Derwentside College

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 the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

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

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GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

- *grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses*

- *grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses*

- *grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses*

- *grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths*

- *grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.*

By June 1996, some 329 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 329 colleges are shown in the following table.

College grade profiles 1993-96

	Inspection grades				
Activity	1	2	3	4	5
Programme area	9%	59%	29%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	14%	50%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	12%	54%	30%	4%	<1%

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 61/97

DERWENTSIDE COLLEGE
NORTHERN REGION
Inspected August 1996-February 1997

Summary

Derwentside College in Consett, County Durham, is responsive to the needs of its local community. Governors and managers have guided the college successfully through a period of considerable change. Effective strategic planning has helped the college to improve its performance. Staff are enthusiastic and work well together to promote students' learning. Communications throughout the college are open and consultative. Links with partner schools are effective. A wide range of initiatives has been developed to increase the participation of local people in further education. Marketing and promotional activities are good. The enrolment and induction of students are planned and implemented well. Quality assurance is well organised. The college has invested heavily in computing and information technology facilities, and improved some of its accommodation. To raise further the quality of provision the college should: improve the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; overcome shortcomings in the college's management information systems; improve retention rates on some courses; overcome weaknesses in tutorial and counselling activities; improve staff numbers and expertise in some areas of provision; and develop longer-term plans for the development of equipment and accommodation.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science and mathematics	2	Health and social care	2
Computing and information technology	2	Art and design	2
		Humanities	2
Engineering	3	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	4
Business	2		
Leisure and tourism	2		

INTRODUCTION

1   Derwentside College was inspected in three stages between August 1996 and February 1997. Inspectors spent a total of 63 days in the college. They observed the college's enrolment and induction processes, visited 132 teaching sessions and inspected students' work. Inspectors met representatives of the County Durham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), students, parents, employers, college governors, managers and staff, and a range of other people who have an interest in the college.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2   Derwentside College was established as a tertiary college in 1986 following the decision of Durham Local Education Authority (LEA) to bring together the activities of Consett Technical College and the sixth forms of five local schools. The college is now a major provider of further education in the semi-rural district of Derwentside, which has a population of 86,000. It also serves villages in Weardale, on the moors of south Northumberland and in the Tyne Valley. The college has recently extended its provision of adult and community work in its immediate locality and in more remote locations.

3   The college's main centre occupies a hillside on the western edge of Consett, a town dominated until the 1980s by its steelworks. It also has: two centres in the former coal mining town of Stanley, about eight miles from Consett; one in the mainly residential village of Lanchester; and another in Hexham, the market town of Tynedale district. Low levels of car ownership and poor public transport facilities hinder efforts to increase the participation of local people in education and training. The college is extending its community-based teaching centres and providing transport to help people in outlying districts to travel to the centres.

4   Unemployment in the area is high at 13.7 per cent of the population, compared with the national rate of 7.6 per cent. Youth and long-term unemployment are particularly high. Minority ethnic communities account for less than 0.5 per cent of the population. Within 16 miles to the east of the college lies the conurbation of Tyneside, incorporating the main population centres of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Gateshead. To the south east of the college is the city of Durham. The college competes for students with four colleges based in those centres.

5   The college is one of the largest employers in the district. Only 10 firms in Derwentside employ more than 200 people; 70 per cent of local businesses each employ less than 25 people. Only 2.3 per cent of Derwentside residents are categorised as professional and 22 per cent as management. This compares with 4.6 per cent and 27 per cent nationally. Much work has been done to improve the environment and bring employment to the area following closure of the mining and steel-making industries through the 1970s and 1980s. A range of light industries is now developing in the area. The college, in partnership with the

Derwentside District Council and the TEC, is establishing a management facility on a new site, on land reclaimed from the former steelworks.

6   Sixty-one per cent of college students are female and 99 per cent are white. The majority of the college's 16 to 19 year old students are recruited from local schools, especially its partner schools. The proportion of pupils from partner schools enrolling at the college has declined slightly in recent years: at present it is 39 per cent of the available cohort. The staying-on rate in further education for those schools is 55 per cent. Twenty-two per cent of young people in Derwentside join training schemes, which is around twice the national average. Recruitment to the college from Stanley and Lanchester has increased by 38 per cent and 69 per cent, respectively, since the college opened its new centres. Ninety-four people have enrolled at the Hexham centre in its first year of operation.

7   In 1995-96, the college enrolled 3,732 students of whom 999 were on full-time courses. Student numbers by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2 and 3. The college employs 175 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 89 are teachers. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4.

8   The college offers provision in all the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas except agriculture and construction. The range of courses includes general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects, general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects, and courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and other vocational awards. At the time of the inspection the college had six teaching departments: science and mathematics; humanities and leisure; engineering and information technology; health and caring; communication, art and design; and professional studies.

9   The mission of the college is to be a centre of educational excellence providing a wide range of learning opportunities for local people. It intends to achieve this by:

- offering teaching and support services of the highest quality

- meeting the learning needs of individuals, communities and employers within a supportive and caring environment

- promoting equality of opportunity by increasing access to education

- encouraging students to achieve their maximum potential in terms of personal development as well as educational and employment goals.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

10   The college is committed to contributing to the achievement of national targets for education and training. It provides a broad range of

academic and vocational courses which generally meets the needs of its community. Opportunities for students to progress to higher levels at the college are improving. The number of GNVQs available at foundation, intermediate and advanced level has been increased. NVQs are offered at different levels in many vocational areas. A range of other vocational and skills-based courses is provided through the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) and the RSA Examinations Board (RSA). Recently, the demand for some GCE A level courses has fallen, and the college plans to reduce the number of subjects it offers. Programmes running include:

- 25 GCE A level subjects and nine GCE AS subjects

- 15 GCSE subjects

- 14 GNVQs, including one at foundation level, six at intermediate level and seven at advanced level

- eight full-time NVQs, including one at level 1, five at level 2 and two at level 3. The college also runs a number of part-time NVQ courses.

11 The college is involved in initiatives to increase participation in education and training by people who have traditionally not entered further education. Special courses are offered to women wishing to return to work. In partnership with Derwentside District Council, the college provides enhanced childcare facilities and additional learning support for women in the South Stanley area. The college is using information technology to enable people living in remote areas to study at convenient locations. For example, an innovative vocational training initiative, funded by the European Regional Development Fund, the Rural Development Commission, Northumberland TEC, and the Single Regeneration Budget, enables people living in outlying areas of Durham and Northumberland to access computer-based distance learning packages, from their offices and homes. One hundred and twenty small businesses and individual students have enrolled on this project.

