

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Wigan and Leigh College

July 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 90/95

WIGAN AND LEIGH COLLEGE

NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected September 1994 – March 1995

Summary

Wigan and Leigh College is a large and diverse general further education college in Greater Manchester. It offers an extensive range of full-time and part-time courses to students locally, nationally and internationally. Full-cost provision for industry and commerce, and international education and business links, are important features of the college's work. There are extensive links with schools and higher education institutions. Governors are experienced and have played a key role in developing the college's mission. They are committed to the improvement of the college through a comprehensive and carefully-developed strategic plan, and explicit 'core values'. Enrolment and induction procedures are well organised. Students receive effective guidance on careers and welfare matters, and good learning support. The quality of teaching is high. Examination results are generally satisfactory; individual students reach high levels of achievement. The flexibility of the college's provision has enabled students to progress at a pace which suits their abilities. Teachers are well qualified and committed to their work. There is strong support for students' learning by non-teaching staff. Most areas of work are well equipped. The college should: continue to improve the standard of its accommodation; address some aspects of financial management and instances of weaker management at school, section and course level; and develop further its quality assurance framework to include quantitative standards and performance targets.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics, science and computing	2	Art and design	1
Construction	2	Teacher education and social science	1
Engineering	1	Other humanities	2
Business and administration	2	Adult basic education	1
Catering, leisure and tourism	1	Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	1
Care, hairdressing and beauty	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1 Wigan and Leigh College was inspected in three stages. Enrolment and induction procedures were inspected in September 1994. During January 1995, 100 inspector days were used for the inspection of specialist subject areas. Aspects of cross-college provision were inspected by a team of nine inspectors who spent 34 inspector days in the college between 6 and 10 March 1995. Inspectors visited 378 classes, examined representative samples of students' work and held discussions with governors, senior managers, staff and students, local employers, head teachers, parents, representatives from the local education authority (LEA) and of METROTEC (Wigan) Ltd, which is the local training and enterprise council (TEC). The inspectors also had access to comprehensive documentation about the college and its courses.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Wigan and Leigh College was formed in April 1992 from the amalgamation of Wigan College of Technology and Leigh College. Both of the former colleges trace their histories back to the nineteenth century when each served its separate geographical community and their industries. Wigan and Leigh College, which is one of the largest and most diverse in the sector, continues to serve the communities of the borough of Wigan but also attracts many students from throughout the North West, from other parts of the United Kingdom, Europe and overseas. International education and business links are an important feature of the college's work. Sciences, engineering and business studies account for 60 per cent of full-time enrolments, and about a third of part-time enrolments are in business studies. Humanities, another large area of work, is wide ranging and its different aspects are taught across the college's sites.

3 The college is located on 10 sites within the borough of Wigan, a major conurbation 20 miles equidistant from Liverpool and Manchester. The Wigan campus incorporates five of the sites. It provides about 80 per cent of the college's accommodation and is within walking distance of the town centre and its rail and bus stations. Four smaller sites form the Leigh campus which is seven miles from Wigan. There is one small site at Tyldesley, about two miles from Leigh. Some of the sites have limited space for car parking.

4 The college operates in a competitive environment. Within the borough of Wigan there are two 11-18 comprehensive schools and two sixth form colleges, St John Rigby Roman Catholic Sixth Form College and Winstanley College. Colleges within easy travelling distance of Wigan and Leigh are: Bolton College, Eccles College, Salford College, Skelmersdale College, South Bolton Sixth Form College, St Helens College, and Warrington Collegiate Institute. The borough of Wigan also has 19 secondary high schools and 10 special schools.

5 At the time of the inspection, there were 18,458 enrolments, representing about 8,000 full-time equivalents students. Of the students

enrolled, 72 per cent were part time and 28 per cent full time. Sixteen per cent were following higher education courses. Twenty-nine per cent of students were between 16 and 18 years of age; 46 per cent were over 25. Fifty-five per cent were female. Three per cent of students were from minority ethnic groups, compared with less than 1 per cent of the local population. Enrolments by age and by level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3.

6 The college employs 476 full-time teachers and 95.5 full-time equivalent part-time teachers. Ninety-six full-time staff and 8.1 full-time equivalent part-time staff provide support for teaching. There are 237 full-time and 23.7 full-time equivalent part-time support staff. About 40 per cent of the full-time staff and 55 per cent of the part-time staff are women, although there are proportionately fewer in senior positions. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

7 The college was about 9 per cent below its recruitment target in 1994-95, measured in terms of funding units. It has planned for a modest growth (about 3.3 per cent) in funding units in 1995-96, representing an increase of approximately 2 per cent in full-time students and 6 per cent in part-time students. Nevertheless, college managers anticipate that enrolments are likely to be slightly below the overall FEFC-funded enrolment target at the end of the 1995-96 academic year. While FEFC-funded part-time students are expected to be about 3.4 per cent above target by the end of the year, a shortfall of 10.6 per cent is expected in full-time enrolments. The shortfall in full-time enrolments was already apparent at the time of the inspection. There were lower enrolments in science, mathematics and computing, engineering, business studies, and art and design. The main factors influencing this were the increased competition from other providers offering General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) and General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) advanced courses, and the falling demand for one-year General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses.

8 The 1991 census shows that the borough of Wigan has a resident population of about 298,600, of which 66 per cent are of working age. Forecasts suggest that the overall population of the borough is likely to remain relatively static, but with an increasing proportion of older residents, and that the numbers of 16-18 year olds in the borough will increase until 1997. Approximately 60 per cent of local school leavers continue in full-time education, a figure which compares well with other areas of the North West.

9 Economic recessions have seriously affected levels of employment in the area. There have been major job losses in manufacturing and mining and their associated industries. Nevertheless, there continues to be a higher proportion of people employed in the manufacturing, construction and distribution industries than in other parts of the North West. Although

the level of employment in the service sector is increasing, it remains below national and regional averages. There are many small companies. About 90 per cent of all organisations in the area employ fewer than 25 people and collectively they provide about one-third of all local employment. The college itself is one of the largest employers in the area. The borough has development area status, which qualifies it for central government assistance. There is also a city challenge initiative aimed at the economic and local regeneration of the area. Unemployment in the college's main catchment area is about 10 per cent which is higher than the 8.8 per cent average for the North West.

10 The college, in its mission, aims to provide high-quality, innovative education and training which enable individuals and organisations to fulfil their potential. In its strategic plan the college has adopted 10 core values. These include professionalism, equality of opportunity, competitiveness, openness, partnership, a caring culture and a commitment to continuous improvement. The plan further defines seven strategic aims which follow from the college's mission and core values. Analyses of needs and risks, and a review of an earlier strategic plan, have been used to develop strategic objectives which form the core of the college's operating statement for 1994-95. Particular emphasis is placed on the achievement of national targets for education and training, the expansion of higher education provision in the college, providing better opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and improving the academic and pastoral support for all students. The operating statement covers all aspects of the college's work. It forms the basis of action plans for senior managers and other staff against which resources are allocated, target dates set and monitoring and review procedures established. Regular progress reports are required from those with responsibilities.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

11 The college offers an extensive range of full-time and part-time courses. There are 40 subjects at GCE A level, 12 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) courses and 26 subjects at GCSE level, most of which are located at the two sixth form centres on the Wigan and Leigh campuses. The college provides vocational education and training for school leavers, the unemployed, those in work and adults returning to education. There is an open-access policy and suitable courses or programmes of study for students irrespective of their previous levels of attainment. There is a range of foundation courses for students who have few formal entry qualifications or for other groups, such as mature students returning to study and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are clear routes for students to progress from foundation to higher level programmes, including some higher education courses which the college offers under franchise arrangements with local universities.

12 Positive commitment to GNVQs and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) has resulted in a significant growth in both these

areas. There are 51 NVQ programmes, most at more than one level, and 970 students are enrolled on 20 GNVQ programmes in 11 programme areas. Overall, the college offers 89 different GNVQ and NVQ awards from 40 different lead bodies. To support the growth of NVQ and GNVQ programmes the college has provided good levels of training and staff development. More than half of all teachers and technician staff are qualified assessors for these programmes.

13 The college has made a significant contribution locally to the achievement of national targets for education and training. In 1994, about 40 per cent of those achieving foundation target 1 and 60 per cent of those achieving foundation target 2 had done so through the college.

14 A fruitful partnership exists with five local secondary schools to help teach and assess students' achievements on intermediate GNVQs in art and design and business studies. The partnership is funded by the Wigan Education Business Partnership, a group comprising the local authority, the TEC, and education and business interests in the borough. The Wigan Education Business Partnership is now seeking to extend the partnership to other schools, in order to raise pupils' aspirations and to encourage them to enter further and higher education.

15 Most courses are well designed to meet the educational and personal needs of students. Modular GCE A level courses have been introduced wherever possible and there are alternative study routes through a range of foundation and intermediate level courses. Part-time students are able to attend college at times to suit their particular circumstances. The college subsidises the cost of a nursery at the Wigan campus and a playgroup at the Leigh campus. Students on vocational courses are usually able to enrol at varying times of the year and there are arrangements for differing patterns of attendance on courses. This flexibility is a particular feature of courses in engineering, business studies, art and design, and hairdressing. Students find the arrangements helpful and they have resulted in an increasing number of adult enrolments.

