

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

**Leek College
of Further
Education and
School of Art**

May 1995

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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 59/95

LEEK COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION AND SCHOOL OF ART WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Inspected May 1994 - February 1995

Summary

Leek College of Further Education and School of Art is a small further education college serving students from scattered towns and villages in the Staffordshire Moorlands. Many students travel some distance to reach the college. It offers a wide range of full-time, part-time and recreational courses for students of all abilities. Staff have been enterprising in designing new courses to meet the needs of employers. An effective and professional approach to marketing is raising the profile of the college. There are strong links with the local community, employers, external agencies and some schools. The college is well governed and well managed: the corporation members understand their responsibilities and are clear about the college's future direction and development, and skilful and effective senior management promote the attention to quality that is evident throughout the college. Internal communications are good. Staff are committed to the aims of the college and provide a personal and caring atmosphere for students. The effective teaching and learning is supported by good tutorial assessment and assistance. Students on vocational courses achieve outstanding examination results and few students leave before completing their studies. The college should extend its computerised management information system; develop further its performance indicators; continue to improve its accommodation; provide where possible better access for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; and improve the library bookstock.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science	3	Art and design	2
Engineering	2	Humanities	2
Business and office administration	2	Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
Health and social care	2		

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INTRODUCTION

1 Leek College of Further Education and School of Art was inspected between May 1994 and February 1995. The college's enrolment and induction arrangements were inspected in the first week of September 1994. Specialist subject areas were inspected between 5-6 May and 1-3 November 1994. Cross-college provision was inspected during the week commencing 13 February 1995.

2 In all, 10 inspectors visited the college and 48 inspector days were used. Inspectors visited 100 classes and scrutinised samples of students' written and practical work. They held discussions with corporation members, staff, students, parents, local employers, heads of local schools and representatives of the local community and of the Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

3 Leek College of Further Education and School of Art has its origin in the Mechanics Institute founded in the town in 1867. By 1891, instruction was being provided in scientific, technical, commercial, domestic and manual matters, and in 1900 teaching was transferred to the present site. In 1981 the Further Education College amalgamated with the School of Art to form the current college. Along with its site in the centre of town, community outreach provision is offered in Biddulph. In 1988, the college pioneered a business centre to sell high-quality training to industry. In 1990 it became one of the first United Kingdom educational institutions to sell training in Czechoslovakia.

4 The college serves a wide area, broadly comprising the Staffordshire Moorlands and the easterly edge of the urban conurbation of Stoke. The region is primarily rural and contains the three towns of Biddulph, Cheadle and Leek. The present population of the Moorlands is about 95,500. The Staffordshire Moorlands has a 6 per cent unemployment rate compared with 10.5 per cent for Staffordshire as a whole. Those aged under 25 make up 31 per cent of all unemployed people in the area. There is a small minority ethnic population constituting 0.4 per cent of the total.

5 The Moorlands has many small to medium-sized businesses and a few large national companies. Thirty-five per cent of businesses are in manufacturing, mining and engineering. Retail and other services account for 23 per cent; tourism, distribution, hotel and catering 23 per cent; agricultural and construction 11 per cent; and business and finance 9 per cent.

6 The college operates in a competitive environment. There are six schools offering sixth form provision including two in the town of Leek. There are also five colleges within a 14-mile radius of Leek. The college's mission refers to 'providing the highest quality standards of education, training and recreational opportunities in the Staffordshire Moorlands and its environs, through programmes based on individual recognition,

attainment, equality of access, flexibility and relevance'. It also affirms a commitment to 'the spirit of partnership as a means of ensuring that the skills base of the community matches national standards'. To improve access, the college provides support for students' transport and nursery provision.

7 The college has 2,349 student enrolments approximating to 1,030 full-time equivalent students. Enrolments increased by 12.6 per cent in 1993 and by 8.3 per cent by November 1994. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. The college employs 67 full-time staff and 142 part-time staff of whom 67 per cent are lecturers and 33 per cent are support staff. A staff profile with staff expressed as full-time equivalents is shown in figure 3.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 Staff throughout the college are knowledgeable about current further education issues and the government's aims and policies for the sector. The college's mission and strategic objectives have been widely and well communicated. A successful innovation was the distribution to all teaching staff of a small plastic card that contains the college's mission statement on one side and the national targets for education and training on the other.

