

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

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**Barrow-in-  
Furness Sixth  
Form College**

**May 1995**

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**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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## **THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

### **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 57/95

## BARROW-IN-FURNESS SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

### NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected December 1994–February 1995

#### Summary

Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College is a welcoming college that has good links with schools, other colleges and much of the local community. Both staff and students speak positively of the college and its strong sense of corporate identity. The number of students at the college is increasing steadily. It continues to provide successful academic programmes of study while broadening its provision to include a range of vocational courses and programmes for adult students. A well-structured and effective liaison system ensures a smooth transition from school to college. Teaching is of a high standard and examination results are generally at or above the national average. Staff are well qualified and experienced. Accommodation is a particular strength and the recent addition of a substantial new building has contributed significantly to a learning environment that is stimulating and attractive. The college management structure is complex; there is scope for simplifying it to allow a sharper definition of roles and a greater contribution from middle managers. College policies and systems for monitoring and review should be strengthened, and the college needs to implement its plans for quality assurance. The college should improve retention rates on a minority of courses; develop provision at foundation level; and improve information technology facilities for students.

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

<b>Aspects of cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Responsiveness and range of provision	2
Governance and management	2
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	2
Quality assurance	3
Resources: staffing	1
equipment/learning resources	2
accommodation	1

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Science	2	Art	2
Mathematics and information technology	2		
Business studies	2	English	1
		Geography, history, government and politics	1
		Psychology, religious studies, sociology	1

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1 Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College was inspected in three phases during the academic year 1994-95. Inspectors visited the college for two days at the beginning of September to assess the college's enrolment and induction procedures. Specialist inspections of curriculum areas took place in December 1994 and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected at the end of January 1995. In all, nine inspectors spent a total of 47 inspection days in the college. They visited 75 classes, examined samples of students' work, studied college documentation, observed a board meeting, and held discussions with a wide range of groups including staff, students, governors, parents and members of the local community, as well as representatives from local schools, the careers service and the Cumbria Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

## **THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS**

2 Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College was established in 1979 following the reorganisation of secondary education in the town. It is one of the few purpose-built sixth form colleges in the country and is the only sixth form college in Cumbria. The college occupies an attractive site to the north-east of the town. Originally built to accommodate around 400 students, the college was extended in 1993, by which time there were over 650 students. The overall participation rate for school leavers in full-time education for Cumbria is 58 per cent, well below the national average of 70 per cent, and that for Barrow is even lower at 52 per cent. Take-up of youth training schemes at 33 per cent is higher than for other parts of Cumbria. Thirty-seven per cent of school leavers obtained five grades A-C in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses, about the same as the national average.

3 The college has six partner schools within the borough of Barrow-in-Furness, including one that is grant maintained and one Catholic school. In 1994, 38 per cent of those leaving partner schools entered the college. This made up two-thirds of the college's student intake. Students are also drawn increasingly from further afield in the South Lakes area, including two 11-16 schools over 20 miles away at Coniston and Cartmel.

4 Other post-16 providers in the area include two 11-18 schools, at Ulverston eight miles away and at Millom over 20 miles away. The further education college in Barrow, Furness College, has in recent years extended its traditional engineering provision into other curriculum areas, as Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Limited, the major employer in the area, reduced its apprenticeship programmes and other training activities. Colleges in Lancaster and Kendal are beginning to recruit actively in the area.

5 The area has a strong sense of local identity. Barrow-in-Furness is a small industrial town at the end of the Furness peninsula with a population

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of about 61,000. Manufacturing accounts for 50 per cent of local employment. The area is renowned for its engineering and shipbuilding industry, particularly the construction of nuclear submarines, where Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Limited still operates as a major employer, although its workforce has declined from about 14,000 in 1989 to 5,500 in 1994. Tourism continues to be a significant source of work in the locality. The local unemployment rate is 9.6 per cent, compared with an average of 7.5 per cent for Cumbria as a whole. Minority ethnic groups form less than 1 per cent of the local population.

6 The remainder of the Furness and South Lakes area which the college serves is largely rural, much of it in the Lake District National Park. The continuation of financial support for student travel is of considerable importance to the college, as about a fifth of its students travel more than 20 miles a day. Transport links in the area can be difficult and the college subsidises a bus from Coniston jointly with Furness College.

7 The college has grown steadily in the past five years. From 1990-93 the number of students increased from 542 to 687 and in 1994 the college exceeded its growth targets by 1 per cent. There are currently 912 students on roll, of whom 746 are full time. The majority of these are 16-19 years old, although there are growing numbers of students aged 20 and over. Fifty-five mature students are studying for 15 hours or more each week at the college and a further 51 are studying part time. Recently, adult recruitment to the college has tended to be from those laid off by Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Limited. These students are mainly male and aged between 20 and 25. However, more than a third of adult students are female and a third are 25 or over. Details of enrolments by age and level of study are given in figures 1 and 2. Full-time equivalent enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3.

8 There are 44 full-time and 20 part-time members of teaching staff, excluding the principal and vice-principal who do not teach. A further 17 members of staff, 13 of them full time, provide the support functions of finance and administration, teaching support and site management. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

9 The mission of the college is to provide post-16 education which is of high quality and sensitive to the needs of the community and the aspirations of individual students. There is a commitment to encouraging students to realise their full potential through learning experiences which promote questioning, critical review, independence and self-reliance. The aim is to achieve this through a wide-ranging curriculum within a supportive and caring environment.

#### **RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION**

10 The college's provision has a clear rationale that is understood and supported by staff, managers and governors. It identifies as its core business the provision of General Certificate of Education advanced level

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(GCE A level) and GCSE courses to 16-19 year olds. Its secondary objective is to develop an appropriate range of vocational courses and programmes for adult students to ensure it meets its growth targets. It intends to achieve this increase in breadth of curriculum and volume of activity without undermining its traditional strengths.

11 The college offers 30 GCE A level subjects which include recently-introduced subjects, such as psychology. Alternative syllabuses broaden the choice in some subjects, for example in history and English. There is a limited number of GCE advanced supplementary (AS) two-year courses; the nine subjects running this year represent a reducing area of activity for the college. The college's programme of 17 GCSE subjects allows students to improve on existing grades or take up new subjects. This year only 56 students are following a wholly GCSE-based course.

12 A growing portfolio of vocational courses reflects the college's commitment to planned growth. In 1993, a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) at intermediate level in business was introduced. In 1994, this was extended to advanced level and GNVQs at advanced level in leisure and tourism, and at intermediate level in health and social care, were also started. The college plans to introduce further GNVQs, including science, and art and design in September 1995. Arrangements for a foundation art course, franchised from Cumbria College of Art and Design, are nearing completion in readiness for a September 1995 start.

13 In the past, the college has successfully run the diploma of vocational education for those students not ready for intermediate level provision or for whom GCSEs were not an appropriate option. Now that the diploma of vocational education has been discontinued, the college, for the first time, was unable to offer appropriate provision to some students in September and had to turn them away. If it wishes to respond to the needs of the community and operate as an open-access college, as stated in its mission and charter, the college should consider the development of provision at foundation level or its equivalent to replace the diploma of vocational education.