12 There are programmes specifically designed for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college is working with a range of specialist agencies to extend this provision. For example, the Derwentside Unemployed Education and Training courses were developed as a result of a partnership with the Sheltered Housing and Adult Workshop. The college aims to expand this provision on other sites. It is working with people with impaired hearing in Stanley, and intends to support them with special equipment provided at this centre. The range of basic literacy and numeracy programmes is narrow.

13 The college has a clear marketing strategy and there is regular consultation between the marketing staff and others in the college. The marketing team has developed attractive and professionally-produced materials. These have improved the college's image in the community. Market research provides information to support curriculum planning.

Market information is also gleaned from the college's recently-established focus groups that bring together staff, students, members of the community and employers. However, the college has not yet fully analysed the effectiveness or cost benefits of its different marketing activities.

14   There are well-established and productive links with other colleges and universities, local partner schools and special schools. The college is represented on the local tertiary head teachers' forum, and the Derwentside 14 to 19 forum. Useful links have been developed with the Chester-le-Street Schools Consortium, for example pupils are able to join part-time GCE A level courses at the Stanley centre. Collaborative arrangements enable college students to study GCE A level theatre studies in a local secondary school. Students in partner schools can achieve foundation GNVQ units and NVQ level 1 units as part of the national curriculum. The college is a member of the Northern Colleges Network and the principal attends the Durham Principals' Group. Links with universities include: first-year degree courses in education and health with the University of Sunderland; a higher national certificate and diploma programme in total quality management with the University of Salford; and a higher education access programme with the University of Northumbria at Newcastle.

15   The college has been successful in attracting funding from external sources. For example, in 1996, it received £290,000 from the European Social Fund to develop a number of projects, including advanced technical training for the young unemployed and preparatory training for the long-term unemployed. The Single Regeneration Budget has supported a number of developments, including the Stanley South Enhanced Learning Project and the upgrading of college computer networks at Consett.

16   Relationships between the college and County Durham TEC are good. The TEC regards the college as responsive to the needs of local employers and the community. The college has TEC contracts to deliver modern apprenticeships, youth credits and adult guidance. It is founder member of the Derwentside Education and Training Partnership which seeks to promote collaboration between providers of TEC projects. Links with employers are fostered through an employer focus group, intended to identify employers' training needs and to promote the college's services. This has led to the development of some new training initiatives for local firms. However, some employers' representatives indicated that the college does not always respond quickly to requests for assistance, and does not grasp fully their education and training needs. There are no formal links between the college and local employers at programme area level. Few full-cost courses or consultancy services are taken up by employers.

17   Students are able to enrich their main programmes of study through a range of optional activities. All students are able to study accredited courses in information technology skills. GNVQ leisure and tourism

students have the opportunity to gain additional qualifications in sports coaching and modern languages. Other activities include the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, theatre visits and a range of sporting and leisure activities. A number of students have undertaken foreign study tours or exchange visits but the overall number of European activities is small. There is no college policy or strategy for incorporating European themes into the curriculum, and take-up of language courses is generally low.

18   The college's commitment to equality of opportunity is supported by a formal policy and a recently-established harassment statement. The policy lacks a clear implementation strategy. An equal opportunities committee has cross-college representation from enthusiastic staff but it does not have clear terms of reference and progress on a range of issues has been slow.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

19   The corporation has 11 members including the principal and a staff representative. Its membership does not fully reflect the college's growing needs. The board is aware of this and is seeking to extend its membership to 14. It hopes that this will enable it to increase the number of female members: at present there is only one. The chairman of the board is the deputy chairman of the County Durham TEC and serves as the TEC nominee. The clerk to the board is the vice-principal. The board has a number of committees, among them the finance, employment and general purposes committee and the audit committee. Attendance at board and committee meetings is generally good at around 80 per cent, though the finance, employment and general purposes committee is not as well attended.

20   Board meetings are generally managed effectively, though some briefing papers lack focus and debate on key issues is not always rigorous. The board has a register of interests and a code of practice. It carried out a self-assessment of its performance in preparation for inspection. For the last two years it has held an annual general meeting, open to the public, and by combining the most recent one with a Christmas carol concert and other activities it succeeded in attracting over 300 people. Electronic mail is the preferred channel of communication between the college and more than half the governors. Others will join the network in the near future.

21   Board members are kept informed through presentations by the principal and other managers, and through regular reports on the college's progress against a range of performance targets. They do not receive routine reports on health and safety or equality of opportunity matters. Board members are clear about their role and do not involve themselves unduly in operational matters. They attend strategic planning days and other college events, and a number maintain contact with the college through membership of focus groups and other committees. One member

has been particularly helpful in providing support for college developments in information technology. The board has wished for some time to extend its range of contacts with the college, and has begun to tackle this by asking individual members to identify the links they would like to develop. New governors receive induction from the principal and the clerk, and a mentoring scheme has been set up, though it is not yet fully operational.

22   In 1995, in response to a worsening financial position which resulted mainly from the college's failure to achieve its recruitment targets, the college embarked on a period of organisational restructuring. The number of managerial posts was reduced and the amount of delegation of responsibilities was increased. For example, a central student services unit had previously handled most activities relating to student support. The unit was disbanded and its activities passed to the departments. The new structures are straightforward, and roles and responsibilities are clear to both staff and students. Staff generally welcome the shift in responsibilities, though it has meant demanding workloads for some. The college has for the past two years achieved its targets relating to students and finance. A further restructuring was in progress at the time of the cross-college inspection.

23   The teaching and support staff view college management as open, consultative and effective. The reduction in management posts from 22 to 12 has been achieved without compulsory redundancies. The principal is committed to ensuring that communication throughout the college is effective. This is achieved primarily through a range of regular meetings in the two timetabled meeting slots each week, a number of whole-staff meetings led by the principal, and at least two staff-development meetings each term. There is a weekly newsletter and electronic mail is increasingly used as a channel of communication for managers, staff and students, though many staff do not yet have easy access to the system.

24   Strategic planning is led by the principal but staff and governors play a part in determining the plan and setting and monitoring targets. There is no college operating plan and the resource implications associated with targets are not identified. Goals from the strategic plan are allocated as targets to individual managers. Targets for managers are revised periodically to take account of changing circumstances but the revisions do not always record the reasons for changing the targets. College performance targets on recruitment, attendance and achievement provide the framework for target setting by departments. Progress towards targets and goals is reviewed regularly at a range of meetings led by the principal. Departments and teams are not required to produce their own plans to support college plans, though some do so.

25   Departments, sections and teams meet frequently and their meetings are generally effective. The college's academic board has representatives from all parts of the college, and includes two students. It has done useful work, including a recent review of the college's complaints procedures.