16 Students are offered a wide range of studies which are complementary to their main programme of study. It includes sport and leisure, drama and performing arts, information technology and computing, and creative writing. The students who take part welcome the opportunity to develop additional skills. For those who do not undertake work experience as part of their academic or vocational course, the complementary studies programme also provides an 'understanding industry' course, participation in the young enterprise scheme or an opportunity to undertake voluntary work. An important aspect of students' voluntary work is their contribution to community-related activities such as help for the elderly and disabled, and voluntary work with children. The youth award scheme is used to provide students with nationally recognised qualifications for this work. Local charities also benefit from students' involvement in fund raising. Half of the students questioned during the

inspection said they were satisfied with the complementary studies programme. However, the programme is voluntary and only about 30 per cent of students are involved. Few second-year students participate in the programme.

17 One of the college's strategic objectives is to increase the number of adult students. Initiatives designed to achieve this include: flexible timetabling of classes and courses; Saturday morning courses; creche and nursery facilities on all main sites; the introduction of short courses such as those offering credit through Open College arrangements; and courses designed to prepare students for entry to further or higher education. A member of college staff provides effective 'outreach' liaison with local community groups. The college's adult guidance staff provide impartial guidance and information on college provision to members of the public, often in town centre locations such as shopping centres, libraries and job centres. The success of these initiatives is reflected in the 22 per cent increase in the number of adult students following part-time programmes from 751 in 1993-94 to 913 in 1994-95. A full-time access to further education course, offering adults with few formal qualifications an opportunity to study, was established in 1994-95 and has attracted 193 enrolments. The college offers further opportunities to adults by franchising a number of adult basic education courses to local schools.

18 The Open College of the North West, founded in 1975, was the first such federation to be formed and the open college enterprise scheme at the college is part of this regional provision. It provides adults who wish to resume their studies with an opportunity to enter higher education through means other than GCE A level studies. The scheme is jointly validated and administered by the University of Lancaster and the Open University. The arrangements which have been made for students with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, are a notable feature of the scheme.

19 The open college enterprise provides a wide range of courses. For example, there are access programmes in computing, nursing, paramedical studies, social work, teacher education and science. The majority of students on these are women between 21 and 40 years of age, many of whom have young children and receive additional benefit support. There is also an increasing number of unemployed men who are retraining for other careers. The open college enterprise scheme includes procedures for the accreditation of students' prior learning and experience. Retention rates on open college enterprise courses are poor and it is not uncommon for only half those enrolled on a course to take the final examination. The college is addressing this situation by improving arrangements for initial guidance and for tutorial and pastoral support.

20 The college has productive relationships with its partner schools. It also liaises, by invitation, with some schools in the neighbouring boroughs of Bolton and St Helens. The marketing of its provision to schools is systematic and carefully organised through its schools liaison service.

Relevant programmes and supporting materials are developed centrally within the college and care is taken to tailor them to the specific needs of the different schools. Well-designed brochures inform high-school pupils about the range of opportunities within the college and the facilities available. Most curriculum areas in the college have strong links with schools although links in the areas of computing, humanities, art and languages are underdeveloped. Parents of 16-18 year old students are invited to parents' evenings twice a year and receive four progress reports during the year. Parents find the reports useful and speak well of the ease of contact with, and helpfulness of, tutors.

21 There are extensive and effective links with local employers, industry training boards and business associations. The college has contact with over 2,500 local employers, 1,000 of whom have employees studying at the college. Employers feel that courses are well organised and appreciate the efforts made by college staff to ensure that they meet employers' specific training needs. They welcome the regular reports they receive on the progress and attendance of their employees. Good progress is being made in establishing links between industry and the college's adult basic education provision.

22 There is a positive and fruitful relationship with the TEC, which considers the college to be responsive to local labour market needs. There is effective co-operation at strategic planning level and many useful links at an operational level. A member of the college staff is currently seconded to the TEC to help develop a joint database to serve the needs of the TEC and the college. The TEC considers the college's approach to the organisation, teaching and assessment of training programmes to be exemplary. It has awarded several contracts to the college including the management of youth credit provision in the borough. Successful collaborative ventures between the college and the TEC include the establishment of an adult guidance centre at the college's Parsons Walk site in Wigan and the extension of the management charter initiative network which was started by the college.

23 Marketing of courses is well organised and effective. The business development and marketing unit has extended the scope of its responsibility since incorporation. Market research is a major aspect of its work. Identified trends and potential areas of demand inform decisions about course development and design across the college. Reports produced by the unit are also used to support bids for external funding, particularly those from European community sources. The unit organises promotional activities in association with college faculties. It also designs and produces publicity materials. The effectiveness of its activities is monitored and the information used to improve performance. The college has recently won a national training award for the distance-learning materials produced by the unit to support the teaching of NVQ courses in hospitality and catering. Examples of outstanding successes on the part of students are often

publicised in college broadsheets and the local press. A regular prize-giving event is held, with prominent figures as guests.

24 International activities and the marketing of services abroad have led to successful collaborative ventures with countries in Europe, the Middle and Far East. For example, as part of their study links or for work placements, students have visited France, Germany, Italy, Holland, Switzerland, Poland and Spain. Staff of the business school have recently provided courses for firms in Athens, Moscow and Brussels. Overseas governments, including those of Malaysia, Oman, Hong Kong and Brunei sponsor students to attend courses at the college and there are currently about 60 students from overseas enrolled on engineering or business studies courses. The college participates in activities sponsored by the British Council in France, Bahrain, Malaysia, Oman and Gibraltar. It also runs successful distance-learning courses in Hong Kong, Singapore and China.

25 Links with higher education are strong and extensive. The college has entered into franchise arrangements with several universities in the North West and West Midlands to run degree and post-graduate diploma courses. It is part of the Lancashire Integrated Colleges scheme through which the college is licensed by the University of Central Lancashire to run a first degree course. It is also affiliated to Salford University and is a founder member of the university's further and higher education consortium. About 60 students are currently enrolled on access to higher education programmes at the college. The college hosts the annual regional higher education convention, sponsored by a national newspaper, which is attended by students from schools and colleges throughout the region.

26 The college has a clear commitment to equal opportunities. A detailed and comprehensive equal opportunities policy has been developed, with the support of senior management, through consultation with all staff. Rigorous steps have been taken to implement the policy within all areas of the college. Guidelines for implementation of policy have been distributed and there is a linked programme of staff training and development. The college is taking positive steps to improve traditional gender imbalances in different curriculum areas. At present, there are relatively few females on computing, engineering and construction courses.

27 The college makes exceptionally good provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Effective organisation and appropriate numbers of support staff ensure that these students are successfully integrated with other students on mainstream courses. All students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are able to study for a range of nationally recognised qualifications which are relevant to employment opportunities available in the area. The college has helpful and productive links with special schools within the borough. For example, it provides good support for the teaching and accreditation of GNVQ foundation level courses in these schools.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

28 The governors of the college have played a key role in debating, setting and reviewing the mission of the college. They are committed to the continuing development of the college through its strategic plan, core values and strategic aims. Every two months they receive progress reports from senior managers which detail the actions and progress being made against the operating statements of the strategic plan. Governors provide particularly good support for the college through their work on the committees of the governing board. They maintain good working relationships with senior managers.

29 From April 1995, when the present vice-principal becomes the principal, there will be 16 members of the governing board, including four women. The chairman is a local businessman and eight other governors are drawn from the local business community including the TEC. Other members of the governing board include two co-opted members representing higher education and local authority interests, the head of a local secondary high school, two staff members from the college and the principal. There are no student representatives on the governing board or its committees other than the student affairs committee.

30 The membership of the board and the corporation's committee structure altered during the period of the inspection. There are now six committees. Each is chaired by a governor and has at least two other members who are governors. In addition to the required committees for remuneration, finance, human resources and audit there are committees for physical resources and student affairs. The roles of two other former committees, those for business development and curriculum, are subsumed by the college company and academic board respectively.

31 Meetings of governors are well managed and the governors fulfil their duties effectively. The corporation board receives minutes of all statutory and other committees and of the academic board. Governors should consider how they might monitor the effectiveness of their work, including the scheduling of business against an annual planning cycle.

32 Governors collectively have wide experience, at senior management level, of education, finance, industry and commerce. Individual governors take an interest in the work of particular schools of the college and some take part in major events organised by schools.

33 Following initial delays after incorporation, the academic board now meets regularly and is starting to operate effectively. The board has 13 subcommittees. Particularly active subcommittees include those for quality assurance, staff development and equal opportunities, which are fulfilling responsibilities crucial to the development of the college. The academic board and its subcommittees operate in a participative and democratic manner.

34 The college's senior management team comprises the principal and four directors. Each director takes overall responsibility for an area of management: finance and management information systems; human resources; the curriculum; and business development and marketing. The senior management team is an important forum for debate and decision making. It meets frequently and operates to good effect. The quality of the minutes of meetings has improved. Senior managers are well qualified in their areas and collectively they provide effective leadership. The college is well managed at senior level although a few staff expressed the view that there is a lack of consultation by the senior management team on issues affecting the operation of schools.