14 A positive feature of the college's activity is the increasing amount of provision it makes for students aged 20 or over. Within the last decade, the college has built up a substantial clientele of mature students; numbers have increased from 25 in 1989 to 106 in the current year. In the past, such students joined existing GCE A level or GCSE courses. This pattern continues; in the current session 63 mature students are following GCE A level courses, with over two-thirds taking three or more subjects. In addition, four students have joined GNVQ courses. In September 1994, the college introduced access courses specifically for mature students, accredited by the Open College of the North West, to provide an alternative route to higher education. These attracted 18 students; modules are running in English, history and sociology, and there are plans to introduce two further modules next September. As yet, no provision is available at

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preparatory level to support students who wish to extend their basic skills before progressing to the GCE A level equivalent course. The college also runs a small part-time day and evening provision; at present there are 77 students on schedule 2 courses supported by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and 48 on non-schedule 2 provision.

15 In line with the commitment in its mission statement, the college offers its students the opportunity to experience a wide range of cultural and leisure activities. Students are required to select one option a term from the supplementary studies programme which, in addition to work experience, teaching practice, music making and a variety of sports, includes skills-based courses such as computing, or general interest options such as Amnesty International. All students on GCE A level programmes are strongly encouraged to take GCE A level general studies by attending one teaching session a week; over 60 per cent entered in 1994. Currently eight of the 20 advanced level GNVQ students are taking an additional GCE A level subject; no GCE A level students are taking GNVQ modules. The college has no one-year fast-track courses for GCE A level subjects and does not offer distance learning as an option.

16 To help overcome the limitations arising from the college's geographically isolated location, students are encouraged to travel out of the district. They participate successfully in regional and national sports competitions; visits are arranged to theatres in various parts of the north west, and there are trips to London, exchanges with France, Germany and Poland, visits to Ireland and Israel, and a proposed visit to Japan. In addition, life in the college is enriched by visits from touring theatre groups and the presence of a series of resident practising artists, actors and writers who give students the opportunity to learn from successful practitioners.

17 The college has a number of productive links with schools and colleges in the area. The principal is actively involved in a number of educational groups including Furness Educational Consortium, an association formed in 1993 by the heads of schools and college principals in Barrow, which builds on the work of a consortium set up under the technical and vocational education initiative. The Furness Educational Consortium promotes collaboration rather than competition between institutions. Recent initiatives have included the appointment of a work experience co-ordinator who serves all participating institutions. Previously supported by the technical and vocational education initiative, she is now based at the college and funded through the Cumbria TEC. The college has developed an imaginative franchising arrangement with three 11-18 schools to help adult students who are unable to travel to the college. This year, 29 students are registered with the college but attend the franchised schools as full-time students.

18 Staff have responded to the demise of the technical and vocational education initiative by developing a number of informal contacts with schools to maintain effective curriculum links. Teachers in some subject



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areas meet regularly and there are a substantial number of exchanges of staff between schools and the college. For example, an English teacher at the college teaches in a local school for part of the week, while his counterpart teaches at the college; a biology teacher is an occasional teacher in local primary schools.

19 Historically, the two colleges in Barrow have enjoyed a productive and co-operative relationship, based on clear differentiation of provision. Curriculum developments at both colleges have introduced overlapping provision and an increasing possibility of competition. Links are still positive but at present the relationship is one of effective communication rather than collaboration. The college makes good use of its links with higher education. Last year, for example, admissions tutors from four universities contributed to a training day for staff to help them prepare students for their applications to higher education.

20 Parents speak well of the college and of its responsiveness to their concerns. There is a meeting for parents of new students, the college provides parents with regular reports on performance and progress, and there are opportunities to meet staff at parents' evenings. The college strengthens its contacts with the community in other ways. Local organisations make use of its premises in the evenings and at weekends. College drama productions and musical performances are well supported, as are those of visiting professional companies.

21 The college's growing links with the business community stem primarily from work experience contacts and from the principal's active membership of various groups. As well as belonging to a number of local employer organisations, the principal is a member of the Cumbria TEC strategic forum and a number of its sub-groups. Local firms provide speakers for careers events and help by sponsoring particular activities, for example, the artist in residence scheme or by contributing to the cost of improvements, such as the replacement of the theatre floor. Direct employer involvement in curriculum matters is underdeveloped; the college will need to consider this in the light of its growing vocational programme.

22 Traditionally, the college has relied on reputation and word of mouth for its recruitment. It is now turning its attention to a broader range of marketing strategies. Its recently produced marketing plan emphasises the importance of a purposeful and planned marketing strategy and the need for a coherent college approach. An early outcome has been the development of an attractive house style for its prospectus and stationery.

23 The equal opportunities committee at the college was reconstituted early last year and is beginning to implement a range of commitments. Staff are aware of equal opportunity issues and some have reviewed course content and teaching materials to take account of issues relating to gender and ethnicity. Progress overall has been slow. The college has a system for maintaining records of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Though the college has a number of good facilities, such as

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the accessibility of all but a few areas in the college and a specially designed suite of medical rooms, the number of students with particular support needs coming to the college remains surprisingly low. The college should investigate ways of removing barriers to participation and encouraging enrolments from students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

#### **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

24 The board of governors serves the college well. Its 17 members include nine independent members, a nominee from Cumbria TEC, two parents, and a co-opted member who is an assistant principal at Furness College. There are eight women on the board, including the chair of the corporation. Five of the governors are former or current parents of students at the college. Members contribute to the college from a broad base of experience and expertise which includes finance, legal matters and local government, and an ability to draw on a wide network of contacts within the local community. The principal's personal assistant serves as clerk to the board. There is an appropriate range of subcommittees, each with clear terms of reference and relevant membership. College managers attend subcommittees in areas for which they have responsibilities. The board is increasing its contacts with the college by holding informal meetings with groups of staff before each full meeting.

25 The board carries out its business briskly and efficiently; there are no silent members. Its work is well supported by effective chairing at both board and subcommittee level and by documentation and minutes that are accessible, colour coded and spiral bound for ease of reference. Members have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities; they see their role as providing a sounding board for college management and ensuring that the college continues to change and develop in line with its mission and ethos. For example, it was a board member's initiative that led to the recent establishment of a working party to help the college formulate its marketing strategy. The board should strengthen its involvement in the college's strategic planning and review processes. Although meetings have recently included presentations on particular aspects of college activity, members have not yet considered their training needs, nor have they identified how they intend to evaluate their own effectiveness.

26 The principal took up post in January 1992 and, after a process of consultation with staff, the current management structure was introduced in the following September, with a commitment to review the structure after two years. That process has now started. The principal and two vice-principals, one with financial and the other with personnel responsibilities, form the principalship. They meet frequently and informally but no minutes of meetings are kept. At the time of inspection one of the vice-principal posts was vacant and temporary arrangements had been put in place to deal with the situation. The senior management

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team meets formally every week. It consists of the principalship and the four college directors. Each director has three roles: responsibility to a member of the principalship for a significant cross-college function; leadership of a team of tutors offering pastoral support to students; and overall responsibility for the work of a number of departments. The diversity of roles undertaken by individual directors creates problems; there is no consistency between the four in the emphasis they place on their different roles and there is some overloading. Although staff are clear about the structure on paper, they are less clear about how it works in practice and are often uncertain where to take issues. This leads to some duplication of effort and confusion.