The academic board has recognised that it needs to review its role and structures to reflect the changes in the college. The college's provision as a whole is regularly reviewed in relation to market needs and as part of the strategic planning process. Some strategic commitments, for example those relating to flexible learning, modularisation and adult learners, lack strategies to support their implementation. There is no formal system for handling new course approvals outside the strategic planning process, and there are instances of new developments faltering because of this.

26　The college has a number of policy statements. Some of these, such as the health and safety policy, are up to date and comprehensive, while others, such as the information technology policy, are in need of review. Some are statements of intent rather than policies.

27　The college has made good progress in developing its computerised management information system by bringing together a number of separate software packages. Managers are provided with useful data on students and finances. However, the system is not yet fully operational or effectively networked across the main college sites. The information requirements of the different users of the system have not been fully determined. The college recognises the need to refine and improve the system. The information held centrally does not always match that held by course teams. As a result, some staff do not have confidence in the data, and regard providing, accessing and analysing data as a chore, rather than a benefit. Computerised information relating to students is not fully protected against loss of data if the system fails.

28　The college has worked hard over the past two years to achieve sound financial health. It is seeking further efficiency savings and is monitoring its performance against similar colleges in the sector, using benchmarks provided by external consultants. The allocation of budgets for consumable items to cost centres is generally well organised. At departmental level, particularly in courses teams, there is little analysis of costs. Staff have difficulty determining the cost of different aspects of provision, especially when developing new courses.

29　The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1996 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college receives approximately 80 per cent of its recurrent funding from the FEFC. Its average level of funding increased from £19.31 in 1994-95 to £19.51 per unit in 1995-96. Evidence shows that the college's average level of funding will fall for 1996-97. The median for general further education colleges in 1995-96 was £18.13 per unit.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

30　The college provides students with appropriate information to help them choose a suitable study programme. Prospectuses are appealing and informative, and they are supplemented by more detailed course leaflets. Enrolment is orderly and purposeful. Staff are friendly and well briefed on their responsibilities. Admissions staff offer potential students

general advice and specialist teachers follow this up with more detailed information. Some departments provide 'taster' courses for adults.

31   The college's recruitment team undertakes well co-ordinated liaison activities with local partner schools, including two special schools. These activities are highly regarded by parents, who value the opportunity to meet college staff at parents' evenings and through a newly-established focus group for parents. Almost all year 11 pupils in the partner schools attend presentations by college staff. The college has recently introduced a 'shadow a student' scheme whereby groups of year 11 pupils experience a college student's typical day. One group of pupils said they found the experience informative and enjoyable.

32   Induction is well organised. The college has recently given more autonomy to departments and course teams for organising induction activities. All full-time students receive the college charter at induction and sign a learner agreement that clearly sets out their rights and responsibilities. The agreement is included in the handbook for part-time students who also sign a checklist, confirming that it has been explained to them. Some aspects of the induction process need attention. For example, existing or former students enrolling on a further course have to follow the full induction programme again. The needs of new students joining second-year groups are not effectively addressed. Few students take advantage of opportunities to receive credit for their prior learning.

33   The process of identifying and supporting students who need help with literacy and numeracy is generally good. All full-time students are assessed to identify those who could benefit from additional support in a range of subjects. Students with less than four GCSEs at grade C undertake the Basic Skills Agency test to identify those who would benefit from help with English and mathematics. Students on GCE A level courses spoke with enthusiasm of the help they had received in mathematics and chemistry workshops, and of the development of their information technology skills in the learning resource centre. However, attendance at some support sessions is low. In one basic literacy workshop there was only one student present; only three out of 16 students were present in an information technology workshop and no record of attendance was available to inspectors.

34   The tutorial programme as set out in documents is well structured and thorough but it operates with variable effectiveness across the college. All full-time students have a personal tutor and a weekly one-hour tutorial period. Tutors receive appropriate training and can borrow centrally-held learning materials to support their work, including materials on AIDS awareness, drugs education and equality of opportunity. Most students value the progress reviews which take place during tutorials and include updating of records of achievement and individual action planning. However, many students regard the tutorial programme as unproductive and some tutorials are poorly attended.

35   A full-time, professionally-qualified adviser provides careers advice and guidance for students. County Durham Careers Service provides additional support. Speakers from industry and commerce give students more detailed information on specific careers. Many students use the well-resourced careers information and advice centre. Students are encouraged to undertake work experience during their courses and they are advised and supported by the college's work placement manager. The college sets deadlines for completion of higher education application forms. References for students are written by personal tutors and although they are checked by managers there is no house style and some references provide limited information on the students' attainment and potential. A training event for tutors on the writing of references was not well attended.

36   Procedures for monitoring the attendance of full-time students are clear. When a student's attendance falls below a specified level, a concern note is raised by the subject teacher who also informs the personal tutor. Reasons for non-attendance are sought from the student and the action taken is formally recorded. The system works well in most cases but some teachers do not always follow the agreed procedures. There have been delays in passing on information which have reduced the effectiveness of the system. The college is reviewing ways in which the absence of part-time students is monitored and new approaches are being tried at Stanley and Lanchester.

37   A qualified part-time counsellor is available for consultation three hours a week at the Consett centre. Additional support is provided by a member of staff as part of her study for a higher degree. Both counsellors receive supervision of their caseloads: in the case of the full-time member of staff, this is paid for by the college. The time devoted to counselling is small compared with the size of the student body; students' use of counselling support has declined over the last two years. The counselling room is not suitable for its purpose. It lacks privacy. Counselling records are poorly maintained.

38   Good childcare facilities are provided through a creche at the Consett centre. It is well equipped and its staff are well qualified. Free places are offered to students in receipt of benefit but the facilities are not used up to their full capacity. At Stanley there is access to a creche at an adjoining leisure centre. Although there is no creche at the Lanchester centre, the college has arrangements with a number of local registered childminders. All full-time students are guaranteed free travel to the college. The college runs two free buses, which can be used by part-time students if space is available. Students not eligible for LEA travel passes, who are unable to use the special bus service, have their travel expenses reimbursed by the college.