35 The college's senior management committee comprises the senior management team, heads of school and other key postholders. Members debate strategic issues and have a formative influence on the overall policies and management of the college. There are clearly-allocated responsibilities for implementing and monitoring college policies, on equal opportunities, health and safety, accommodation and environmental issues.

36 There are clear lines of accountability within the college and its schools. Roles and responsibilities are well understood. In most respects, the schools are managed effectively. There are also many instances of good management practice at section and course level; for instance, in the deployment of staff and resources and in the day-to-day management of courses, including the recording of student enrolments, attendance and retention rates. Some weaker aspects of management at school, section and course level tend to be linked to working across two or more sites which have different traditions. Weaknesses include a lack of communication between staff on the different sites and the failure to share curriculum development or good practice in methods of teaching and learning. There are also instances of failure to act over poor levels of student attendances, low course retention rates and inadequacies in the deployment of staff and resources.

37 Despite the failure to reach its funding targets, the college is currently in a healthy financial position, partly as a consequence of its significant earnings from full-cost courses, international education and business activities. For 1994-95, the college's average level of funding is £20.90 per unit, compared with an average of £18.17 for general further education and tertiary colleges. The FEFC allocates about 75 per cent of the total income of the college. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to April 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Although the college's financial forecast for 1994-95 shows a deficit of about £450,000, this reflects a planned internal accounting policy of permitting budget holders to carry forward unspent budget allocations into the next financial year.

38 Some aspects of the college's management information systems are at an early stage of development. Financial systems in the college are still

developing. Regular financial reports are provided for budget holders, senior managers and governors. The quality of the financial information is generally good and there is a growing confidence in the outputs. However, responsibility for monitoring budgets at a management level are unclear and there are no regular statements of cashflow against budget.

39 The college collects and maintains particularly good information on the first destinations of its full-time students, although its information on part-time students is less comprehensive. The college considers that the information collected, although incomplete, is accurate and so provides reliable evidence on which future analysis and planning can be based. Statistical information on students' achievements, first destinations, and the outcomes of market research supports the annual review of courses and is also provided to other interested organisations.

40 The information on students' destinations shows that, in 1994 about 66 per cent of full-time students went on to higher education, 16 per cent continued in further education and 11 per cent entered employment. The destinations of the remaining 7 per cent either fall outside these categories or are unknown.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

41 The college's enrolment procedures are well organised and effective. Potential students have a range of well-publicised opportunities to receive impartial guidance prior to enrolment. Adults who are considering a programme of further education are offered guidance from qualified advisers who visit community centres, libraries and job centres in the area. Secondary school pupils can take part in pre-enrolment activities organised by the college, including interviews to help them identify their needs and career aspirations. The college keeps clear records of all pre-enrolment guidance interviews and their outcomes. College guidance advisers and careers officers are present at all enrolment sessions to provide students with further guidance and advice if this is needed.

42 The induction programmes follow a common framework which ensures that all students undertake a broadly similar range of general activities as well as some more specific to their course or subject. The schools provide students with a sound introduction to the content of their courses and the requirements of their programme of study. In engineering and construction, students also undertake industrial and other visits as part of their induction programme.

43 Students can ask for additional support when they complete their application and enrolment form or may be referred to the college's support service following an initial guidance interview. Students who are thought to need additional support are interviewed by specialist staff. In some cases, diagnostic testing is used to identify students who require extra help with numeracy and literacy. However, the practice is not standard and, partly as a consequence, a few students are enrolled on courses which are not appropriate.

44 The college has made progress in establishing clear procedures for the accreditation of students' prior learning which operate through a central college service based in the advice and guidance centres. There are examples of students who have been credited with NVQ units of study as a result of their previous experience but none so far have achieved a full award. The college's accreditation of prior learning service also provides staff training and publicises the benefits of accreditation to schools in the college, to local employers and the community. The college's service has recently been awarded a contract by the TEC to provide accreditation in business and information technology for employees of local small businesses. At present, the service applies only to NVQ units but it is being extended to cover GNVQ units achieved by pupils in local high schools or by students who transfer from other colleges.

45 Students receive good tutorial support. Full-time students have a personal tutor and are timetabled for a tutorial period once each week. Although personal tutors are free to decide the conduct and content of tutorials they adhere closely to the tutorial issues and topics contained in the tutors' handbook, or to requests from senior tutors to cover specific issues with students. Personal tutors undertake the role voluntarily and all have received appropriate training. Their responsibilities are set out in the college's tutorial policy statement. Senior tutors are responsible for monitoring the tutorial system to ensure that it continues to meet the quality targets which have been established. Senior tutors also provide personal tutors with guidance and support through formal and informal meetings, staff-development sessions and newsletters. Although each personal tutor is nominally responsible for 15 students, this number is often exceeded. Some tutors have 30 or more students for whom they provide guidance and support.

46 There are effective and well-organised arrangements for the profiling and review of students' progress. All full-time students maintain a student file, which sets out the stages of the process and contains forms for recording students' action plans and the outcomes of their review meetings with tutors. Students use their file to build up a record of their progress and achievements. Each student has a computer disk on which they can enter information to be printed directly into their national record of achievement. Personal tutors ensure that students keep their files up to date and that there are regular reviews of their overall progress. Students are encouraged to set learning targets, agreed with their tutors, as part of their action planning. Students' subject tutors, usually teachers on their programme of study, will also check on their progress and review their work. Subject and personal tutors work closely together to monitor students' progress and to identify any additional learning or support which may be needed. Although there is a good system for recording and monitoring students' attendance at classes, some personal tutors fail to take effective action on absenteeism.

47 Tutorial support for part-time students is less well organised. Although part-time day students have a personal tutor, often one of their subject teachers, they sometimes experience difficulty in arranging tutorial meetings. Some adult students do not know their personal tutor and some are unaware of the college's facilities for support and guidance. A pilot scheme aimed at providing better support for part-time students is operating in three of the schools. The outcomes are not yet evident.

48 The college offers a wide and well-publicised range of advice and guidance to students through the specialised centres which have been established at each site. Their services include welfare advice, careers guidance, information and guidance on entry to higher education, accreditation of prior learning, guidance on access for adult students and personal counselling. Although some of the staff who provide advice and guidance to students keep good records, the overall collection and use of information to review and improve services is not systematic. In particular, the monitoring of students' use of the centres is weak.

49 Welfare guidance is provided by the Wigan youth service under a service level agreement between the college and the local authority. Students receive helpful advice on accommodation, benefits and welfare rights. Although in its first year of operation, the service is well used and a recent survey indicates that students hold it in high regard. Its strengths include the well-developed accommodation service and the good levels of administrative support. However, links between welfare guidance, the college's tutorial system and arrangements for the reception and care of residential students are weak. The college should consider ways to make fuller use of the youth service's skills and experience in providing welfare support.

50 Careers guidance is provided under a service level agreement between the college and the local authority careers service. The careers service provides a high level of support to the college, equivalent to five full-time careers officers. The college and the careers service have a long-standing and productive working relationship and this enhances the quality of the service provided and the awareness in the college of provision for careers guidance. The service level agreement excludes some students from receiving careers guidance; for example, full-time students on higher education courses franchised by the college and students on college courses franchised to other providers. The college is currently considering how the needs of such students can be met. Following the first complete year of operation, the service and the college are also reviewing ways of deploying careers service staff to better effect.

51 Two college-wide systems provide learning support and study support for students. Learning support, which is co-ordinated through the learning support team, is designed specifically for those students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Study support, co-ordinated by a different team, is provided for students who have difficulties with spoken and written

English, mathematics, study skills or other difficulties which limit their ability to cope with the requirements of their programme of study.

52 The college's arrangements for learning support are well resourced and effective. They enable many students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities successfully to follow an appropriate mainstream course or programme of study. A special service helps adult students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who wish to enter employment when they have finished their course at college. There is strong support for adult students on basic education programmes. However, some students on courses of English for speakers of other languages do not receive adequate support.

53 The college does not have a policy for student representation on course review committees. Nevertheless, there are student representatives on over half of these committees. Students are also able to make their views known through six-monthly college-wide surveys, the results of which are widely disseminated. Students rights and responsibilities are clearly set out in the students' charter, the students' handbook and the learning agreement which all students sign. Students are also made aware of their rights and responsibilities during induction courses and tutor group meetings.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

54 The strengths clearly outweighed the weaknesses in over 75 per cent of the sessions inspected. Less than 5 per cent of sessions had weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. The following table summarises the grades awarded for the 378 teaching sessions which were inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		27	50	12	2	0	91
GCSE		8	11	6	3	0	28
GNVQ		22	30	25	8	0	85
NVQ		25	22	9	1	0	57
Access		3	0	0	0	0	3
Higher education		5	6	5	0	0	16
Other*		33	43	19	2	1	98
Total		123	162	76	16	1	378

*Note: *other includes Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) courses, professional non-vocational courses and provision not leading to any award.*

55 In many of the sessions, the work is well planned and purposeful and there are good relationships between students and teachers. Good-quality handbooks provide students with information on their courses, and there

are well-developed schemes of work. Teachers ensure that students' work is assessed regularly and accurately. Adult students are successfully integrated with younger students on a range of courses and there are good opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to join mainstream courses including vocational courses. Teaching on higher education and access courses, and on most NVQ and GCE A level courses is of a high standard. The quality of teaching on GNVQ and GCSE courses is generally good, although when compared with the overall profile for the college a slightly higher proportion of these sessions had weaknesses which outweighed strengths.