27 Responsibility for delivering the curriculum rests with the college's 17 departments and much of the curriculum development takes place at this level. The departments range in size from two with one member of staff to two with seven. All heads of department have one hour allocated to them for their departmental duties. The larger departments generally work effectively as teams. They hold monthly meetings that are minuted and identify issues for action and, in the best instances, they have developed well-documented processes and procedures. In some departments such as English, responsibility for specific aspects of provision is successfully delegated to staff; in other departments, responsibilities for specific courses or groups of students are delegated. Some departments are not so well managed; they have less effective processes and no coherent departmental view.

28 The potential isolation of staff in smaller departments is partially addressed by clustering departments into four areas which facilitate communications and cross-college working. One area, the sciences, brings together homogeneous subjects; two cover related areas, and the fourth clustering, mathematics and modern languages, was born out of necessity. The director responsible for each area does not necessarily have specialist knowledge of the curriculum in that area and this has had the effect of leaving responsibility for the curriculum increasingly with the departments. While staff appreciate the opportunity that area meetings give for communication with members of the senior management team, their views on the effectiveness of the meetings are mixed. Some heads of department would prefer a structure that allowed them to speak for themselves in the senior management arena rather than through the directors of study.

29 The college has an academic board which meets twice termly. Its role is to advise the principal and corporation on the standards, planning, co-ordination and oversight of the academic work of the college, including work to develop cross-college policies. Not all staff are clear about the board's role. Membership consists of the principal, one of the directors, and two representatives from each of the areas and from the support staff. Area meetings are now timed to allow staff to consider agenda items for the academic board in advance of each meeting. This has led to variable practice in chairing the area meetings: some are chaired partly or wholly

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by directors, some partly or wholly by academic board members. Of the eight teaching staff members of the board, five are heads of department; this reflects the value the heads of department place on the board as a channel of communication but limits its ability to represent a cross-section of teaching staff as originally envisaged. The college should find more effective ways of keeping heads of department informed or of enabling them to contribute directly to college management processes.

30 The management structure was introduced to enable the college to meet the demands of incorporation, while providing continuity and ensuring the stability of day-to-day management of the college. It has served this purpose well, but the structure is over complex and no longer meets the college's emerging needs. Thought needs to be given in the current review to a structure that will streamline roles, match them more effectively to college functions and enable staff at middle management levels to contribute more to the managerial processes.

31 Staff view the leadership provided by the principal and his senior colleagues as purposeful, open and responsive. Communications are effective. In addition to the departmental and area meetings, staff meet for a five-minute briefing at the start of every day and a weekly bulletin gives requests, items of news, details of staff absences and events for the week ahead. Staff work well together and have a strong sense of corporate identity.

32 There is a joint consultative committee which enables representatives from the teaching and support staff unions to meet the principal, usually twice a term; extra meetings are arranged for specific purposes. A vice-principal has overall responsibility for personnel procedures, but there is no strategy for managing support staff as a single unit. Scope exists for increasing the involvement of support staff in the college's planning processes.

33 The college's strategic plan is well structured and comprehensive. It is supported by departmental plans which are generally aligned to the overall plan but show considerable variation in format, focus and effectiveness. The associated operational plans follow a standard format. They include timescales and identify responsibilities but monitoring procedures need to be more detailed and the costing of associated resource implications would strengthen budgetary forward planning. Monitoring and reviewing processes at both departmental and college level are at best informal and lack structure and consistent implementation. Neither the academic board nor the corporation are involved in reviews.

34 College policies are at various stages of development. Some, like the health and safety policy, are comprehensive, detailed, and effectively implemented and monitored. Some, like the equal opportunities policy, have been through a long process of gestation and are soon to be implemented. Others, as in the case of information technology, are more statements of intent than frameworks for action and development. There

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are a number of committees working on these and other policies but, in general, insufficient attention has been given to the processes of implementation and review.

35 The college has devised its own computer-based student record system which deals effectively with student and course records, including applications, enrolment and allocation to courses, students' timetables and examination entries. The finance system uses commercial software adapted to meet the college's requirements. Reports are regularly produced for college managers and budget holders. Information is accessible to managers and staff through a networked system of 12 terminals in key offices and the staff workroom. Examination results on entry and on exit are not yet on the student database and this causes complications in terms of accessing information.

36 The college sets out to operate in a prudent manner on a sound financial basis, and it continues to plan for a surplus. Its average level of funding for 1994-95 is £19.57 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.81. Summaries of the college's income and expenditure for the 16 months to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6. Most of the college's income is from the FEFC and most of its expenditure is on staffing; efficiency gains have allowed it to reduce the proportion spent on staffing from 85 per cent to 75 per cent over the past two years. Budgets are allocated to departments according to a formula based on FEFC-funding methodology; additional funds are retained centrally to support developments and departments bid for them through their directors. The procedures and criteria for allocating these funds are not always understood by heads of department.

### **STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

37 A particular strength of the college's admission process is the contribution made by link tutors. As well as sustaining a long-term relationship with a designated school, a link tutor interviews potential students before they leave the school and then sees them again at the college after they have received their GCSE results. The link tutors take their students through the enrolment procedures and continue to provide personal support during the first few weeks at college. Both students and staff speak positively of the benefits this continuity provides. The transition to college is further eased by a well-organised and extensive range of pre-induction activities. Link tutors take students who were former pupils back to their schools to talk about their courses and college life. The majority of students enrolling will have taken part in a college open day in year 10 and attended an open evening in year 11. In the summer term prior to enrolment they have the opportunity to spend a day at college to sample their chosen subjects.

38 Enrolment and induction procedures are effective and valued by students. The various activities are imaginatively located in different parts of the accommodation to help students find their way around. Students

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meet their link tutors as their first point of contact and there is no evidence of long waiting times. An initial induction day is carefully planned and delivered to ensure consistency between the various tutorial and subject groups. Students receive an attractive pocket-sized diary which contains useful information, including the student charter; the majority of students continue to make use of these diaries throughout the year. Students also sign the college's learner agreement which identifies both student and staff responsibilities. However, some of the information that subject tutors ask students to supply duplicates information already available to them from enrolment data. There is no college-wide system for screening or assessing students to identify individual learning needs and, where this is done in particular subject areas, the approach is too informal to be effective. No opportunities exist for the accreditation of prior learning.

39 The tutorial programme, introduced in September 1994 and building on previous experience, is developing well. Students speak positively of the tutorial support they receive. Over a period of time, which varies according to need, link tutors hand over their support role to group tutors. The group tutor, who may or may not teach the students, meets them every day for registration and for a one-hour tutorial session each week. The tutorial programme is delivered in the weekly session and draws on a comprehensive range of resource materials which supports the tutor and ensures consistency of curriculum coverage in areas such as study skills, health education and individual review procedures. Tutors contribute to the evaluation of the programme and changes to materials have been made as a result. College staff are working with staff from partner schools to look at personal development programmes in an effort to reduce repetition of work and enable the college's programme to build on students' prior learning. Tutors involved in the new programme have not had any training for their roles and there are no trained counsellors on the staff.