39   The college has an active students' union involving representatives from each tutor group, supported by a member of staff. Full-time students

aged 16 to 19 provide the bulk of the membership. Union affairs are conducted professionally and attendance at meetings is good. The union promotes social events and provides financial support to students for out-of-college activities. It has contact with college management through membership of the academic board and the learning resources centre user group. A focus group for students provides a forum for ideas and suggestions for improvement. There are no students on the board of governors.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

40   Inspectors observed 132 teaching sessions involving 1,397 students. Fifty-seven per cent of the teaching sessions had strengths which outweighed weaknesses. This is lower than the average of 63 per cent for all colleges in the further education sector quoted in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1995-96*. Eleven per cent of the sessions had weaknesses that outweighed the strengths. The average number of students present in the sessions inspected was 11, which represents 76 per cent attendance, compared with the national average for general further education colleges of 73 per cent. The best rate of attendance was on leisure and tourism courses; the lowest was on computing and information technology courses. The following table shows the grades awarded to the sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level	8	14	10	1	0	33
GCSE	0	2	5	2	0	9
GNVQ	3	15	12	3	0	33
NVQ	1	5	5	0	0	11
Other vocational	7	13	6	0	0	26
Other*	2	5	5	6	2	20
Total	**21**	**54**	**43**	**12**	**2**	**132**

* includes access to higher education and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

41   In science and mathematics, teachers kept meticulous records of students' achievements and regularly informed them of their progress. Teachers explained complex topics clearly. Assignments had clear instructions and deadlines for completion. Marking was detailed, fair, and provided appropriate comments. Lesson plans were generally poor. Students were often expected to complete the same work and progress at the same rate, regardless of their experience and ability. For example, on GCE A level courses, teachers aimed their lessons at younger students and did not take sufficient account of the needs of adults in the class. Students were not given enough work to do on their own. Teachers' questions to students were frequently too vague and brought little response.

42   Teaching in computing and information technology was good. Teachers tried hard, though not always successfully, to meet the needs of individual students and to enable them to work at their own speed. Students were encouraged to assess their own work, and record their own progress and achievement. Some teachers provided plain English versions of GNVQ performance specifications to help students understand what they had to achieve. Most assignment briefs had clear information about the criteria for grading the work done: teachers provided supportive comment in their marking of completed work. Few teachers used visual aids. Some learning packages provided to assist students in developing their computing skills contained out-of-date information.

43   Teachers of engineering prepared their lessons well. Students were involved in a range of activities and their attention was maintained successfully. In one lesson for a small group of advanced GNVQ engineering students, the teacher explained a method for calculating approximate areas, and by skilful use of questions kept all the students involved, including some with poor numeracy skills. Technical staff provided good support in workshop and practical sessions. Assessment tasks were set at an appropriate level. The assessment and progress records of some students on NVQ programmes were poorly managed. At NVQ level 3, practical skills were developed and assessed in the college rather than in the workplace which would have been more appropriate. Development of the necessary underpinning knowledge was neglected. Inappropriate clothing was sometimes allowed in workshops.

44   Teaching in business and administration was generally effective. Lessons were well planned. Teachers coped well with the wide ability range in some classes. Good records were kept of students' practical and assignment work. Students on full-time business and secretarial courses benefited from a programme of visits to employers' premises and the links with other colleges in Europe. These features were built into project and assignment work. One group of students examined factors that might attract a manufacturer to the locality. The teacher used current market information and encouraged students to identify the problems and opportunities that might dissuade or attract the firm to relocate to the area. In the NVQ administration programme, too much use was made of simulated work experience in the assessment of student competence.

45   In leisure and tourism, teachers used a wide range of teaching styles, supported by good documentation, to promote learning. In the first year of the advanced GNVQ in leisure and tourism, students undertook a survey to investigate the potential for developing a new community leisure facility. The tutor provided a clear brief for the students and organised them into small teams to produce a survey questionnaire. Students used information technology and communication skills to carry out the research and present their conclusions to the whole class. Staff to student relationships were respectful, supportive and productive. In some lessons, schemes of work

and lesson plans were not clear, and students had insufficient opportunities to develop their numeracy skills.

46 In health and social care, most lessons involved a variety of teaching methods and activities to motivate students. Teachers drew on students' experiences to reinforce learning. Students were encouraged to study on their own or in small groups. For example, on a nursery nursing course students undertook a group project. They were required to locate appropriate sources of information, analyse the data and present their findings to the rest of the class, using a variety of presentation methods. Students responded well and benefited from this challenging activity. Teachers in a minority of lessons did not make sufficiently clear what students were meant to achieve. In a few instances, students were required to take notes for long periods and lost interest in their lesson.

47 Teachers of art and design provided students with challenging projects that incorporated a range of two-dimensional and three-dimensional work. They regularly assessed students' work and kept good records of their achievements. In the specialist studios, students and teachers got on well together and students produced work of good quality. The weaker lessons, often involving large groups, lacked clear aims and objectives, and consequently students were not sure what tasks had to be achieved. As a result their work was sometimes inaccurate or ineffective.

48 Teaching was good in most humanities subjects, though less so in English. In the most effective lessons, teachers drew together the findings of the group at appropriate intervals. Self-assessment sheets were used in history and psychology to enable students to judge their own progress. Some teachers were able to get students to ask searching questions and offer opinions. A well-organised history lesson on the rise of the Nazis involved effective use of video and handouts and thoughtful analysis by the teacher. In English, there was some innovative use of computers but little sharing of good practice. In the less effective lessons students were not given enough guidance on what they were meant to achieve; errors were not corrected by teachers; lessons were ill planned; study time was not well used and learning materials were poorly produced.

49 In the college's courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, much of the teaching lacked rigour. Tasks were not well matched to students' needs and the stated aims of the lesson. Some teachers, though caring, were not aware of the educational implications of students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They used inappropriate teaching strategies and their expectations of students were too low. Many lessons were too long and students had difficulty maintaining their concentration. Information technology was not used routinely to support students' learning. Teachers did not review frequently enough to ensure that students retained what they had learned.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

50   Students aged 16 to 18 taking GCE A level examinations in 1996 scored, on average, 4.0 points per entry (where grade A=10 points, E=2), based on the data in the 1996 performance tables published by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). This places the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Overall GCE A level pass rates declined from 79 per cent in 1995, to 73 per cent in 1996. Students' attendance and retention are poor in some subjects, particularly for part-time students attending in the evening. The destinations of full-time students are recorded and the college keeps partner schools informed. Sixty-six per cent of last year's GCE A level students entered higher education.

51   Eighty-seven per cent of the 70 students in their final year of study in the intermediate vocational courses included in the DfEE's 1996 performance tables were successful. This places the college in the top 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Eighty-six per cent of the 64 students on advanced vocational courses were also successful. This places the college in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Seventy-one per cent of students at the college are over 19 and do not feature in the tables published by the DfEE.

52   Students in the sciences and mathematics were able to write clearly about what they had learnt. Assignments, particularly those produced by adult students, were of a high standard. In practical science sessions, students worked safely. Most GCE A level pass rates were at or above national averages; those for physics were particularly good. Results in GCSE subjects were more variable. In 1996, only 29 per cent of students studying GCSE mathematics in the evening obtained grades A to C.