56 Where teaching is less successful it is often because the methods of teaching are inappropriate or because teachers' presentations are poorly delivered. Lengthy presentations failed to sustain students' interest or to allow them to ask questions and discuss issues. Occasionally, teachers dictated extensive notes when other strategies would have been more appropriate. Some teachers failed to draw sessions to an appropriate conclusion, for instance, by summarising the key points which had been covered, or by helping students to identify what they had learned during the session.

57 Science is taught well. Students are provided with clear guidance on the structure of their course and what is expected of them. Most course documentation is comprehensive and has been prepared with considerable thought. It includes procedures for safety in the laboratories which, in the majority of cases, are operated effectively. Schemes of work include criteria for assessment. Students receive good individual support from teachers. Homework policy is clearly defined and marking is accurate and comprehensive, providing students with relevant, detailed comment and supportive criticism. In one GCE A level chemistry class, students identified imaginative projects to work on. Topics included: a comparison of the calcium content of cows milk and a manufactured baby food; the measurement of acidity in popular soft drinks; and the toxicity levels of ponds affected by effluents. After conducting background research, they undertook further research using experiments they had designed themselves.

58 Teaching in mathematics and computing is based on good course planning and a wide variety of support materials including notes, illustrations and handouts for students to use both in class and in their private study. Teachers have a good understanding of their subject. Students' work is assessed regularly using a variety of methods. Detailed records are kept of students' achievements and students are regularly informed of their progress. Although marked work is returned promptly, the assessment of students' portfolios of work for NVQ in computing is not consistent enough and should be improved. Teaching and the promotion of learning are generally of high quality. However, in some sessions the tasks are not sufficiently challenging and the pace of the work is too slow.

In a few sessions, teachers do not require students to work to sufficiently high standards, for instance in the design of their computer programs. In some mathematics sessions, the range of activities is narrow and students have too few opportunities to contribute to discussion.

59 Staff who teach construction have wide experience of the industry. The quality of teaching is generally good; activities are equally well managed. Nevertheless sessions vary in their effectiveness. Teachers differ in the extent to which they are prepared to use a range of approaches to maintain the interest and motivation of students. The imaginative teaching methods adopted in some sessions help to promote high standards of work by students. On some courses, including GNVQ built environment and NVQ plumbing, students are able to progress at their own pace using specially-designed learning resources and other high-quality resources including closed circuit television. The good construction training, linked to NVQ competencies, helps students to develop and apply their skills in realistic contexts. In one notably good session, students on an advanced GNVQ course presented their research on the common faults noticed in flexible road repairs. Each group of students decided how best to present their findings; one group chose to use a video recording and another prepared overhead projector slides. Students' presentations were recorded on video to help them analyse and improve their communication skills. Less successful construction classes included monotonous presentations, inadequate opportunity for students to question or discuss the topic being considered and insufficiently-challenging teaching materials. The teaching of mathematics and information technology skills on GNVQ courses is not specifically related to construction topics, and some teachers fail to make full use of the flexibility provided by the school's information technology facilities.

60 Courses in engineering are carefully planned and co-ordinated and the quality of work is high. Course leaders maintain detailed and up-to-date course files giving information on the management and operation of courses. Activities are generally well chosen to meet the needs of students, most of whom are interested and well motivated. Students are appropriately challenged, although in some GNVQ classes the wide range of ability of students makes this difficult. Students are given opportunities to reinforce their theoretical understanding by engaging in closely related practical activities. Assignments in engineering are well designed and students are clear about what is expected of them. Students' work is marked carefully and consistently. Practical assessments nearly always conclude with students being asked to test and verify their work, to demonstrate that the task has been successfully carried out. Teachers give students good support during practical sessions. However, there were occasional instances where there was inadequate preparation for practical work; as a result, time was lost and the pace of work slowed down. In a particularly well-managed session, the teacher combined a practical demonstration, excerpts from a video and a well-paced

presentation with opportunities for students to ask and answer questions. A prepared sheet of questions was used to emphasise the main points in the video and students made notes as they watched. Their subsequent responses to the video were used as the basis for further questions. All students participated well and apparently enjoyed the session.

61 The majority of courses in business studies have well-defined schemes of work which contain clearly-stated aims and objectives. Teachers use a variety of teaching methods, provide challenging tasks and ensure that the work proceeds at a good pace. As a result, students are well motivated. The work is not always sufficiently relevant to all students where there are differing levels of experience and prior knowledge within the same class. Teaching on the management courses is particularly strong. Some assignments clearly focus on important business and management issues and help to put theoretical aspects into context. For instance, during a well-taught session on budget deficits, the assignment work helped students achieve an understanding of the topic and its relevance to current economic and political debates. The development of core skills, particularly in information technology, is well planned. Good use is made of the college's open learning centre to support students' development in mathematics, English and information technology. There is support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on GNVQ and NVQ courses.

62 In catering, the teaching is well planned and effective. Relationships between staff and students are friendly and supportive, and teachers set high professional standards. Much of the work on NVQ programmes takes place in realistic working environments such as training kitchens, reception areas and restaurants. Students are given clear direction and guidance at the start of each session, and there are job descriptions and job cards available to help them undertake each practical activity successfully. The more advanced students, as part of their own assessment, help to monitor and supervise the work of less experienced students. This provides them with useful supervisory experience and allows the teacher more opportunity to give individual help to students and to assess their progress. Teachers mark work conscientiously and helpfully. Although there are opportunities for students to develop core skills during their course, further work is needed to identify, document and assess students' progress in these areas.

63 Most sessions in leisure and tourism are set in a relevant vocational context. Levels of challenge vary. In some sessions teachers have high expectations of students and they respond well, but not all sessions are equally challenging. Relationships between teachers and students are friendly. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. Teachers and classroom assistants provide extensive individual help, but are equally skilled in fostering students' independence. In one good evening session with adult students, the teacher used up-to-date

knowledge of the industry to illustrate the topic being discussed and drew effectively on the students' own experiences. In a few sessions work was poorly presented, teachers used poor-quality teaching aids or students were insufficiently motivated.

64 Courses in health care and counselling are well planned and are supported by good documentation. Students' experience on work placement is used skilfully to link educational theory and vocational practice. Staff demonstrate professional role models, particularly in counselling techniques. Students are given clear guidance on schedules and deadlines to help them plan their work. They are also encouraged to evaluate their own and each others' progress. In one good session, a group of mature students studying the management of care provision made an interesting and well-structured video recording of a news briefing they had prepared. In their subsequent analysis of the recording they developed their understanding of skills and strategies which would be of value to them in their work. Although most teaching sessions are challenging, the planned activities on some courses are too ambitious for the time available and opportunities for effective learning are lost. In a minority of sessions, teachers failed to take account of the students' maturity and experience. Some younger students are reluctant to seek help with problems in English grammar and spelling. Other students should be encouraged to participate more in class and those intending to go on to higher education require further opportunities to develop their essay writing skills.

65 There are good schemes of work for hairdressing and beauty care courses and teaching is generally of a high standard. Teachers make effective use of a wide range of learning aids. Students speak positively of the knowledge and abilities of teachers. Salons and other practical areas provide realistic working environments and sufficient clients visit the salons to provide students with a breadth of experience similar to that which exists in commercial salons. Students gain further insight into their chosen area of work through external visits, including a visit to Paris. Adult students are well supported and benefit from flexible forms of attendance. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are integrated with other students on mainstream courses and are provided with appropriate additional support. A course recently introduced is proving successful in developing students' core skills by integrating suitable topics in numeracy and literacy with other aspects of hairdressing theory. Some mature students are persistently late for class and attendance in a number of groups is low. Some students dress for practical sessions in ways which present an unprofessional image to clients. There are instances where the poor standard of accommodation for hairdressing and beauty therapy has an adverse effect on the quality of work.

66 Courses in the performing arts are well planned and well documented and provide a judicious balance of practical work and theory. Many of the teachers have extensive professional experience. Teaching sessions offer

an appropriate mix of activities aimed at building students' technical skills and developing a thorough knowledge and understanding of their art. Students' achievements are assessed on a range of evidence: their presentation of scripted and improvised work; their working diaries of the rehearsal process; design portfolios; and written, formal essays on the theatre, music history and practitioners. In music, the records kept of students' achievements and the weekly setting of targets for instrumental work is exemplary. Teachers jointly moderate their own work and there are external moderators on diploma courses. The support provided by staff is of high quality. Some teachers have received training and guidance to help in providing for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

67 Art and design courses at all levels are taught by enthusiastic and skilful teachers. The courses are coherent and well planned, and ensure that all students cover the relevant subject skills in, for example, life drawing, art history, design and illustration, and the analysis and synthesis of ideas. The teaching of these and other aspects of art and design is of a high standard. In BTEC national programmes, relevant vocational skills and competencies are developed, for instance in graphics, textiles, photography, fashion and advertising design. The development of students' core skills is well integrated with other aspects of assignment work. A GNVQ group has been formed to enable those students who have good subject skills, but few formal qualifications, to progress at a faster rate. They cover both the intermediate and advanced levels of the course in two years rather than three. Teachers maintain accurate records of students' work and their levels of achievement. There is limited use of oral feedback from students to evaluate the overall effectiveness of provision.