40 Careers education and guidance provision within the college is comprehensive and effectively co-ordinated by the careers director. Careers education is part of the tutorial programme. It includes a series of presentations from industrialists and representatives from higher education which takes place during the common tutorial time so that any interested student can attend. The college has close links with the local careers services and two careers officers come to the college for half a day a week. As well as giving advice, careers staff offer students mock interviews, where the questions asked are based on actual questions reported back by former students. Students' comments in an evaluation survey on the careers programme carried out last summer were very positive. As well as giving advice, a comprehensive support system for students wishing to enter higher education begins in the summer of their first year in college. The prominent position in the foyer of an up-to-date and informative notice board reflects the high priority given to careers education in the college.

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41 Support for mature students is co-ordinated by two tutors and is developing satisfactorily. Before they enrol, mature students have access to helpful advice on matters relating to courses, finance and personal organisation. They value the two-day induction programme arranged for them in September, but there is no induction provided for those unable to attend or who enrol late. Mature students are not part of the college's standard tutorial programme. They are allocated a member of staff who teaches them as their tutor and they arrange their own times to meet. This has meant that students do not always have access to the same information and support as the younger students, especially in the area of careers education and guidance. Those tutoring mature students have not received any specific staff development on issues which affect these students, such as benefit regulations. There are no creche or nursery facilities at the college.

42 The college has been slow to develop its procedures for monitoring progress and recording achievement. Some good practice exists, for example, in social studies, but elsewhere procedures are less effective. A college-wide system for recording progress was introduced in September 1994. It involves termly subject reviews in which students are encouraged to assess their own progress and achievements and set targets, but this aspect of the reviews is insufficiently developed. Information arising from the subject reviews is passed to the group tutors, who review the overall progress of students on a one-to-one basis and use the information as a basis for reports. Students are not encouraged to build on the national records of achievement they bring with them to the college, and only one student left the college in 1994 with an endorsed record.

43 There is no systematic learning support available for those students identified as experiencing difficulties in basic skills such as numeracy, communication and information technology.

44 The process for monitoring student attendance involves subject tutors, group tutors and directors. Directors carry out a monthly monitoring of registers by a laborious manual process and information on absentees is then passed to group tutors for action. It is not always systematically followed up by tutors and this is a particular problem in relation to the college's programme of supplementary studies.

45 The college benefits from a thriving student council formed from elected members from tutor groups. Members of the council, which includes the principal, are clear about their aims; these include improving conditions for students, acting as a link with teaching staff and raising funds through social events. The view of council members is that their recommendations are followed up and that the dialogue with college managers has resulted in negotiated solutions. The council is an effective fundraiser; for example, a recent discotheque raised £2,000. It uses its funds to make significant contributions to charity and to support students, contributing, for example, a third of the cost of producing the student

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diary. Because mature students do not attend the tutor group meetings, they are unable to play as full a part in the council as they would wish.

46 The college is responding to sections 44 and 45 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 by ensuring that it provides a collective act of worship and religious education through weekly prayer sessions for those who wish to participate. This is offered through an active inter-denominational chaplaincy centre at the college which is developing a wide range of activities. These include acts of collective worship, a Christian union, discussions, workshops and visits. The centre is supported by a team of five voluntary staff from outside the college, including a full-time chaplaincy youth worker.

### **TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING**

47 The teaching observed was of high quality. Eighty-seven per cent of the sessions inspected had strengths which clearly outweighed the weaknesses. The work in science, English, geography, history, government and politics, psychology, religious studies and sociology was of a consistently high standard. The 10 poorer sessions were mainly in mathematics, computing, business, art and design, and theatre studies.

The following table summarises the grades given for the 75 teaching sessions inspected.

#### **Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study**

<b>Programmes</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Totals</b>
GCE AS/A level		25	23	5	1	0	54
GCSE		2	9	3	0	1	15
GNVQ		0	4	0	0	0	4
Access to higher education		1	1	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>28</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>75</b>

48 The best teaching provided a variety of activities, which were well paced, pitched at an appropriate level and encouraged students to be involved in their learning. Teachers gave lively and interesting presentations which conveyed their enthusiasm for their subjects. Good use of questions led to animated discussion, and maintained students' interest and motivation. In mathematics, a stimulating presentation on the basic principles of mechanics made appropriate references to other subjects to reinforce key points. Teaching was well matched to the different abilities and interests of students. For example, in English, students were given a choice of essay topics some of which were straightforward and others were more complex. The implications of each topic were fully discussed and each student was invited to select a topic which would be challenging but achievable. The teacher was prepared to negotiate further topics with individuals.



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49 Students' individual experiences were effectively linked to classroom-based activities. For example, to gain work experience, individual GCE A level government and politics students have shadowed their local member of parliament for a two-week period in the House of Commons. Their experiences were used as a basis for discussion which succeeded in integrating the theoretical and practical aspects of the course.

50 There was effective use of group work to promote learning and the development of communication skills. For example, in science, students were asked to imagine they were chemical engineers and they then worked in groups to examine the most cost-effective way of removing sulphur from fuel; each group presented its findings to the whole class using visual aids and an overhead projector. In sociology, groups of students created headlines and text for the front pages of newspapers and used them to analyse the effect of the media on influencing opinions.

51 Good teaching was often accompanied by the appropriate and imaginative use of teaching aids. For example, in psychology, sociology, religious studies and business studies, overhead projectors and video recordings were used judiciously to highlight key points and to provide telling illustrations of important principles. Learning resources designed by teachers for specific purposes were used effectively and innovatively in history, geography, and government and politics sessions. In science and mathematics, several sessions made appropriate use of computers.

52 Generally, the weaker sessions relied too heavily on one teaching strategy, and gave few opportunities for students to respond to questions and develop their own ideas. For example, an over emphasis on note taking was a feature of some business studies classes. In art and design, there was insufficient emphasis on observational drawing, and students were not given enough encouragement to experiment and use different media and materials to develop imaginative concepts. Practical work in computing was not sufficiently challenging for some students.

53 Relationships between staff and students were relaxed, friendly and supportive. Staff were knowledgeable and confident in their teaching, and were committed to meeting the needs of their students. These characteristics enhanced the learning process and commanded the respect and attention of both the mature and 16-19 year old students.

54 Schemes of work were available in all subjects but varied in quality. For example, they were well developed in science, history, geography, government and politics and for the GNVQ courses in business, where schedules for assignments and assessments were shared with students. In English, the schemes of work contained appropriate programmes of study but they did not include teaching methodology, although good practice was observed in lessons. In theatre studies, there was too much emphasis on practical work at the expense of theoretical content. Schemes of work in computing lacked sufficient detail.

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55 There were regular, appropriate assessments of students' work in all subject areas. Marking schemes were clear and, where necessary, reflected the assessment criteria for coursework prescribed by the examining bodies. Strategies to ensure consistency in assessment procedures and standards across particular subjects, for example, art and design, were effective. Work was marked thoroughly and promptly, and detailed comments provided constructive feedback to individual students. In science, art and design, and theatre studies, staff encouraged students to assess and evaluate their own work.