9 Vigorous and comprehensive marketing has successfully created a commitment to customer service that permeates curriculum planning. Timetables have been made flexible and responsive. All students taking Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications are entitled to attend courses in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) English and mathematics. Other initiatives, some of which have been partially assisted by the introduction of learning-resource centres, include flexibility for students in determining their programmes of study, ease of transfer between programmes and entitlement to core studies.

10 There is a wide range of full-time and part-time courses together with leisure and recreational opportunities. The college offers 21 GCSE subjects, 26 General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects, and eight GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects. There is an extensive range of vocational courses including those leading to qualifications from the Engineering Training Authority (ENTRA), RSA Examinations Board, City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G), and CENTRA (Educational Services) Ltd. The BTEC first and national diplomas, and intermediate and advanced General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) are offered in art and design, information technology, nursery nursing, health and social care, leisure and tourism, manufacturing, business, science, and fashion. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 4.

11 All full-time staff are aware of the importance of developing vocational qualification programmes for post-16 students. The advanced GNVQ courses have parity with GCE A level in the eyes of students and staff. The

college's equal opportunities policy has helped planning for learning needs and has stimulated access provision for women returning to education. Curriculum planning has also given emphasis to serving the needs of local business, industry and commerce through the development of relevant and flexible programmes of study. The local employers' network sees a continuing improvement in the college's responsiveness and professionalism in its dealings with industry.

12 The college has established good links with local business and industry, particularly through the training courses that it offers. Four advisory groups, which include representatives of local commerce and industry, meet about three times each year. The college has a good reputation within the commercial and industrial community for the provision of training credits. Employers receiving students on work placement valued their contacts with the college and commented favourably on its quick and willing responses to training needs.

13 There are productive links with the Staffordshire TEC. The college has co-operated in several important TEC projects, including work-related further education, GNVQ development, the competitive fund and European projects. It has been enterprising in carrying out its own surveys as part of the work-related further education programme, as well as in undertaking employer visits. The college is an authorised training centre for AutoCAD computer-aided design systems and has been particularly successful in offering training for employers using computer-aided design facilities.

14 A significant and enterprising venture has been the establishment of Moorlands Training Services Ltd as a wholly-owned company to provide full-cost courses for industry. Training of a high standard has been undertaken for local industry. The college has also responded to the demand for training in new and emerging skills and for adult re-training. It has recently started a franchising initiative to improve and accredit National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) for local companies with in-house training. A college project run in partnership with Staffordshire TEC and Staffordshire County Council, and jointly funded through the European Social Fund, has been highly successful in the development of 'teleworking courses' for workers located away from a central office. This method of working was identified as having particular potential for the economic regeneration of the area. In conjunction with its partners, the college piloted the first teleworking certificate accredited by C&G at level 2. As a result of these pilot ventures, the college acts nationally on behalf of C&G and the Telecottage Association to validate and register centres delivering the teleworker qualification. A second telecentre has been established at the college's Biddulph site. The venture partnership has also supported the development of a vocational qualification for telecentre supervisors or managers.

15 Liaison with some secondary schools is longstanding and has evolved from the technical and vocational education initiative. The college

participates in career events, provides information on courses and gives advice to potential applicants from the schools. Twenty-six students from one school attend GNVQs in business studies and engineering studies for one day each week. Students from schools are taken by bus to the Leek and Biddulph sites.

16 Strong links are forged with parents, including a parents' evening in the week before induction. Importance is attached to the relationship with parents throughout a student's career at the college. Parents of students aged under 18 receive helpful and detailed reports each term. Parents had much praise for all aspects of the college's provision and its helpful attitude.