68 Most students of English work willingly and with perseverance. Teachers use a range of texts and activities. Skilful questioning by teachers, and opportunities for work in pairs and small groups, enable students to develop their own ideas. In one good GCE A level English language lesson, students used a list of linguistic features to guide their analyses of an extract from a contemporary novel. They were well motivated and discussed ideas at length before reporting their findings to the whole class. The discussion was lively and students demonstrated a good understanding of the text and its linguistic features. In a minority of sessions teachers failed to structure their teaching so that students were unable to contribute effectively or to explore ideas for themselves. The development of relevant core skills and supported self-study are integral to much GCE A level work. Most of the written work from students is meticulously marked, and effectively moderated. Students receive helpful written comments on how to improve their work.

69 History and geography are well taught. Most sessions are of high quality. Schemes of work lack detail, but there are shared policies between the staff which ensure consistent approaches to teaching, marking and assessment. Communication and problem solving are a planned focus of

the courses and form the basis of students' self-assessment. There is effective support for students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

70 Modern foreign languages lessons are well planned. Teachers set tasks at an appropriate level and provide students with good background material. Teachers' expectations are high. In particular, the assignment topics set for GCE A level students are conceptually demanding and stimulating. In most sessions, teachers make extensive use of the language being learned both in their presentations and in their questions to students. Points of grammar are also explained solely in the language being taught. Opportunities for students to practise the language include role playing, work in pairs and work in small groups. On occasions, teachers give students insufficient opportunity to develop their own linguistic skills. The best examples of marking contain helpful comments and detailed corrections, but standards of marking and assessment are not consistent.

71 Standards of teaching in sociology, psychology and law courses are high. In a few instances, unsuitable accommodation prevents teachers from using visual aids appropriately. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects. They create friendly and relaxed relationships which help to promote learning. Close attention is given to developing students' examination skills. Teachers maintain detailed and accurate records. These include a value-added analysis of the progress of individual students relative to their earlier achievements. The standard of work expected of students is appropriate and their work is carefully marked. Adult students are supported in both day and evening classes. At the Wigan site good use is made of a laboratory area in which psychology students can undertake experimental tasks and coursework assignments. In one good evening session, a group of GCE A level students used this facility to test a proposed correlation between manual dexterity and personality, using members of the group as subjects. The activity provided the basis for an exercise which the students could later incorporate into their coursework.

72 Courses in teacher education are taught by professionally-experienced and well-qualified staff who share a common philosophy and educational ethos. They encourage students to ask questions, to take part in discussion and to analyse, reflect on and evaluate the texts and material they study. Sessions are lively, interesting and stimulating, and students participate with enthusiasm. Educational theory and practice are closely linked and students from diverse backgrounds are encouraged to develop their own working philosophies. Teachers are skilful both in meeting the requirements of the universities whose courses are franchised to the college and in responding to the individual needs of students.

73 The teaching of adult basic education, including the teaching of English for speakers of other languages is good. Students enjoy the sessions and speak highly of the support they receive. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well integrated with other

students. Computers are used regularly and effectively in the majority of sessions. Students' own projects help them to develop literacy skills. For example, one student who is campaigning on behalf of those with disabilities used a session in adult basic education to draft letters to organisations it was intended to lobby and then produced typed versions of the letters using a wordprocessor. The teacher provided the student with guidance on the competencies which would be assessed.

74 The quality of the teaching and learning within the college's provision for students with learning difficulties is outstanding. Lecturers and support workers have a good command of their subjects. They are enthusiastic and creative in devising teaching and learning strategies which motivate the students and promote high standards. Support workers are deployed in areas where they have a particular interest or in which they have a qualification. Students are encouraged to think for themselves and to accept some responsibility for organising their own learning. Teachers check that they are understanding the work and provide helpful comments. Assessments are thorough and lecturers are rigorous in requiring evidence of students' progress. Many sessions provide opportunities for students to make self-assessments and to assess the progress of their peers. Staff have produced an extensive range of teaching materials to help students develop the skills of learning independently and information technology is used effectively to support students' learning. In one good session, students working toward the vocational access certificate spent the morning in the kitchen of the college's bistro, preparing lunch for customers. This was the first time that this group had undertaken this work and the lecturer had carefully prepared students for the task over a period of several weeks. Each student was allocated a specific role in the process of producing and serving the food. The lecturer had high expectations of the students and, while making opportunities to check students' understanding, also worked hard to ensure that they met the deadlines required to produce lunch on time.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

75 The majority of students at the college display a mature and purposeful approach to their studies and are keen to learn and benefit from their chosen course. The flexibility of much of the college's provision has enabled students at all levels to progress and achieve their chosen goals at a pace which suits their abilities.

76 In all subject areas, students are developing knowledge and understanding appropriate to their levels of study. On vocational courses, many students develop a balance of practical skills and supporting knowledge and are able to demonstrate their understanding when undertaking assignments. For example, high standards of competence are achieved by students on catering courses and the work they produce is attractively and professionally presented. In art and design, students work in a disciplined manner and show versatility across a range of

practical skills which is based on good levels of academic knowledge. Students on management and supervisory courses are able to draw effectively on their own experience at work. They apply theoretical concepts to realistic situations and talk confidently when explaining and justifying their views.

77 Students on the more academic courses display solid gains in understanding and knowledge. For example, on GCE A level humanities courses, students are enthusiastic and committed to their work, they learn to work independently, effectively build up their portfolios of coursework and achieve good standards in individual projects and coursework. Their written work often demonstrates a good command of language. Many students of modern foreign languages display confidence in speaking the foreign language. There are nevertheless significant numbers of students in GCE A level and GCSE modern foreign language classes who make basic grammatical errors in their oral and written work.

78 Most students are effectively developing literacy, numeracy and information technology skills through units or modules incorporated into their vocational courses, through the complementary studies programmes and through their use of the college's open-learning centres. However, in some curriculum areas, opportunities for developing information technology skills are limited. For instance, some students on the National Nursery Examinations Board (NNEB) courses make little use of information technology in assignments. Students of hairdressing are not always encouraged to acquire relevant information technology skills; they have little opportunity to develop competence in using the software programmes now being used in commercial hair and beauty salons. Although there are many opportunities for science students to develop their skills in problem solving, numeracy and information technology, some students of human biology have poorly-developed numeracy skills, sometimes to an extent which impairs their progress in the subject.

79 Group work is fostered and encouraged on many courses. The majority of students respond well, developing their skills as team members and as individuals responsible for their own work. In a few instances, the groupwork lacked a clear focus, and the discussion was disorganised or superficial. Good standards of safety were observed in both individual and group work during practical sessions in workshops and laboratories.

80 The college's flexible, open-access policy allows some students to progress at a slower pace and to attain accreditation over a longer period than is normal. This is particularly the case in a number of courses in engineering, construction, catering and business studies. The college's systems for recording examination results sometimes show relatively low numbers of students gaining some qualifications within a given timescale and do not always adequately reflect the progress students have made, including their success in individual units. Good systems exist for personal tutors to track and monitor the progress of individual students but the

college should consider how it can more accurately portray and analyse the achievement of students on flexible programmes of study.

81 Sixty-nine per cent of students aged 16-18 years were successful in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the performance tables for 1994 published by the Department for Education. This places the college in the lowest third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. However, there are significant variations in results between courses, and over half of the full-time vocational courses achieve pass rates of 80 per cent or better. With few exceptions, mature and part-time students on vocational courses achieve satisfactory or good results.

82 The GCE A level and GCSE courses are located in the community sixth form centres at the Wigan and Leigh campuses. Both centres undertake a comprehensive analysis of examination outcomes, completion rates and the value added to students' achievements during their time at the college. Given the wide range of students' ability on entry to courses, their achievements in GCE A level examinations are often good. There are examples of notably high levels of achievement by some students. Information supplied by the college shows overall pass rates of 83 per cent for full-time students on two-year GCE A level courses. In a significant number of individual subjects, the college's students achieve pass rates above the national average for general further education colleges. These include GCE A level English, German, law, chemistry, sociology, physics, psychology, art and physical education. Poorer results were obtained in economics, computing, human biology and by some students of mathematics.

83 In 1993-94, students aged 16-18 years taking GCE AS/A level examinations scored, on average, 4.2 points per entry (where A=10, E=2), according to the 1994 tables published by the Department for Education. This places the college amongst the middle third of colleges in the further education sector. Students on part-time GCE A level courses are mostly over 21 years old and generally achieve good results. The overall pass rate is 79 per cent. Results in GCSE subjects are more variable. Only a low proportion of students achieve grades A-C in these examinations. In 1994, only 16 per cent of students taking GCSE human biology and 22 per cent of students taking GCSE business studies gained A-C grades.

84 Adult students on basic education courses make good progress in acquiring basic skills and developing their confidence. Many successfully develop skills in information technology. In 1993-94, about 28 per cent of these students gained nationally recognised qualifications, which compares favourably with many other colleges in the sector.