### **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

56 The majority of students enjoy their studies. They work well, individually or in groups, are supportive of each other, and tackle tasks enthusiastically. Most students are well motivated, especially the adults. However, in several of the GCSE classes, a few students are less attentive and do not give of their best.

57 Overall, students develop the knowledge, skills and understanding appropriate to their course. For example, first-year students following the GNVQ advanced course in business are able to respond well to challenging topics. In mathematics, good results in the assessments at the ends of units of study confirm students' understanding of basic principles. Psychology, religious studies and sociology students produce well-expressed and clearly argued written work of a high standard. In English, students' writing skills develop well as the course progresses. Many first-year students have not yet developed the technique of presenting ideas clearly and logically. By contrast, the written work of second-year students shows an ability to organise and express ideas with confidence and a greater depth of understanding. For example, with support from staff, some students have compiled an anthology of their own poetry and prose. Many of the students' contributions are vibrant and compelling, contain a mature and sensitive use of language, and are often able to convey complex ideas and emotions. Creative work in art and design is more variable in quality. For example, sketchbooks, multi-media design sheets and imaginative solutions in a variety of media and materials are characteristics of the work of textiles students but in art, students' visual language and essential drawing skills are insufficiently developed.

58 In all subjects, students respond well to questions and confidently express their own ideas. There is an appropriate emphasis on the development of oral communication skills. For example, in a science lesson, groups of students discussed the ethical and legal issues involved in artificial insemination before presenting their ideas to the whole class. Some of the more reticent students are drawn into group work effectively. In history, geography, and government and politics classes, the importance of decision making is emphasised by structured group work which involves every student.

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59 There is no policy for ensuring that all students have the opportunity to develop information technology skills, although the college is beginning to address this. Twelve advanced level students are following one-year courses in typing, wordprocessing, computer literacy and information technology, in addition to their GCE advanced level or GNVQ programmes. In English, history, art, and government and politics, there were good examples of coursework which had been wordprocessed but, in most cases, students already had the necessary skills before they came to the college. Some subject areas provide opportunities to use information technology. For example, in science, and government and politics, students use the college's compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database facilities to enhance their learning. Insufficient use is made of information technology in art and design programmes.

60 Opportunities for students to develop other core skills vary from subject to subject. For example, in geography, the development of numerical and problem-solving skills form an integrated part of lessons. Science students extend their mathematical skills in an appropriate scientific context. In GNVQ business courses students were able to use core skills at an appropriate level in presenting their portfolios. In business studies, an over emphasis on note taking impedes the development of other study skills.

61 Generally, the GCE A level examination results gained by students at the college are in line with national averages. In 1994, 260 candidates produced a total of 808 subject entries, including general studies. The overall pass rate was 80 per cent, compared with a provisional average of 83 per cent for all 18 year olds in sixth form colleges. In 15 of the 25 subjects, the percentage of students achieving grades A-E was at, or above, the corresponding national averages. Several subjects had pass rates of 100 per cent: English literature (58 students), economics (19 students), and German, music, psychology and religious studies, all with less than 10 students. Pass rates of over 90 per cent were achieved in business studies, English language, French and geology. Over 20 per cent of students in economics and English literature gained grade A; nine of the 14 students who took government and politics achieved grades A or B. Fewer than 10 per cent of entries achieved grades A or B in biology, business studies, computing, further mathematics, geography and theatre studies. The pass rates in computing, further mathematics and social biology were all more than 15 per cent below the corresponding national averages.

62 Fifty-six entries for GCE AS examinations in 10 subjects produced an overall pass rate of 75 per cent. Pass rates of 100 per cent were achieved in business studies, chemistry, German, history and sociology. Students aged 16-18 entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1993-94 scored, on average, 4.2 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education.

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63 In 1994, there was a total of 469 entries for 22 subjects in GCSE examinations. Overall, 51 per cent of entries achieved grades A-C compared with a provisional average of 50 per cent for sixth form colleges nationally in 1993. The results in geology, a new subject to many students, were good, with 24 of the 28 students gaining grades A-C. The entries for most subjects were from students who were retaking the examination to improve their grades. In English, 75 per cent of the 57 entries from students aged 16-18 achieved grades A-C; in mathematics, 38 per cent of the 88 entries achieved grades A-C. The percentage of students achieving grades A-C were below the corresponding national averages in half of the subjects studied. For example, in biology, geography and sociology, less than 25 per cent of students achieved grades A-C. Almost 20 per cent of the total entries were from students aged 19 or over. All of the nine part-time students taking history gained grades A-C; in mathematics, six of the nine part-time students gained grades A-C. The first cohort of nine GNVQ intermediate business students achieved five credits and one distinction; one student gained one unit, and two students failed to complete any units successfully.

64 In 1994, 85 per cent of students completed their GCE A level programme; the retention rates for individual subjects were variable. Over 90 per cent of students completed courses in art, computing, English literature, French, geography, geology, home economics, further mathematics, music, physics and theatre studies. In social biology, business studies, German, mathematics and sociology, retention rates were all below 75 per cent, as they were in nine of the 10 GCE AS courses.

65 Retention rates for one-year courses were poor. Of the 115 students who began programmes of study in September 1993, only 89 remained at the college until the following May, a retention rate of 77 per cent. Nine out of 13 students completed the GNVQ intermediate course in business, a retention rate of 69 per cent. Out of the 22 GCSE subjects, five had retention rates of less than 80 per cent. The attendance at GCSE classes was also poor; the percentages of students attending classes ranged from 76 per cent to 87 per cent across a spread of subjects, with an average attendance of 80 per cent.

66 Value-added data from the Advanced Level Information System show that generally students achieved grades which matched predictions based on their performance in GCSE subjects. Students underachieved significantly in only two subjects, computing and general studies. There is no system for measuring the performance of students who follow the one-year GCSE courses. The college should address this.

67 Destination data is collected routinely for all full-time students. In 1994, 54 per cent of GCE A level students entered higher education, 9 per cent of students chose to delay their entry to higher education for one year, 17 per cent went on to further education, 7 per cent were still seeking employment, 11 per cent went to employment and 2 per cent were

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unknown. The proportion of students going on to higher education is low for a sixth form college. Of the 195 students who applied to higher education, 22 per cent were unsuccessful. The analysis of destinations of students following one-year courses shows that 66 per cent proceeded to further education and 20 per cent to employment and training, while 4 per cent are seeking employment and the destinations of the remaining 10 per cent are unknown. Over a third of the one-year GCSE students who went to further education courses at Furness College had the relevant entry qualifications before they came to the sixth form college.

#### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

68 The college has a strong commitment to develop a strategy for quality assurance. One of the directors has responsibility for quality and the college's operating statement includes a number of objectives relating to quality assurance, although the timetable on their achievement has not been met.

69 In September 1993, a subcommittee of the academic board was established to devise a quality framework. It is chaired by the director of quality assurance and includes three heads of department, a member of the teaching staff, one of the support staff and a student. Regular meetings of the subcommittee have resulted in a framework document which is nearing completion. The framework is divided into four sections: policy and management, students, staff and resources. The college's overall policy for quality restates the college's mission, indicates that the quality framework will form the basis for assuring quality across the college and states that compliance with the framework is compulsory for all staff. It was considered by the corporation in January 1995.

