a corridor of rooms forming the first floor of an office block. Westcliff annexe is a series of Victorian houses. Although some rooms used for art and design and business and management at Westcliff have been extended and redecorated, there are still serious problems with damp. By contrast, the small Carlton Street annexe was refurbished during summer 1994 and now provides a pleasant and

appropriate environment. Security at the smaller town centre annexes, where no caretaking cover is provided, is poor.

86 With few exceptions, rooms are barren and bare with no relevant display material. There are few external signs announcing the presence of the college or internal signs to direct students and visitors.

87 A lift on the main campus ensures that access for wheelchair users within the main building is satisfactory, and there is a lift in the Somerset House annexe. However, at other locations within the college, access for wheelchair users is either difficult or impossible.

88 Refectory facilities are available at the main site, at Westcliff and Carlton Street. In general, they offer an appropriate service, although the Westcliff refectory is hazardous for students with mobility or co-ordination problems because of the steps approaching the servery. The students' common room on the main site is often not available for students' use. In general, annexes provide few facilities for students. None of them has a designated room set aside for private study.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

89 Strengths of the college include:

- the broad range of learning programmes designed to meet the needs of school-leavers and adults
- the high standards of teaching and learning in the areas of care, art and design and professional studies
- the qualifications, experience and commitment of most teaching and support staff
- the successful new central systems for co-ordinating students' recruitment, guidance and support
- the effective liaison with local schools.

90 The college should address the following issues:

- the image of the college with employers and the wider community
- the unsatisfactory decision-making structures to support effective leadership and direction from the college's senior managers
- the development of an effective computerised management information system which can inform decision making at all levels within the organisation
- the limited availability of some student support services, including learning support and counselling
- the poor quality of provision in science and mathematics, hairdressing, social science and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the inconsistencies in the application of some quality assurance procedures

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- the replacement of inadequate or outdated specialist equipment
 - the inadequate library and learning resources
 - the need to improve access to information technology for all groups of students
 - the unsatisfactory accommodation for teaching and learning activities at the main site and at annexes.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)

 - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)

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

 - 4 Staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)

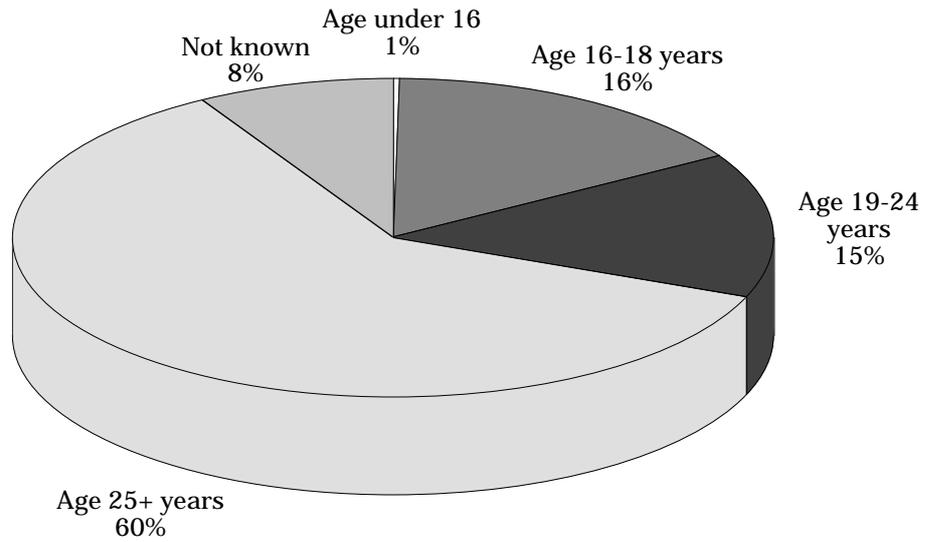
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 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

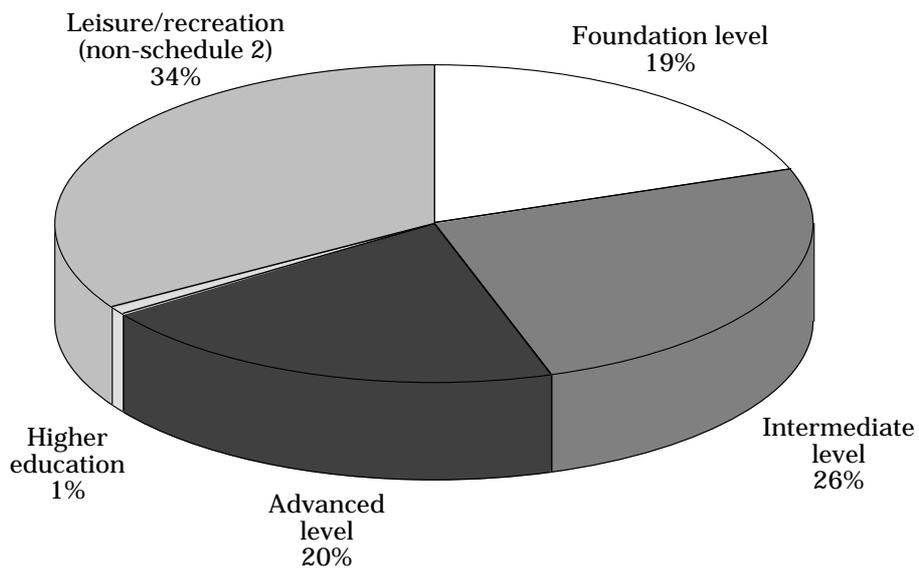
Weston-super-Mare College: percentage enrolments by age (1993-94)