85 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on the college's foundation studies programme are making sound progress towards achieving nationally recognised vocational qualifications. They develop confidence and skills in oral communication and all students are entered

for the English speaking board certificate. They also develop competence in practical tasks.

86 Many students make satisfactory progress within the college. For example, higher national diploma courses recruit about 40 per cent of students from lower level courses in the college. In 1994, of 862 students applying to higher education, 545 (63 per cent) were successful in gaining a place. About 15 per cent of mature students studying for open college awards were successful in entering higher education.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

87 Each school of the college has produced a thorough self-assessment report and there is also an overall college self-assessment report. All of these follow the inspection guidelines used in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. Strengths and areas for development are identified under each heading. Evaluation is supported by evidence and actions are proposed to address weaknesses. The overall report is cross-referenced to other college source documents which are separately indexed for retrieval purposes.

88 The format of the overall report is clearly laid out and provides a comprehensive and structured statement of the college's self-assessment of its provision. The college's evaluation of its work is thorough and realistic and its judgements are, in the main, compatible with the findings of the inspection. During the period of the inspection the college paid particular attention to inspectors' comments and acted quickly to redress some deficiencies.

89 The college's core values and strategic aims include a policy of continuous improvement and an institutional-wide commitment to providing education and training of high quality. The quality policy statement focuses, in particular, on the development of a quality system which supports improvements in the learning experience of students and builds upon numerous quality and curriculum initiatives being taken in schools. The college has been awarded the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit quality kite mark and the business skills centre has achieved a British Standard (BS 5750) accreditation. It now intends to work for the Investors in People award. The college has established good foundations for its quality system, sound procedures are being developed and quality measures and indicators are being formulated and applied. There are already signs that these are having a positive influence in the college.

90 The academic board and its quality subcommittee are responsible for implementing the quality system across the college. Each of the schools has a quality working group and these manage their work effectively. There is a college quality manual which identifies the key individuals responsible for quality issues in the schools. Although there are statements of quality relating to some aspects of cross-college provision such as student guidance and admissions, the pastoral system, equal opportunities, staff

development, review and evaluation, and student appeals, the quality system for other aspects of the college's work is still in the process of being introduced.

91 The college has an action plan which identifies opportunities to improve the quality of provision within given timescales. It has identified performance indicators to assist in the overall monitoring and evaluation of provision, but has still to identify quantitative standards and targets to support these. The college recognises the shortcomings of its management information systems in respect of quality assurance and this is a development priority which is picked out in the overall self-assessment report.

92 Most moderators' and verifiers' reports for vocational courses confirm that assessment criteria and standards are being met. The college has been invited by BTEC to apply to become an assessment centre. If successful, the college will be able to assess and verify its own BTEC courses. The procedures adopted by the college to measure added value give a good indication of students' progress and also some indication of weaknesses in provision.

93 Surveys of students' perceptions provide clear and positive feedback to the college. The results are analysed and used to good effect but mechanisms for seeking the views of students' parents and the wider community are underdeveloped. Employers' views on college provision are sought and these are supplemented by information on employers' perceptions through the TEC.

94 There are good formal and informal practices in many schools for monitoring and evaluating courses and for tracking the progress of students. Many areas maintain comprehensive course files to assist in this process. However, the college lacks written procedures for assuring the quality of some of its non-teaching functions.

95 The college has committed substantial funds to staff development, including opportunities for staff to improve their professional and academic qualifications, an area in which the college has traditionally offered good support to its staff. A revised staff development policy linked to a training needs analysis has recently been introduced. The college has yet to develop an effective method of evaluating staff-development activities and of encouraging the dissemination of information from staff developments to other staff. There is a well-designed induction programme for newly-appointed staff but its effectiveness is not being assessed. New staff are encouraged to obtain a teaching qualification and Training and Development Lead Body assessor and verifier awards through the college's own courses. The college has still to introduce an appraisal scheme across the college and not all staff have job descriptions. This has hindered the introduction of individual training and development plans, and has limited progress towards gaining the Investors in People award.

96 The college is aware of the requirements of the National Charter for Further Education and these have been incorporated into its own charter. This has been published and distributed to all students, staff and other interested parties. All students now enrolled have signed a learning agreement. Governors' names and affiliations are available through the clerk to the corporation. Despite efforts by the college, a significant proportion of students, particularly part-time students, display a low awareness of the college's charter. Monitoring and reporting procedures relating to the commitments of the charter are still at an early stage of development.

RESOURCES

Staffing

97 There are sufficient staff in the college. In the main they are well qualified for the courses they teach. A recently-completed audit of staff qualifications shows that 48 per cent of full-time teachers and 17 per cent of part-time teachers hold first or higher degrees, as do 52 per cent of managerial staff. Others have professional qualifications which match their role. Most staff have practical experience which is appropriate to their specialist teaching. About 85 per cent of full-time and 72 per cent of part-time teachers have a teaching qualification. The college has many staff who hold or who are working towards Training and Development Lead Body assessor awards. Some staff have updated their commercial and professional experience through work placements in industry or commerce.

98 Some staff are not responding effectively to changes in the curriculum and to the ways in which courses are now being taught. Other staff lack recent industrial or commercial experience and this limits the relevance of their teaching. Changes in staffing have affected the continuity and standard of some evening courses.

99 The staff are generally effectively deployed although there are some instances of inadequate levels of administrative or technician support. As part of the college's policy to create strong teaching teams for subjects which are delivered at a number of college sites, some staff teach at both Leigh and Wigan. Some science staff teach across three major schools and this creates difficulties in the management of provision across and between sites.

100 One outstanding feature of the staffing is the effective support for students' learning provided by technicians, clerical and non-teaching members of staff who work closely with teaching teams. There are examples of effective team work by staff in most areas of the college. A high standard of support is provided in music, computer technology, theatre studies and art and design. The teaching of modern foreign languages, is substantially improved by the foreign languages assistants who work in this area. In programmes for students with learning

difficulties and/or disabilities, a strong team spirit is evident in the teaching and support staff. The levels of staffing in libraries is satisfactory, the staff are well deployed and work as a team. Senior librarians liaise with staff in the college's schools to support the curriculum. On enrolment days virtually all of the college's staff are involved in some way, working together to speed the enrolment process for students and the involvement of so many staff makes a significant contribution to the success of these days.

Equipment/learning resources

101 Resources for teaching are mainly sufficient and are of good quality. However, a minority of courses are less well resourced or have poorer access to centrally managed provision such as the college's open-learning centres and libraries. There is also some variability between sites in the resources available for courses in the same curriculum area, for example, in business studies and GCE A level courses in humanities.

102 Overall, the quality and quantity of equipment is good. For example, there is sufficient modern equipment for science courses, including computers which are used directly in the laboratory. Equipment for catering is modern and well maintained although some aspects of provision at the Wigan site are barely adequate to support the teaching. The equipment and instrumentation to support courses in engineering is regularly upgraded and much of it is of high quality and often similar to that currently available in industry. In construction and engineering, the college has benefited from industrial support and has invested significant sums from its earned income to improve its equipment. Equipment for GNVQ foundation courses in art and design includes a video-editing suite. Students on music technology courses have access to professional-quality music recording and sequencing facilities at the Leigh campus. Many teachers throughout the college make good use of pre-recorded videos to enhance classroom teaching and most rooms have access to televisions and video recorders, and are equipped with overhead projectors. Some courses provide students with opportunities to use video cameras, recording and editing facilities to monitor and evaluate their work. Good levels of technician support ensure that the college's equipment is well maintained and technicians often provide students with help and guidance in its use.

103 The college has invested extensively in information technology. Over the last two years, in excess of £1 million has been spent in extending and upgrading computer facilities to support teaching. The college now has about one computer workstation to six full-time students, a high level of provision. With the exception of catering, hairdressing and beauty care courses, students have good access to a range of computer hardware and software. While computer provision for business studies courses is sufficient overall, there is variability in the quality of provision between sites, and the hardware and software is not always suitable for the work undertaken by students.

104 There are sufficient teaching materials and resources for most courses. The materials used to support teaching, including handouts prepared by teachers, are generally good. Staff have developed a wide range of high-quality teaching materials for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Materials to support the teaching of basic food hygiene are also of high quality. Good teaching materials are used on courses in management but in other areas of business studies the quality is more variable. GCE A level students at the Leigh site enjoy the best resources.

105 The library service is based on four separate sites. Generally, it provides effective support to students but the quantity, quality and levels of use of books varies significantly between courses and sites. There is access on all sites to a range of reference materials on compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases. The library stock is now centrally catalogued on a computer system and this helps to improve the accessibility of books and other resources for students on all college sites. Library staff can now systematically monitor library usage and borrowing. Senior librarians assist the college's schools and curriculum teams to identify future needs and trends and this helps to improve the service to students and staff.

106 The four open-learning centres are located at the Linacre and Pagefield sites in Wigan and at the Marshall Street and Railway Road sites in Leigh. They are well developed and provide a high level of support to students across the college. The centres are used by students, often as part of their main programme of studies, and by pupils from local schools. They are also used as 'drop-in' centres by members of the community who may wish to undertake further study but who cannot attend regular classes. All of the open-learning centres are provided with up-to-date computer hardware and software including image scanners, colour printers and access to information stored on CD-ROM. Centres are connected between sites by modern communications software and modem links. In response to demand, the centres have expanded rapidly over the last two years, and there has been a 135 per cent increase in use over the past year. This contrasts with the low levels of use recorded for the college libraries over the last two years.