70 However, the policy statement and operational plans for its implementation are too vague and much remains to be done if the college is to have its framework in place for the next academic year. As yet, there are no specific standards and measures linked to each of the statements for quality improvement. There is no action plan for the implementation of the quality framework and no programme of staff development to help staff understand the framework and quality processes in general, or to provide support in the implementation process. Draft terms of reference have been proposed for establishing a quality assurance committee to assist in the implementation and monitoring of the policy.

71 The processes used for review and evaluation of courses are generally underdeveloped. They rely almost entirely on the use of Advanced Level Information System data and analyses of students' examination results. There is no common understanding across the college of how the Advanced Level Information System data should be used in course evaluation, although a few departments have acted upon the information to good effect. For example, in history, a detailed analysis of the Advanced Level Information System data and students' opinions led to changes in the scheme of work: a wider spectrum of economic and social issues is now

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studied within a shorter period of time. Directors discuss examination results with the heads of departments in their area but action points are not formally recorded. Student input to course evaluation is not consistent across departments, although there is some use of student questionnaires in physics, English, geography, and government and politics, as well as in history. There is no attempt to bring the reviews together to provide a comprehensive picture for the college.

72 The college's self-assessment report is written to the headings in the Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. It draws substantially on the findings of a pre-inspection review which was commissioned by the college and carried out by Cumbria County Council's quality assurance unit in May 1994. The text identifies strengths and weaknesses; judgements within the report are clear and concise and are generally consistent with the findings of the inspection team. However, there is no cross-referencing to supporting evidence.

73 As well as forming part of the college's student diary, the college charter is available in leaflet form. The student charter is clearly set out as a series of numbered statements which describe what students can expect from the college at entry and on the course. There is a shorter section describing the college's commitments to employers and the community, including statements for those providing work experience. The statement on the college's commitment to members of the community deals solely with where information can be found about the college's provision and facilities. The charter was developed by a working group made up of members of the academic board, including the principal, a student and Cumbria's technical and vocational education initiative director. It was considered by the corporation after its publication. The college has not yet met all the stated commitments, for example, in relation to the availability of accreditation of prior learning and records of achievement. There are no arrangements in place for monitoring performance against the charter.

74 The college's system for appraising teaching staff is well established. It seeks to encourage self-evaluation and to identify training needs. Each member of staff agrees with the principal who their appraiser should be; there is no requirement for heads of department, for example, to appraise the staff within their department. The focus of appraisal is agreed between the appraisee and the appraiser and must include either lesson observation or, in the case of managers, analysis of a managerial task. Targets for individuals are identified, recorded and reviewed the following year. An appraisal system and a related training course for support staff are planned.

75 All members of the teaching staff have been appraised. Most speak well of the process and see it as a positive experience. With staff agreement, appraisal targets can be made known to the professional development co-ordinator so that appropriate staff development can be

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provided. However, the existing arrangements do not ensure that identification of appraisal targets and measures of individual performance are linked to the achievement of departmental or college objectives.

76 The day-to-day co-ordination of staff-development activities is effective and detailed records of participation in staff-development activities are maintained. A comprehensive database contains up-to-date information for each individual: it records the type of course attended, its cost and relevance to the achievement of appraisal targets, and a brief evaluation of its effectiveness. The introduction of new syllabuses and GNVQ provision has led to extensive staff development, although, to date, only one person has acquired the qualifications required for staff to assess vocational courses. There is no college-wide strategy for management training, and no programme to provide new group tutors with appropriate skills and knowledge. There is no formal induction programme for new members of staff, although a comprehensive programme was in place two years ago when the numbers of staff joining the college were much higher than they are now. The college is committed to seeking Investors in People status. At present, there are no detailed plans for achieving the award, but a meeting between the college and the TEC has been arranged.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Staffing**

77 Teaching staff are well qualified and generally have appropriate experience. Ninety-one per cent of full-time staff and 85 per cent of part-time staff have first degrees in relevant subjects; 96 per cent of full-time staff and 90 per cent of part-time staff have qualified teacher status. Five of the six full-time staff in the English department are practising writers. Teachers in many subjects have worked as examiners. About a third of full-time and part-time staff have at least one year's experience of work in industry or commerce, but some of this experience is now out of date. Only one member of the senior management team is female; 53 per cent of the teaching staff are women.

78 The increase in enrolments has been well managed to achieve gains in efficiency. The ratio of staff to students has increased from 1:12.6 in 1992-93 to 1:13.3 in 1993-94, and the provisional figure for 1994-95 is 1:14. Over the last two years, the number of full-time equivalent teachers has reduced from 54 to 48. Half of the current staff were appointed within the last four years.

79 The importance of the contribution made by support staff to the organisation is recognised by the college. The number of support staff has increased since incorporation and appropriate expertise has been brought in; for example, the finance function is supported by a chartered accountant and the careers director is a qualified careers officer. Support staff levels are generally adequate. However, the level of staffing in the library is minimal. At present, there is no supervision after the end of daytime

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sessions and the library is closed completely in the evenings unless teaching staff arrange in advance to use it as a resource for students.

### **Equipment/learning resources**

80 The equipment and learning resources in most teaching areas are sufficient, fit for purpose and up to date. Rooms are appropriately furnished, though the purchase of over-large tables for classrooms in the new extension has restricted the options for flexible use. Teaching aids are available as required; six trolleys located around the college hold overhead projectors and video equipment to supplement resources already available in classrooms and this system generally works well. Staff in the English department have developed a text trolley which is used to support broader reading by students.

81 Information technology facilities are growing but need to be extended. The college has three dedicated rooms, including a study room off the library. These are now fully used and a fourth room is planned. The current ratio of one machine to 14 students is inadequate, particularly given the growing use of wordprocessing for coursework. The facilities to support modern languages teaching are limited; video and satellite links are available but need to be more accessible and the audio facilities are poor.

82 The new library offers an attractive and well-designed environment for studying. The careers room attached to the library is well equipped, with relevant information, video and computer hardware and software. The library bookstock is variable in quality; up to date and sufficient in some areas, it is inadequate in others, such as psychology and art. There is some loss through pilfering and the student council recently made a donation to the library to help meet replacement costs. The library is already overcrowded at times and there is no provision as yet for resource-based learning, either in the library or elsewhere in the college.

83 Maintenance arrangements for equipment vary and there is no planned replacement strategy. Electrical equipment is tested regularly as part of the health and safety procedures and minor repairs are carried out by support staff. Teaching staff currently maintain the college's information technology equipment. A more appropriate arrangement should be made.

### **Accommodation**

84 The college buildings provide a welcoming and appropriate learning environment. The external appearance of the college is attractive, sited as it is on the outskirts of town and surrounded by green fields. The main building, which is on two floors, houses the teaching areas, administrative offices and facilities for staff and students. There are three temporary classrooms of variable quality and a bungalow, that formerly accommodated the caretaker, is now used among other things as a base for mature students. These areas and a suite of medical rooms are



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considerably underused. The sports hall is available for letting and it is well used by local schools and the community in the evenings and at weekends. The college has only limited playing fields and has arranged to use a neighbouring school's facilities.