53   On most courses in computing and information technology, students achieved good pass rates. Pass rates for GCE A level were excellent, at 100 per cent for the past three years. Students often collected information through the college's electronic mail network and the Internet. For example, a student on a computer literacy course gained approved access, electronically, to a space centre in the United States of America and copied digital pictures of Earth to use in an assignment. Students' projects were generally well researched, clearly written and well presented. Some students, particularly adults attending the Stanley centre, found it difficult to develop their computing skills working on their own using learning materials supplied by the college; they would have benefited from direct teaching.

54   Most students in engineering were well behaved, hard working and responded well to questions in the classroom. However, overall success rates are low. Often this is mainly due to poor retention rates, for example, of 22 students enrolled in the first year of the two-year advanced GNVQ in engineering in 1995, only six remained on the course at the time of the

inspection. On the BTEC national diploma course which preceded the GNVQ, only 25 per cent of the students who started the course in 1994 completed it in 1996.

55   The standard of assignment and project work of most students in business compared well with that expected in employment. Students made extensive use of office and information technology to support their studies. In administration, students' work was well presented but did not demonstrate clearly that they had understood the relevant topic. Most success rates were at or above national averages. In 1996, the GCE A level courses in business studies and accounting had excellent pass rates of 100 and 95 per cent respectively. A minority of programmes had poor results, including the GCE A level law, the intermediate GNVQ in business, the BTEC national diploma in business, and the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry secretarial course.

56   In leisure and tourism, most students on GNVQ programmes developed and used information technology skills but did not acquire appropriate numeracy skills. Students on the advanced GNVQ in leisure and tourism displayed good practical skills in a coaching session as part of the community sports leadership programme. Pass rates on the GCE A level sports studies course were adequate, but pass rates in the foundation and advanced GNVQ leisure and tourism were poor.

57   Students in health and social care worked well in groups. For example, in a nursery nurse group, students shared decision making and delegated responsibilities. They produced good written work in assignments. Achievement rates were at or above national averages.

58   In art and design courses, students developed good practical skills, including drawing skills. Part-time calligraphy students produced excellent work. Vocational students undertook effective research, especially that involving fashion and textiles. On the intermediate and advanced GNVQs in art and design, students produced written work of high quality. Students made good use of computers to illustrate their work. Pass rates for students on GNVQ programmes and those entered for GCSE examinations were good. Although the proportion of higher grades in GCE A level subjects was below the national average, students' achievements were better than those predicted on the basis of their GCSE results. Many students lacked confidence when talking about their studies.

59   Students on humanities courses were hard working and many performed well. In 1996, a GCE A level geography student received a certificate of excellence from the Oxford Board and the National Geographic Society. Students on one-year GCE A level and GCSE programmes generally achieved pass rates better than comparable national averages. Results were more variable for students on two-year GCE A level programmes. In 1996, examination results, particularly at the higher grades, were poor in English language and communication studies. The results for English literature, which had been good for many years,

declined slightly in 1996. Many students on sociology and child development courses, and on the access course, did not complete their studies.

60   The majority of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities had not gained any nationally-recognised qualifications after attending college for some years. While some students appeared to enjoy their studies and had gained in confidence, others were bored and uninterested. Too many students depended on teachers for instruction and sat for long periods waiting for help. They spent too much time repeating work they had done before, sometimes at a more advanced level.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

61   The college charter is well designed and informative. It contains measurable standards for the level of service that students should expect from the college. It is reviewed on a two-year cycle and a thorough revision took place in 1996. Students and the community were fully involved in the review process and many of their suggestions for improvement are included in the new version. New and separate charters are now available for community groups, employers and work-placement providers. They contain equally clear service standards. The degree to which the various targets in the charters are achieved is systematically monitored. Students are generally familiar with the charter and make good use of it. The charter has not been adapted to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties.

62   The college's quality assurance policy incorporates long-standing processes for monitoring and evaluating provision. Its self-assessment report on quality assurance is lucid, honest and humorous, and charts college progress from what it calls a 'primeval soup' era to the present well-developed system. Full-time staff at all levels in the college are committed to developing an approach to quality improvement based on individual and team responsibility. Part-time staff are less aware of quality assurance issues. Operational responsibility for quality assurance rests with the vice-principal and the quality manager who, with the staff-development officer, form the college's quality team. They are rapidly refining the quality assurance process though, as yet, not all areas of the college are fully involved. Quality standards, expressed as entitlements, are in place for all academic departments and for some cross-college functions. Identified staff are responsible for ensuring that the standards are achieved. Students receive details of the standards at their induction but, some have difficulty understanding the terminology. A quality manual describes the college's procedures and the quality assurance systems used by the external agencies with whom the college works, such as the TEC. Some college staff have not seen the manual and are not aware of its relevance to them.

63   The setting of achievement targets across the college is led by the principal who sees the process as a key management tool to ensure

achievement of the college's mission. All teams are involved in developing their own performance targets, and this has increased staff motivation and their awareness of national quality assurance benchmarks. Reports are regularly produced on achievement against targets and compared with FEFC performance indicators. Reports on quality issues are prepared for the senior management team and the governors. The present uncertainty about the role and terms of reference of the academic board needs to be resolved.

64   The college's monitoring and evaluation systems require course teams to hold termly meetings, with standard agenda items. Teams produce action plans which are monitored by departmental managers and the quality manager. In most cases, appropriate remedial action is taken. However, some course teams and individual staff are insufficiently aware of the systems and do not effectively monitor and evaluate their provision. Students are not represented on course review teams. There is a procedure for observing teaching in the classroom which staff find useful. Observation proforma, based on the FEFC model, are used by departmental managers or peers to provide constructive feedback to those observed. The principal also conducts observations and provides useful oral and written comment on individual performance.

65   Students and employers regularly evaluate the college provision through questionnaires but these are not fully effective. Students with learning difficulties are helped to complete their evaluations. Students are not aware of any summary or analysis of their views or of any improvements which have resulted from the surveys. The student complaints procedure is clear, and detailed records are kept of any action taken. The recently-established focus groups for parents, community representatives, employers and students are providing useful feedback on perceptions of the college. External verifier reports are reviewed by the principal who identifies any action required by course teams.

66   All support and cross-college services have clearly-defined performance targets which staff monitor vigorously but informally. Quality standards have been developed for some cross-college functions. Progress on integrating them with the overall college quality assurance framework is slow. Cross-college services are evaluated by students through questionnaires. Some areas, such as reception, produce their own questionnaires to obtain more detailed students' views of their performance.

67   The college has sensitively handled the introduction of a formal staff-appraisal system which is seen by staff as supportive. Participants in appraisal have received training which they appreciated. So far, 25 per cent of the teaching staff have been appraised which is in line with the target to complete the cycle within two years. No support staff have been appraised.