Enrolments: 11,599

Figure 2

Weston-super-Mare College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1993-94)



Enrolments: 11,599

Figure 3

Weston-super-Mare College: enrolments by mode of attendance and programme area (1993-94)

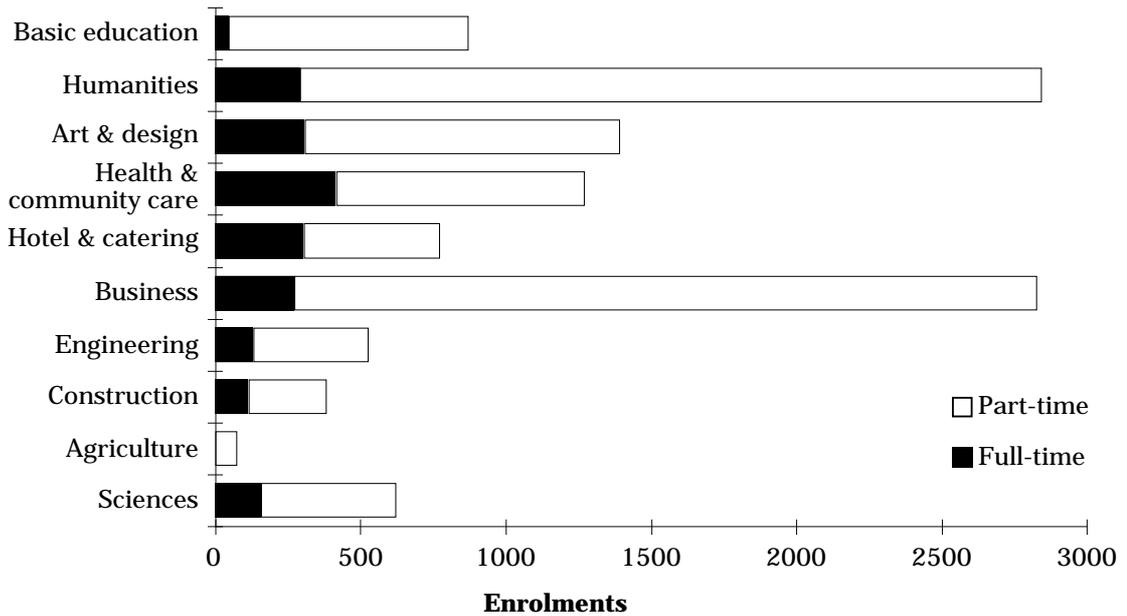


Figure 4

Weston-super-Mare College: staff profile - staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1993-94)