85 The recent £1 million building programme added a new library complex on the ground floor and eight additional teaching rooms above, as well as extending social facilities for the students. It integrates well with the original building, is light and airy, and has attractive display areas in the library and an enclosed space for sculpture at its entrance.

86 Teaching areas are generally of a high standard; internal decoration is good, and rooms are appropriately furnished. Each curriculum area has dedicated rooms, equipped to meet curricular needs. They are appropriately laid out and have relevant and well-maintained displays. For example, English is taught in a suite of five rooms located near one another. There is a small departmental office and a resource room which provides materials and work space for staff and students. The complex of rooms used for art and design needs attention, particularly the textile area and plans are in hand for improvement. The refectory and adjacent seating areas provide the main college social facility for students. It is attractive and well used, though at peak times it is crowded to capacity. Students with mobility problems have access to nearly all college buildings; there are ramps where needed and a lift provides access to the first floor.

87 A particular problem for the college is the size of teaching rooms. Of its 47 rooms only six can comfortably accommodate more than 20 students. This not only limits group sizes but it also restricts the range of teaching approaches that staff can use. There is insufficient storage space in some areas. There are few quiet study areas around the college.

88 The college employs an external consultant to work alongside its estates manager and advise on building matters. As well as producing a comprehensive and effective accommodation strategy, he has helped the college identify a programme that meets its needs through modifications to the existing buildings, rather than through a substantial new building programme. Existing college buildings are in good condition, inside and out, following considerable repair work. Decoration is good and cleaning services are of a high standard. There are few signs of vandalism or litter.

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## **CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

89 The college is making considerable progress towards the achievement of its strategic objectives. Its particular strengths include:

- active participation in many local and regional networks for schools and colleges
- a good range of academic subject courses, supported by a growing portfolio of vocational and adult provision
- a businesslike and experienced board, committed to the college's well being
- responsive and purposeful leadership
- well-established and effective admissions procedures, including the contribution of link tutors
- teaching of a high standard and results that are in line with or better than national averages
- an established and well-received system for staff appraisal linked to development needs
- well-qualified, experienced and capable staff
- college buildings that are welcoming, attractive and provide an appropriate learning environment.

90 In order to maintain its progress, the college should address the following:

- the need to broaden links with the community and local businesses
- the need for better support and more provision to meet the needs of students who underachieve
- the need to streamline the management structure to enable middle managers to contribute more
- the weaknesses in monitoring and review systems
- the need for a more rigorous approach to the implementation and review of the college's plans for quality assurance
- retention and completion rates in a minority of courses
- the development of more foundation level provision
- the limited access to information technology facilities and opportunities for all students to develop their information technology skills.

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## FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

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

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

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

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  - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

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  - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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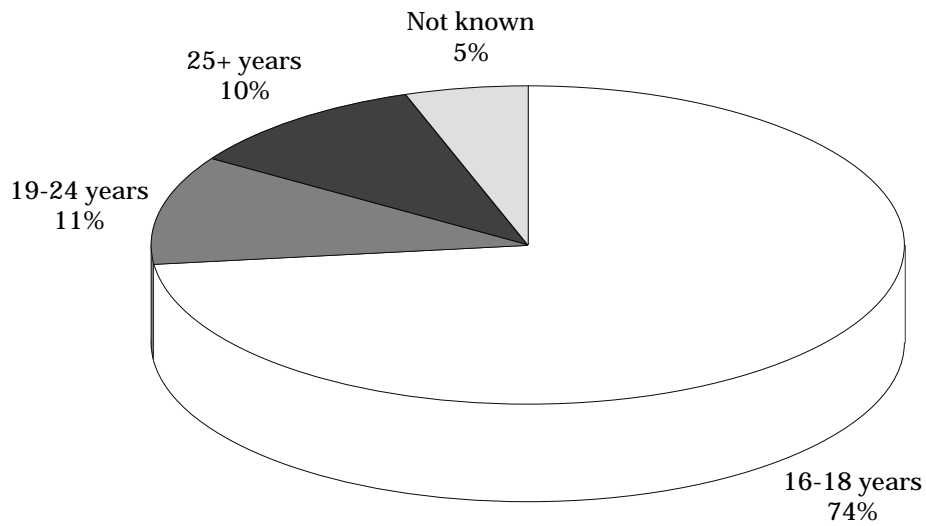
**Note:** the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