68   Staff development is generally well managed and integrated with the college's quality assurance system. Staff are informed of the training opportunities available to them. Their entitlement to development activities is prominently displayed around the college. The college is in the final stages of preparing for the Investors in People award and this is linked to the staff-development programme. Staff-development needs are identified through course team reviews, a training needs analysis across the college and through the appraisal of individual staff. Evaluation of staff-development activities is largely informal. It lacks rigour and there are insufficient links between staff-development activities and the achievement of strategic goals. There are notable gaps in training. For example, some staff are unfamiliar with their new cross-college roles and are not yet receiving appropriate training. The staff-development officer lacks appropriate computer and administrative support.

69   The college's self-assessment report was developed in an open and collaborative way. The report follows the headings used in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. A wide range of groups linked to the college were consulted on its development. The college found the production of departmental and programme area self-assessment reports valuable, and now includes these in its annual quality improvement cycle. Although the college did not assign grades to its provision, many of its judgements accorded with those of the inspectors. Some weaknesses were not identified, though they were addressed through specific improvement targets recorded in the action plan.

RESOURCES

Staffing

70   Teachers and support staff are equally valued by the college and they work productively together. Seventy-five per cent of the full-time teaching staff have a degree or a higher degree: 80 per cent have a teaching qualification. Nearly a third of full-time teachers, concentrated in three of the six departments, are qualified to assess the practical competence of students in NVQ programmes. Thirty-six per cent of teaching time is provided by part-time staff. Not all teachers have the appropriate qualifications or experience to support their work, for example those responsible for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and in areas of engineering.

71   Both technician and administrative support staff work well together and have willingly accepted additional roles and responsibilities. For example, staff in the learning resource centre at Consett now manage the college's electronic mail facilities and have undertaken training to enable them to contribute to the assessment of students' computer literacy. The level of administrative and secretarial support is generally sufficient to meet needs. Technician support is adequate in most specialist areas of the college but only two full-time computer technicians support the

college's rapidly developing and complex computer network. The number of staff and level of expertise are inadequate to support the system.

72   Staff are generally well deployed. In some areas, however, there are insufficient specialist teachers with appropriate expertise to ensure that classes can be appropriately staffed. For example, there is only one full-time physicist. There are appropriate policies and procedures covering personnel matters. These are included in a staff handbook but it is not issued to all staff. Full-time staff can obtain it for reference purposes but many part-time staff are unaware of its existence.

Equipment/learning resources

73   The college's teaching equipment is generally adequate to support the curriculum, and is particularly good at the college's main community-based centres. Most classrooms have writing boards, projection screens, blackout blinds and overhead projectors. Teachers have easy access to television and video-playback facilities. The Stanley and Lanchester centres have large video screens that project high-quality television and computer-generated images. An induction loop system is installed in all rooms at Stanley to assist hearing impaired students. The college's reprographics facilities generally provide quick copying of teachers' handouts but in a few areas, worksheets are poorly copied and some part-time staff have complained of delays in the service. The leisure and tourism baserooms lack an appropriate range of audio and video equipment and projection screens. The blinds in many computing rooms do not block daylight sufficiently, so that images on computer screens are difficult to see.

74   High-quality specialist resources are provided in some areas, for example in ceramics, graphics, media, photography, and hairdressing. In other areas, equipment is not available in sufficient quantities or to current industrial standard. Mechanical engineering equipment is generally poor; there is no modern computer-controlled machinery. Health and fitness equipment is inadequate. There are insufficient resources in health and social care: students require access to more wheelchairs and bed-making facilities. The training office used to develop secretarial competencies has insufficient office equipment. There is no planned, prioritised capital equipment replacement programme.

75   The college has invested in high-quality software and computing equipment networked across all centres, though these resources are not available in all staff workrooms. The ratio of students to workstations is excellent at 6:1. All students have easy access to electronic mail and the World Wide Web through the Internet, which is part of a regional college partnership initiative, supported by the competitiveness fund. Technical difficulties, however, plague the system; the networks linking college centres were not operating during the inspection; compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases that allow students to select from a wide

range of disk-based information were also out of action. There are generally sufficient relevant and up-to-date textbooks for most students and good facilities in the learning resource centres in Consett and Stanley. Bookstocks for some specialist courses, however, are poor, for example music and art.

Accommodation

76   The main college centre in Consett occupies a diverse range of buildings dating from 1900 to 1962 including a former grammar school and the Consett Mechanics Institute. The steeply-sloping site has six main teaching blocks connected by a covered bridge, a covered walkway, and a number of internal and external paths. Areas are clean, tidy and reasonably well maintained. The main entrances at all centres are attractive and well furnished, though some other areas remain drab and in need of decoration. The newly-built Stanley and refurbished Lanchester centres provide high-quality accommodation. Displays of learning materials and students' work are used in a number of subject-specific baserooms. Over 80 per cent of students responding to a survey stated they were satisfied with college accommodation.

77   Maintenance and heating costs at the Consett centre are high. Security is good at the main Stanley centre, where a closed-circuit television surveillance system is in operation, and at Lanchester. Numerous entrances and a lack of security systems prevent effective monitoring of unwanted visitors at Consett. The college tries to meet the needs of students with restricted mobility, though the many levels at Consett restrict access for wheelchair users. The ground-floor accommodation at Stanley and Lanchester are fully accessible and both have toilet facilities for students with disabilities. Car parking is good at all centres except Consett. Signposting to all sites is poor.

78   The refectory at Consett is attractive and well used but at peak times becomes overcrowded. The learning resource centres at Consett and Stanley are spacious, attractive and well furnished, as is the careers and information centre located close to the main entrance at Consett. The hairdressing salon is bright and airy. Vending machines are provided at Stanley and Lanchester. The latter does not have suitable areas nearby for students to consume snacks. The college has its own sports hall and fitness centre at Consett, and there is a public swimming pool nearby. There are good sports facilities near the Stanley centres.

79   The college's accommodation strategy dates back to 1993. It does not identify options and priorities linked to an analysis of needs. A survey commissioned in 1996 from external consultants revealed poor utilisation of accommodation. A planned maintenance programme for accommodation produced in 1994 is out of date and work scheduled for the 1996-97 academic year has not started. The college does not have a policy covering environmental issues.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

80   The college has made significant progress towards achieving its mission. Its particular strengths include:

•   effective governance and management

•   sound strategic planning

•   effective internal communications

•   responsiveness to the local community and effective links with partner schools

•   effective initiatives which have increased participation in education and training

•   effective marketing

•   well-planned and well-implemented student enrolment and induction processes

•   a clear quality assurance framework

•   good information technology facilities.