Accommodation

107 The accommodation varies in quality but is adequate overall. Based on FEFC norms, there is a significant excess of accommodation. The Wigan campus includes the largest building, which represents about half of the accommodation on the campus and about 40 per cent of the college's total accommodation. Some of the rooms and public areas at the Parsons Walk and Pagefield sites have been refurbished to a high standard, but there is also some poor accommodation at all sites. The Leigh campus comprises four buildings in the town which are some distance apart. Although there are examples of good-quality refurbished accommodation in some

buildings at Leigh, including the media centre, the overall standard of accommodation on this campus is barely adequate. The college considers that most of the accommodation at Leigh is either less than satisfactory or unacceptable. It is in the process of reducing the current surplus of accommodation, partly by some demolition and partly by the disposal of buildings and the possibility of a new building at Leigh.

108 Some of the specialist accommodation is of a high standard. This includes the recording studios and media production facilities at Leigh and the good range of workshops and laboratories in engineering and, with one exception, in science. There are good facilities for construction, including a GNVQ resource centre and a built environment centre sponsored by the Construction Industry Training Board. In business studies, there are good specialist rooms at the Pagefield site and the administration centres at both Wigan and Leigh provide good opportunities for students to work in a realistic business and commercial environment. Management courses are provided in good accommodation at Rylands House. However, some accommodation for business studies is unsuitable for its purpose; some rooms are too large or small for the student groups which use them, some suffer from noise from adjacent areas and the accommodation in the Mesnes building is not easily accessible for students and staff with restricted mobility. For teaching courses in catering there are suites of practical rooms at both Wigan and Leigh, although some aspects of the structural layout of the kitchen at Leigh make the area difficult to maintain. The travel shop at the Pagefield site is attractive and easily accessible and provides a realistic working environment for students on courses in travel and tourism. The college's Corner Shop at Leigh offers a range of goods for sale to staff and students and provides opportunities for students on the vocational access course to learn the practical skills of retailing. The student advice and guidance centre at Wigan is prominently located, well signposted and easily accessible. There is a large open-plan reception area with separate rooms for interviews and meetings. The accommodation is decorated and furnished to a high standard and offers a welcoming environment to students and other clients.

109 Classrooms and practical areas are clean and well maintained. However, a significant number of the general teaching rooms in the college are dull, in need of decoration, lack wall displays and generally fail to provide environments which encourage learning. Some accommodation used by the college is old, unattractive and, in some instances, not well suited to the purpose for which it is now being used. This is more often the case at the Leigh campus where the number of smaller sites and their distance apart have made it difficult for the college to establish a corporate identity and to provide support services to a uniform, acceptable standard. At the Grasmere Street site, the accommodation is not well suited to its use as hairdressing and beauty salons and there are poor facilities for students taking breaks and at mealtimes. Both Grasmere Street and Railway Road sites have poor parking facilities for cars. At Wigan, the

Pagefield site has some rooms which are poorly ventilated and have no natural light and others which are affected by noise from nearby areas. The roof of the north light shed, a former weaving shed now housing construction and engineering workshops, is old, leaks in wet weather and is difficult and costly to maintain. The college has to reserve significant funds each year for this work. Although the college has invested in improving access to its buildings for students and staff with restricted mobility, there are still some areas, particularly older buildings, which are not easily accessible to wheelchair users.

110 The college is currently revising its accommodation strategy, as the previous strategy was not fully acceptable to the Council. A new strategy has been devised and is under discussion.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

111 This large and diverse college is serving its students, the local community, industry and commerce well. It is making good progress toward achieving its mission. The main strengths of the provision are:

- an extensive range of full-time and part-time courses and significant full-cost provision for industry and commerce in the United Kingdom and abroad
- a strong commitment to equality of opportunity for all students and exceptionally good provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- a flexible, open-access policy which meets the needs of a wide range of students, some of whom have few formal entry qualifications
- strong and extensive links with schools and higher education institutions and clear progression routes from foundation to higher level programmes
- productive links with local employers, industry training boards and business associations including the TEC
- experienced governors who fulfil their duties effectively and are committed to the improvement of the college through its strategic plan and core values
- senior managers who collectively provide good leadership
- the many instances of effective management throughout the college
- well-organised and effective enrolment and induction procedures
- good careers and welfare guidance for students
- good learning support including the open-learning centres
- high-quality teaching
- generally satisfactory examination results and some high levels of achievement by individual students
- well-qualified and committed staff who are effectively deployed
- good equipment in most areas of the college.

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

- improve induction and tutorial support for part-time students
- assist governors to review and monitor the effectiveness of their work
- review some aspects of financial management
- address those weak aspects of management at school, section and course level which are sometimes associated with working across two or more sites
- seek to improve the development of numeracy skills on some courses
- develop further its quality assurance framework to include quantitative standards and targets for performance
- improve some students' access to information technology
- continue to develop its accommodation strategy and to improve the standard of accommodation.

FIGURES

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- 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)

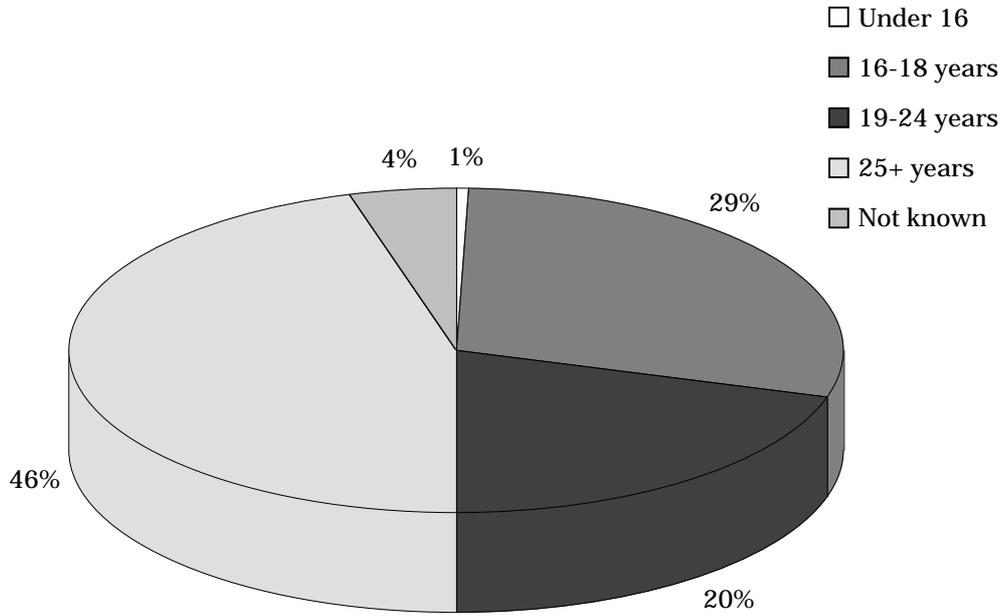
 - 5 Estimated income (for 12 months to April 1995)

 - 6 Estimated expenditure (for 12 months to April 1995)

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

Figure 1

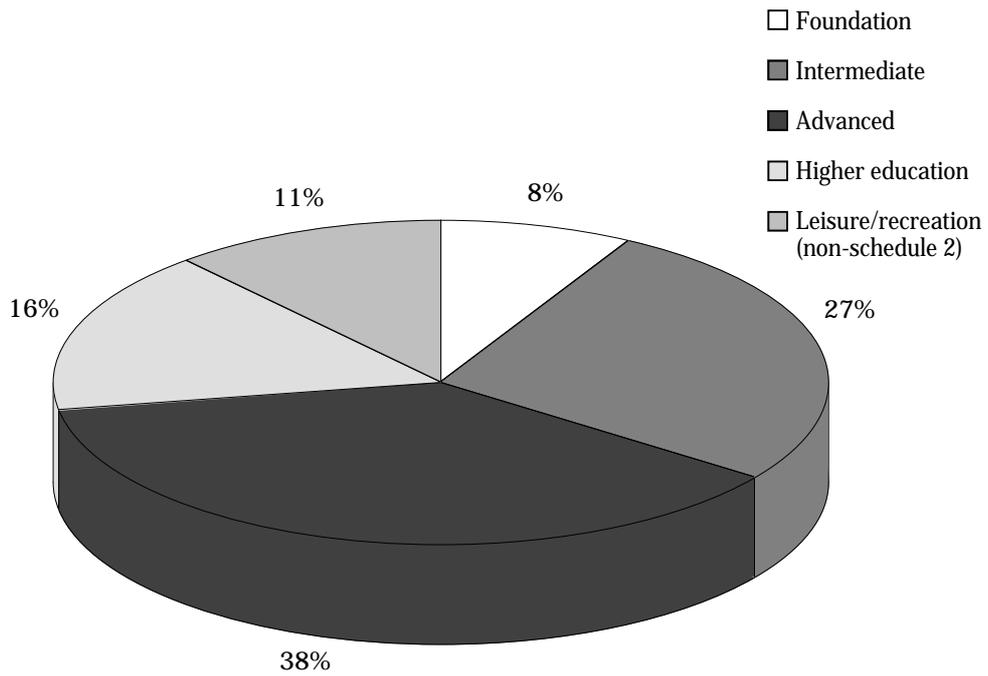
Wigan and Leigh College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 18,458