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**Figure 1**

**Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)**

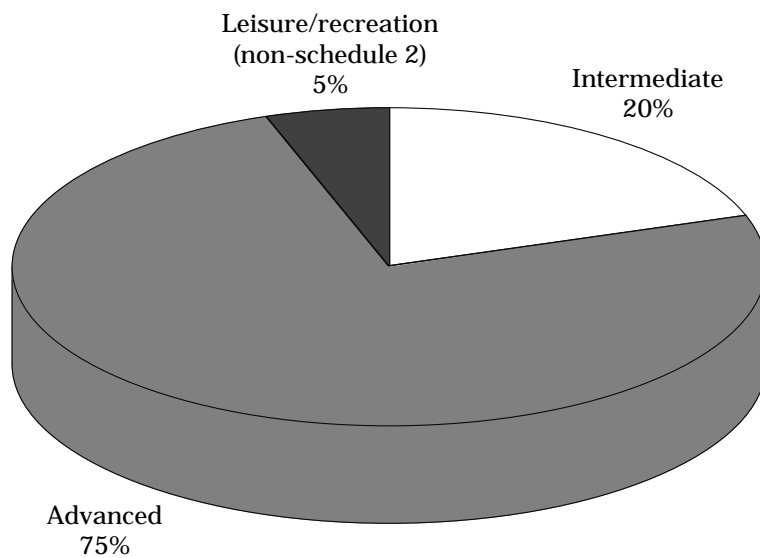


Enrolments: 912

*Note: this chart excludes two enrolments under 16.*

**Figure 2**

**Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)**



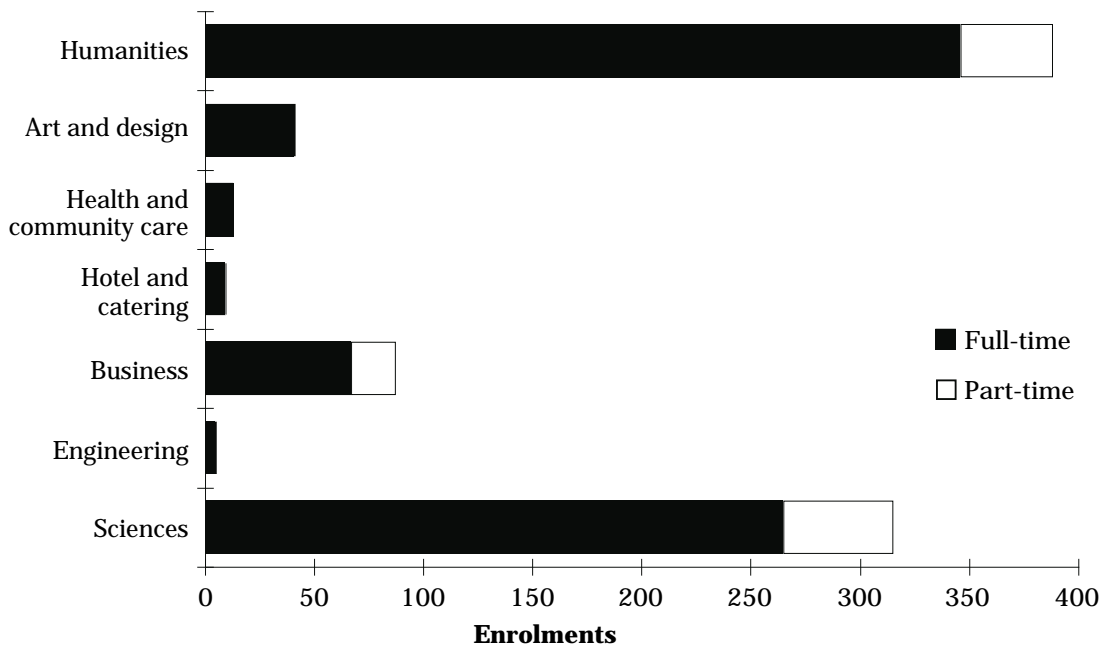
Enrolments: 912

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**Figure 3**

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**Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College: full-time equivalent enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)**



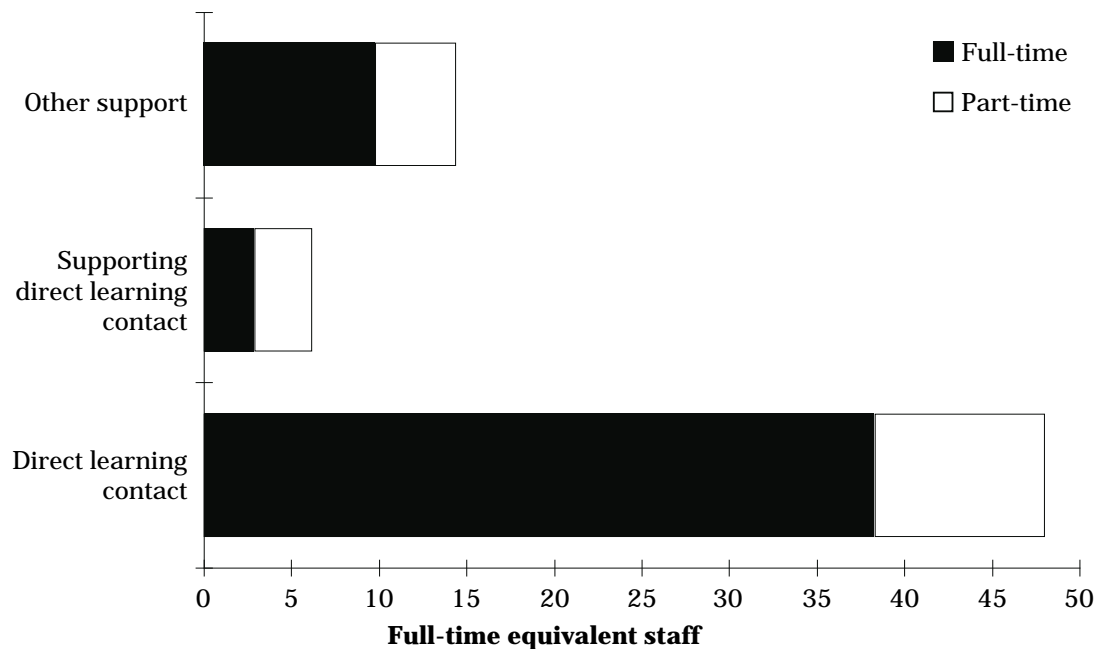
Full-time equivalent enrolments: 862

*Note: this chart excludes 48 non-schedule 2 enrolments.*

**Figure 4**

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**Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)**



Full-time equivalent staff: 69

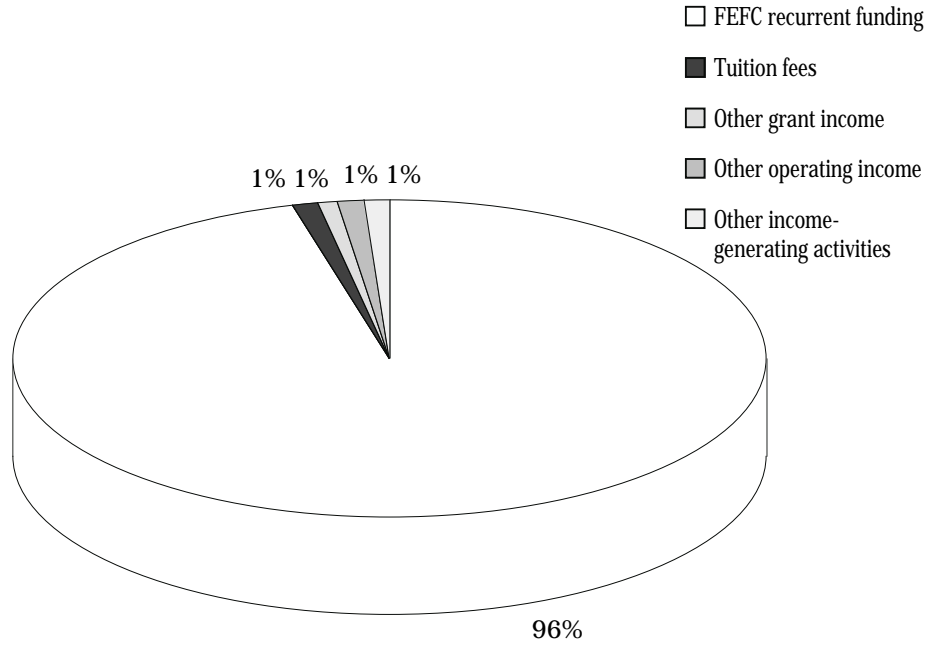
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**Figure 5**

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**Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)**

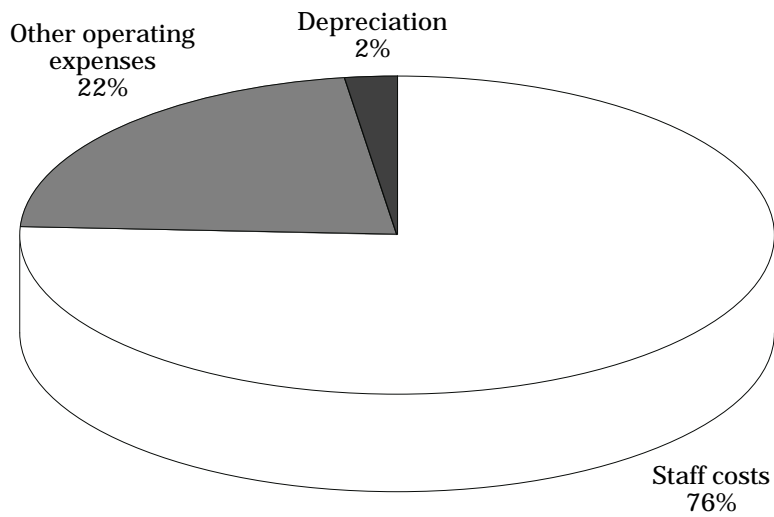


Income: £2,907,000

**Figure 6**

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**Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)**



Expenditure: £2,687,000

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