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

•   improve the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

•   overcome the shortcomings in the management information systems

•   improve teaching in some areas and the quality of tutorial and counselling activities

•   improve retention rates and examination pass rates on some courses

•   ensure that all areas of provision have sufficient appropriately-qualified staff

•   attend to the shortcomings in equipment and accommodation.

FIGURES

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

Figure 1

Derwentside College: percentage student numbers by age (as at November 1996)

☐ Under 16
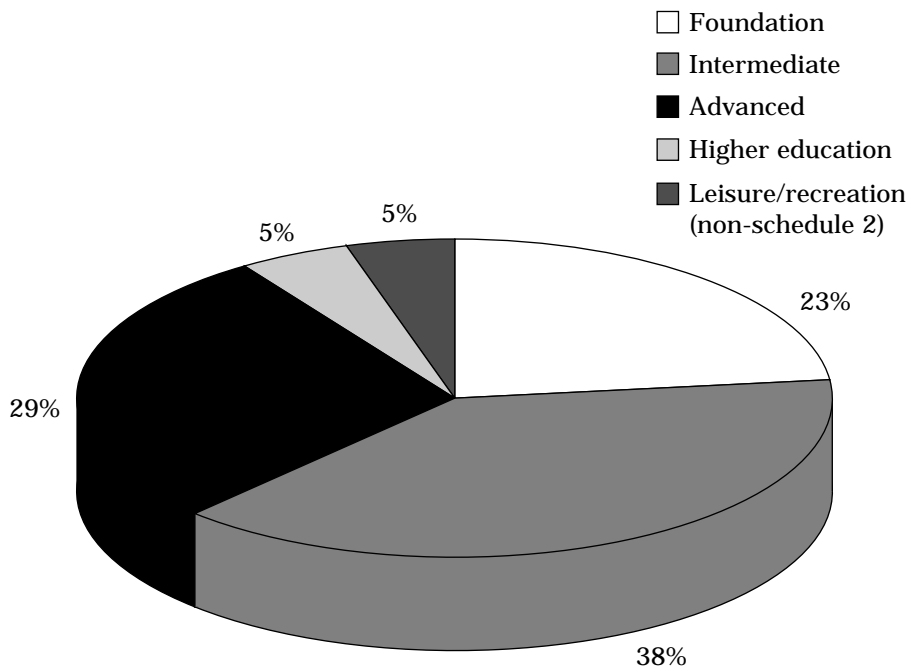▨ 16-18 years
■ 19-24 years
☐ 25+ years
▨ Not known

1%   5%

24%

57%

13%
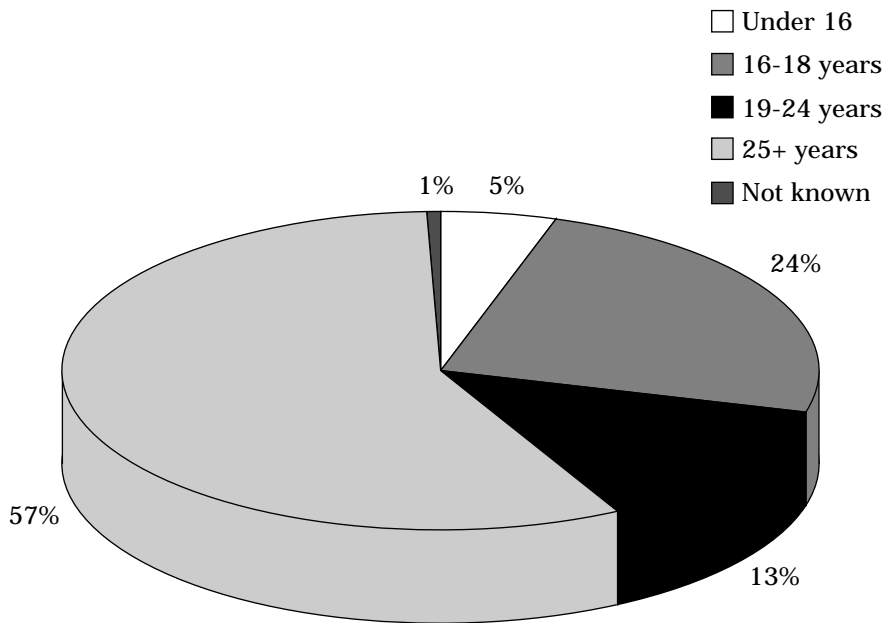
Student numbers: 3,732

Figure 2

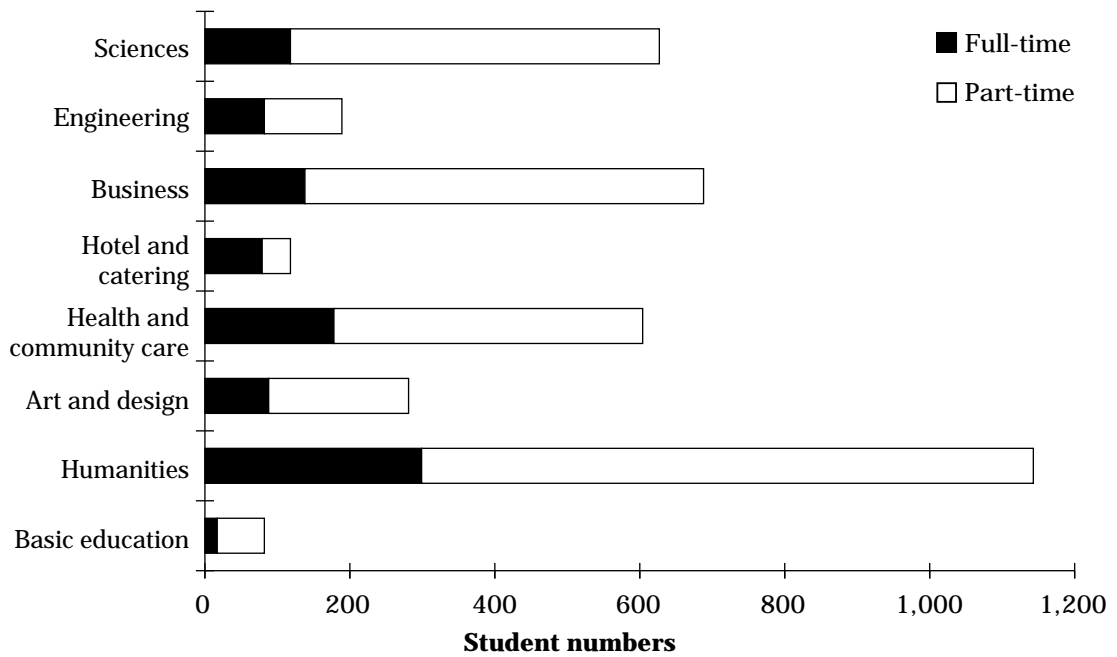**Derwentside College: percentage student numbers by level of study (as at November 1996)**