Figure 2

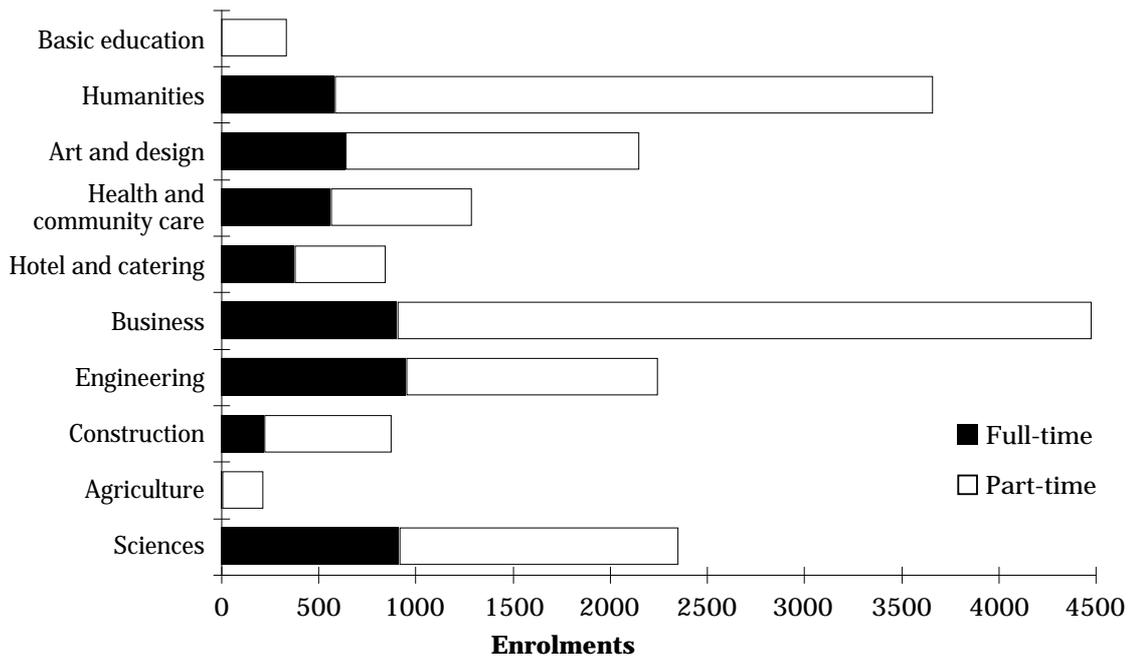
Wigan and Leigh College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 18,458

Figure 3

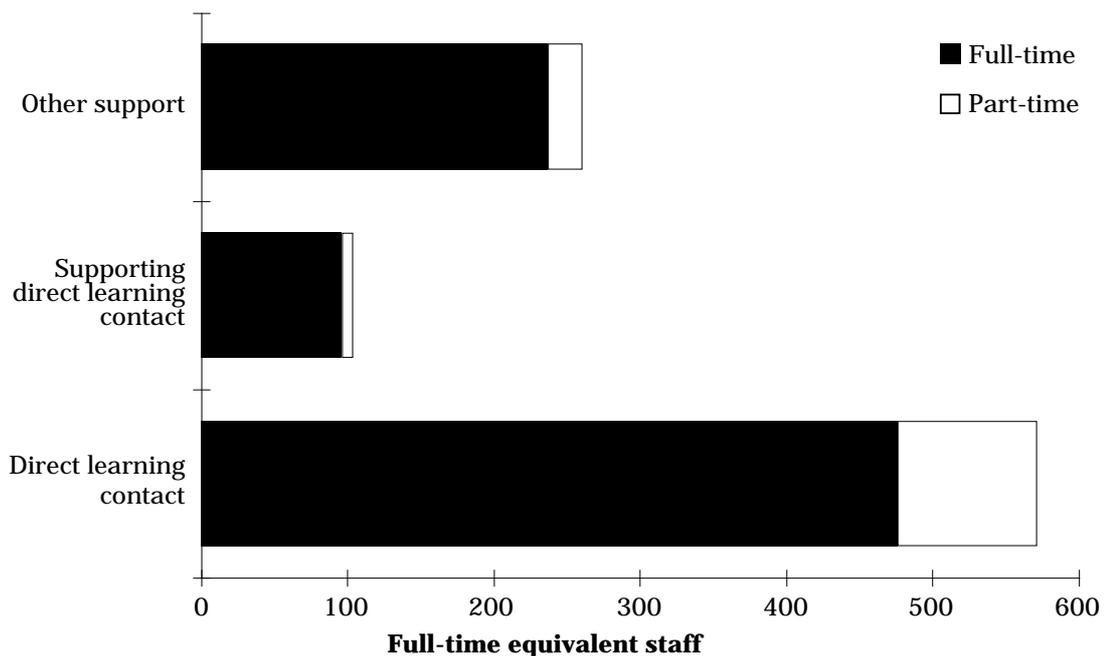
Wigan and Leigh College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 18,458

Figure 4

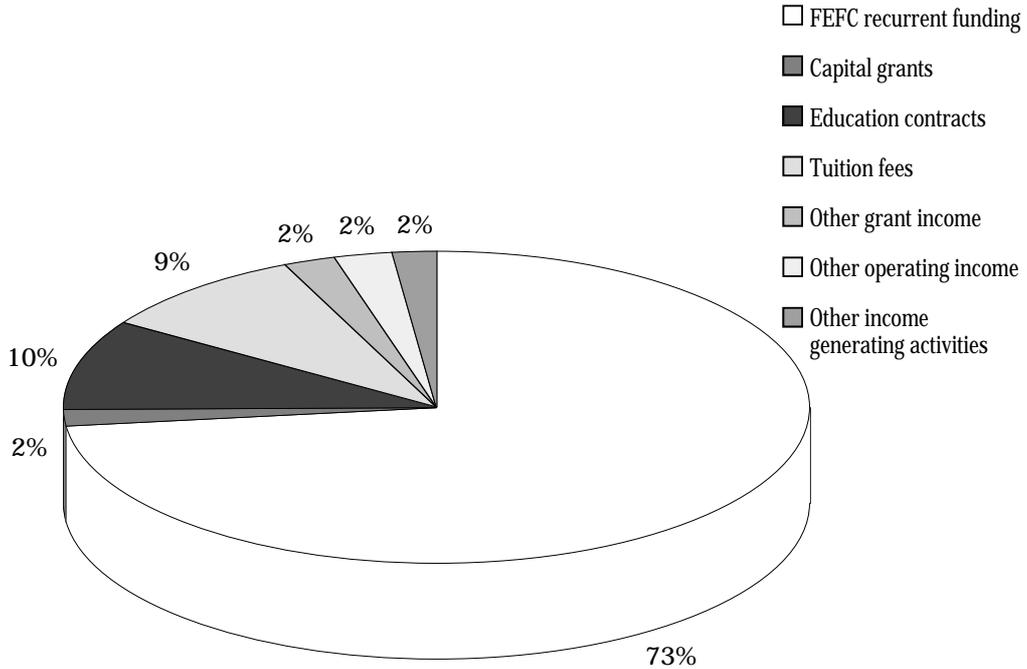
Wigan and Leigh College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 936

Figure 5

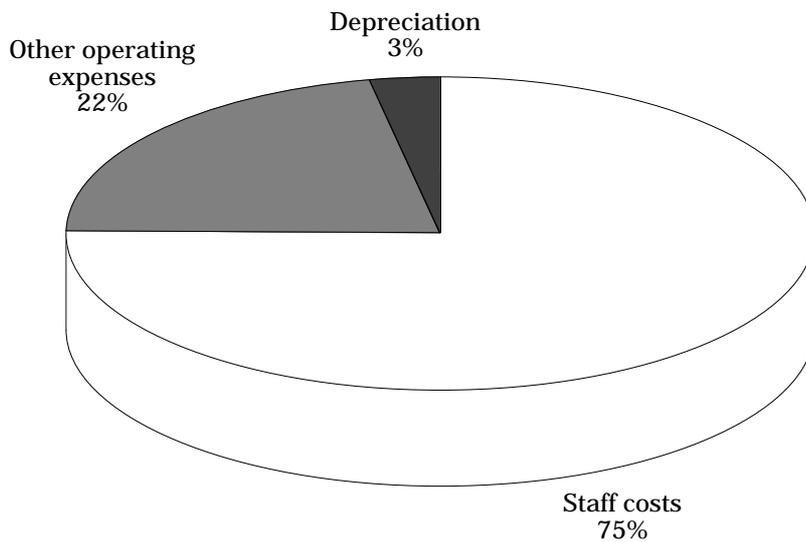
Wigan and Leigh College: estimated income (for 12 months to April 1995)



Estimated income: £24,612,000

Figure 6

Wigan and Leigh College: estimated expenditure (for 12 months to April 1995)



Estimated expenditure: £25,058,000

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