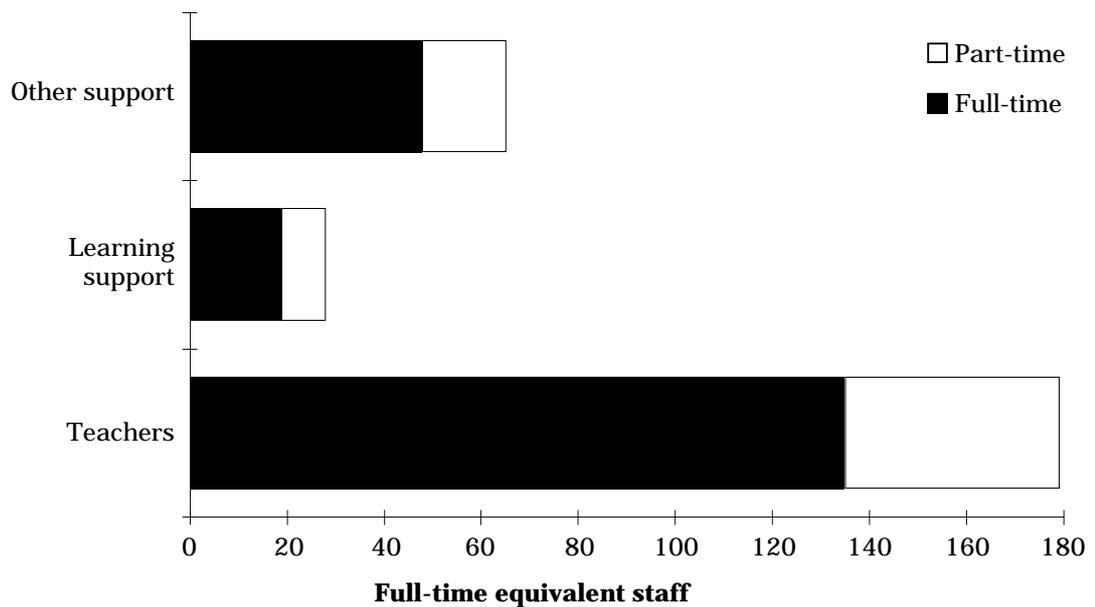
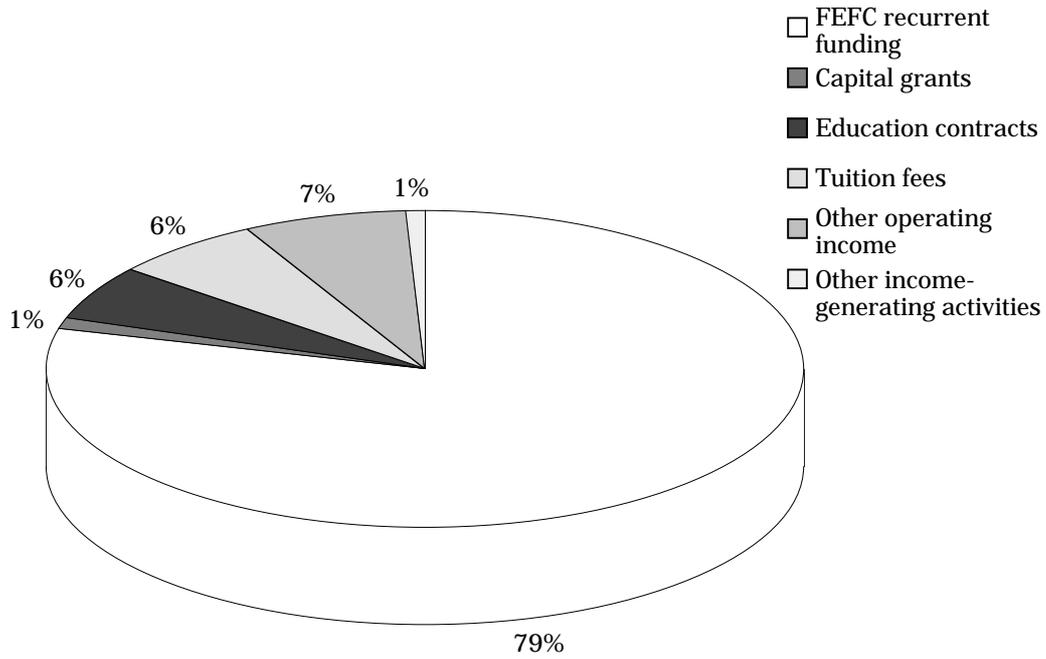


Figure 5

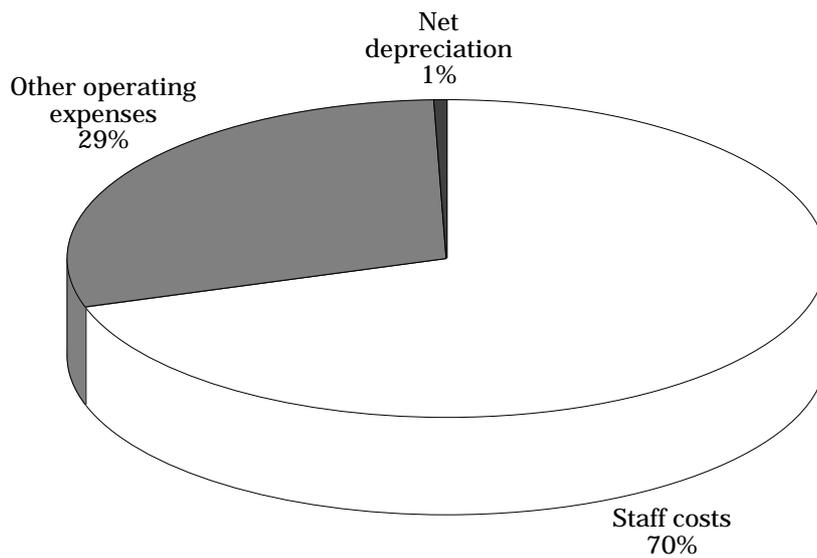
Weston-super-Mare College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £10,066,000

Figure 6

Weston-super-Mare College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £9,876,000

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