☐ Foundation
▨ Intermediate
■ Advanced
☐ Higher education
▨ Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)

5%   5%

23%

29%

38%

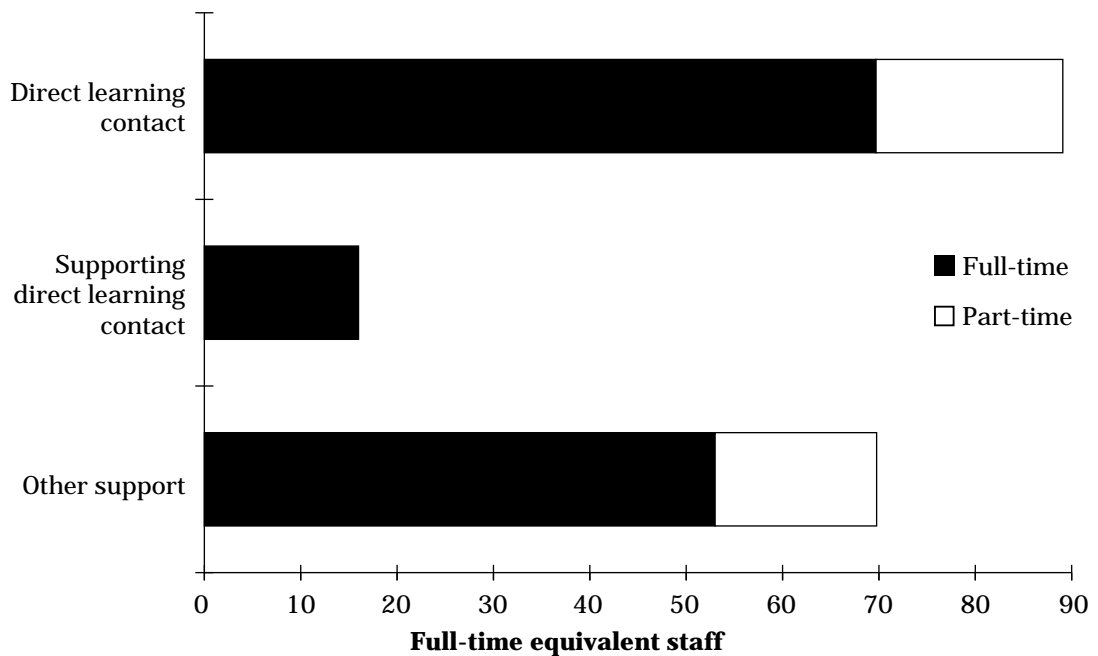Student numbers: 3,732

Figure 3

Derwentside College: student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at November 1996)

Student numbers: 3,732

Figure 4

Derwentside College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at January 1997)

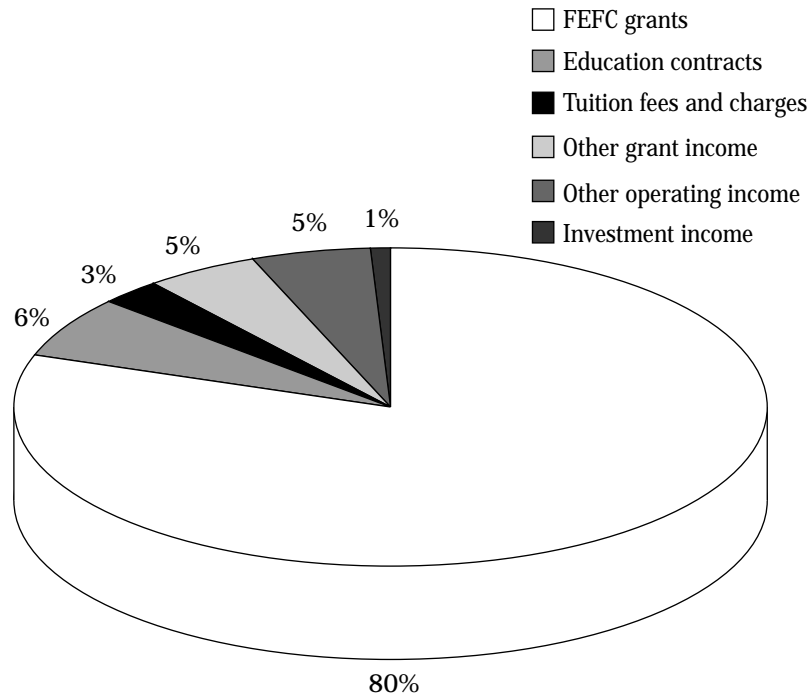Full-time equivalent staff: 175

Figure 5

Derwentside College: income (for 12 months to July 1996)

□ FEFC grants
▨ Education contracts
■ Tuition fees and charges
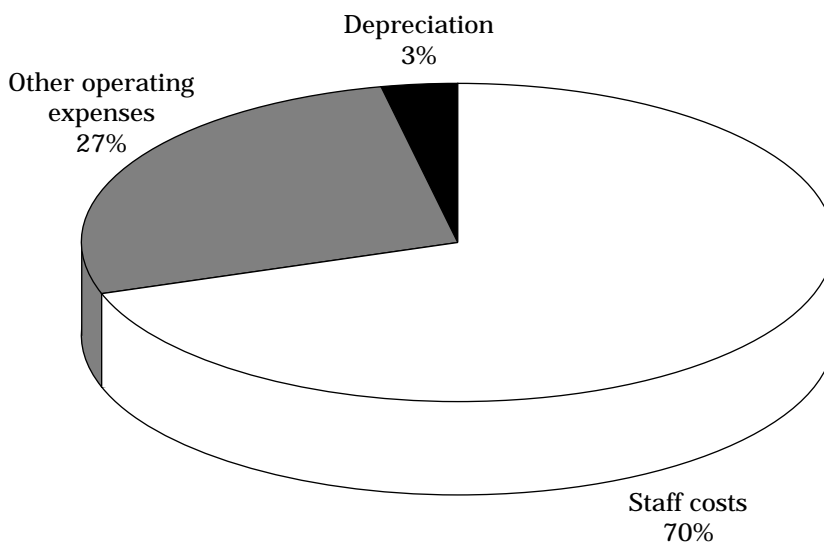□ Other grant income
▨ Other operating income
■ Investment income

Income: £5,379,000

Figure 6

Derwentside College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1996)

Expenditure: £5,323,000