17 The college has built on its community links and carefully nurtured new and productive relationships with special interest groups. Links with the Moorlands Town Partnership, which was set up to enhance the image and appearance of Leek, have led to the involvement of students in several design projects in the town centre. A full range of part-time day and evening leisure and recreational programmes has been designed to meet the needs of the local community which regular college surveys have identified. These include an 'over 60s' group and a group for people who are blind or partially sighted.

18 Constructive links have been made with higher education. These have been effective in promoting the expansion of adult access courses. There is a memorandum of partnership with Staffordshire University and the college belongs to the Staffordshire University Project for Access. The college and the university are also members of a steering group established to develop a 'university of the third age' in the area. The college currently offers a C&G teaching qualification and is collaborating with Manchester Metropolitan University in the development of a certificate of education.

19 The college took over responsibility for adult basic education in the Staffordshire Moorlands from Staffordshire County Council in September 1994. Its positive response to the demand for return-to-study courses has raised the numbers on access courses from 10 adult students in 1990 to over 100 in 1994-95. Opportunities for women returners include a wide range of modular programmes designed for women who are newly entering the job market or seeking to update their skills. During the summer period the college also provides a range of preparatory return-to-study courses for adults. The college has an adult basic education policy and is working towards the quality standards required by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit.

20 The college has a wide range of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The provision is relatively large for adults with severe learning difficulties and there is a small, full-time course for students with moderate learning difficulties. There is effective liaison with special schools, social workers, voluntary organisations, day centre groups and groups for visually impaired mature students.

21 The college has produced marketing plans regularly since 1988. The most recent plan, updated in December 1994, is a comprehensive document which draws on student enrolment, tracking and destination surveys, in-house and independent market research, and a variety of statistical data from other external sources. The plan identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It also includes appraisals of previous marketing performance. The effectiveness of the college advertising has been enhanced by the use of an advertising agency and public relations consultants. This has led to the adoption of a standard format for all college publicity and a coherent advertising strategy in the local press and radio. The college has successfully used advertising on the two local radio stations. The promotional material is extensive and includes an adult prospectus, a college factfile, and a parents' booklet.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

22 The college is well governed by a committed and effective board. The members have a good appreciation of their strategic role and provide overall direction and support while leaving college managers free to manage the institution. The corporation has 16 members including the principal. There are eight representatives of industry, commerce and the professions. Three members are co-opted. There is a community representative, and a member nominated by Staffordshire TEC. There is also a staff member and a student member. A new chairman has been appointed recently. A review of the size of the corporation and of its subcommittees is planned. This is timely as there are currently four vacancies on the board.

23 Members have fully discussed the strategic plan. The aims and mission of the college are frequently discussed by the corporation to monitor the progress made in achieving them. Three weekend conferences have helped them to understand the business of the college, develop good relations with the principal and senior managers, and determine the context within which the college operates. The financial skills of the members of the resources committee have assisted the board to conduct thorough reviews of the college's financial position. Members' expertise has also been valuable in considering personnel and marketing policies. The audit and remuneration committees meet regularly.

24 There is a simple and effective management structure. The principal, three functional directors, the director of the college limited company, three curriculum directors and two cross-college managers constitute the college management team. Senior managers work well together. Each director has responsibility for a range of college functions. Within directorates management structures are uncomplicated.

25 Senior management provides effective leadership. Staff understand and strongly support the college's aims, are keen to see the college succeed and are aware of the part they have to play. Staff consider they are properly

valued by their line managers and work well together. A smooth progression to new contracts for almost all staff has helped to maintain unity. Communications within the college are good. Staff spoke approvingly of the efforts that are made to keep them informed of developments at the college. A briefing for all staff is held weekly after the college management team meeting. It provides a succinct report to staff on the discussions and decisions of the college management team, and gives staff the opportunity to raise issues with managers.

26 Curriculum areas are well managed. Regular meetings are held and there is appropriate consultation when decisions are taken. Staff in curriculum areas have developed their own strategic plans which contribute to, and reflect, the college's strategic plan.

27 The college has a range of policies and committees have been set up to develop their implementation. There are specific equal opportunities policies on gender, race, staff, and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is a health and safety policy which is closely monitored. A policy for conservation and improvement of the environment, linked to an environmental review and specified action areas, was agreed in November 1994.

28 Allocation of financial responsibility is clear and budget holders receive detailed monthly financial information. Budget allocations are negotiated between the director of finance and budget holders. The college management is moving towards unit costing. Careful attention has been paid to the deployment of staff resources through reviews of the work practices of teaching and non-teaching staff. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. In 1994-95, the college's average level of funding per unit is £17.99. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £18.17.

29 The college's enrolment targets have been achieved. Retention rates on courses are monitored and the college is successful in retaining a very high proportion of the students it enrolls. Destination statistics are collected and presented appropriately across the college.

30 Although the college has a computerised information system it provides only basic information. The college undertook to be a pilot for the individualised student record project in conjunction with a commercial software house. Considerable staff time was devoted to this activity but at the time of the inspection the software had not arrived. This has delayed the development of a more comprehensive computerised management information system. There are personnel and financial systems in place. The college examination results are computerised and there is a computerised costing system for the delivery of short courses. For other information, however, the college has to rely on paper records, local databases and spreadsheet applications to produce college information and returns for the Department for Education and the Further Education

Funding Council (FEFC). There is a computerised management information system policy for the future, but the strategy document was last updated in November 1993. This issue needs to be resolved urgently so that a comprehensive and effective system can be established to support the running of the college.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

31 The college is vigorous and enterprising in promoting the opportunities which it offers for study. Considerable effort is put into ensuring that promotional material is well presented and informative. The Parents' Guide sent to the parents of each prospective student is an interesting innovation. The college has an exhibition van which tours the surrounding area in spring and summer and is used at public events in the county. Staff attend careers evenings in schools up to 20 miles away. In the college itself there are well-attended open days, information evenings for the careers service and schools careers teachers, and other events for new students and their parents. Schools receive invitations to bring parties of pupils in years 10 and 11 to visit the college, though few accept. There are good relationships, involving link courses, with the two special schools in the locality. Events are organised for the 'adult learners week' and there are information evenings for adults. The college is also open on Saturday mornings for information and advice.

32 Customer care is given a high profile. Reception staff undergo training in customer relations and have a thorough knowledge of the college and the opportunities it offers. Students commented on the value of the information and general help and advice they received, and on the consideration they were given in deciding on a specific course. Care is taken in arranging interviews to ensure that applicants for full-time courses are interviewed by an appropriate specialist. School pupils are encouraged to bring their records of achievement to their interviews, although few do so.

33 The week-long induction for new full-time students is carefully organised. There are planning meetings for staff and guidance is issued to them on the conduct of the week's activities. An important element of the induction process is the opportunity for students to identify and prioritise learning goals, and for individual action plans to be drawn up and agreed. This provides a firm foundation for tutorial activities. A well-produced handbook gives relevant information to support the induction process and the tutorial programme.

34 The tutorial system encourages the development of a strong working relationship between personal tutor and student. The student is given individual and confidential guidance and support as well as a structured programme of information and activities related to careers and progression routes. A particularly strong feature of tutorial support is the appraisal process. Tutors formally meet each student three times a year to discuss

the student's progress. At these meetings progress reports are reviewed and an action plan is drawn up which the tutor monitors over the next half term. This system of individual support also ensures that the tutor is well placed to help students to transfer between subjects or courses and to give informed advice on progression. Meetings of tutors are held regularly to co-ordinate and to share good practice. Co-ordinated arrangements for the tutorial support of part-time students need to be developed.

35 Careers guidance and counselling services are appreciated by students and are well used. Three members of the student services team provide counselling on demand. If necessary they give students continuing counselling or refer them to a specialist outside agency. The college has a service agreement with the Staffordshire Careers Service whose personnel co-operate effectively with the student services staff. They contribute to the induction programme and see students in college by appointment throughout the year. They also run group sessions in college. Students can call at their nearby office where extensive resources are available. In the college, careers resources need to be built up in a permanent location. Students value the service given by careers and student services staff when examination results are released in August.

36 A policy on the accreditation of prior learning has been developed recently, together with guides for tutors and applicants. The process is being piloted in business studies.

37 Applications, interviews and enrolment forms could be improved to enable the college to have early information on individual students' additional learning needs. Diagnostic testing in core skills is carried out, but not routinely across the college. Students would benefit from the creation of a learner support unit which could provide them with a more coherent system of support and easier access to help.

38 There is a clear system for reporting absences; all unauthorised absences from timetabled sessions are reported to personal tutors. A 'cause for concern' procedure is invoked if necessary. Poor attendance on some courses is an issue which should be addressed.

39 Work placements are an integral and planned part of the programmes of full-time vocational courses. Students and their parents speak highly of the care taken by tutors to find suitable placements and of their value to the participants. It is intended to include GCE A level students in the programme from September 1995.

40 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enjoy a high level of support from all college staff. Separate courses are provided, but the aim is to help such students to move to mainstream courses and to take as active a part in college life as possible.

41 Facilities for sports and social activities are limited. A multi-gym is available at set times, and students can swim without charge at the nearby leisure centre. The students' union has not been active in organising events for its members. A nursery is provided and is well used.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

42 Strengths clearly outweighed weaknesses in 66 per cent of the 100 teaching sessions that were inspected. Only 3 per cent had weaknesses that outweighed the strengths. The following table summarises the grades given to each of the teaching sessions inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		1	8	7	1	0	17
GCSE		1	2	4	0	0	7
GNVQ		1	4	3	1	0	9
NVQ		0	3	0	0	0	3
Access to higher education		1	5	1	1	0	8
Other vocational		4	22	12	0	0	38
Basic education		1	3	0	0	0	4
Other		3	7	4	0	0	14
Total		12	54	31	3	0	100

43 Courses in all the programme areas had clearly-defined aims. Subject studies were generally well documented and lessons were planned to develop students' knowledge. In most subjects teaching and learning schemes ensured coverage of the syllabus. Good teaching skills were observed in art and design, business studies, engineering and humanities. Staff used a variety of teaching methods to ensure that students were challenged and extended their knowledge, skills and experience. All full-time students have an entitlement to help with improving their study skills and subject teaching emphasises the development of communication and problem-solving skills. A feature of many classes was the good rapport between staff and students which led to a significant amount of learning through discussion. Assessment procedures were clear, regular, and well communicated to students. Detailed records of students' achievements were kept.

44 Exceptions to these generally observed patterns were found in a few curriculum areas. In some subjects students were not well informed of their progress. Lessons were not always placed in context or linked with the previous lesson. The extent and effectiveness with which visual aids were used to reinforce learning varied.

45 A draft policy has been produced recently on assessment, recording and reporting of student achievement. This has identified the development of common assessment processes for GCE A level and GCSE courses as a particular need. Current practice is variable.

46 In the sciences there was some good teaching on vocational courses. It would be useful if this good practice could be extended to the GCE A level science course. GCE A level work schemes in science were little more than a statement of the syllabus. Students were required to do little work on their own and there was no overall policy on assessment and marking.

47 Practical work in general was effectively managed by teachers. In science students carried out practical work competently and safely. Practical work in GCSE and BTEC science courses was helpfully marked. In engineering, students were clearly aware of safety considerations. In art and design, students also showed a good appreciation of the importance of safe working practices.

48 In business studies there were good schemes of work and lesson plans which ensured full coverage of the syllabus. Teachers engaged the interest of the students by effective use of well-chosen teaching and learning aids. They produced helpful materials to guide students in their work on assignments. A major strength of the teaching was the development of skills and knowledge which students could transfer and apply to new business situations. Assessment tasks were appropriate and a new system of double marking ensured accuracy and equality of marking. However, marking could be used more effectively to indicate to students their weaknesses in basic literacy and numeracy and to suggest how they could improve their work.

49 All engineering courses have detailed schemes of work and all staff prepared lesson plans. There was a good balance between practical and theoretical work. Films and videos illustrating production techniques were used well; a film shown to one class illustrated the process of casting metals in a foundry more realistically and effectively than any verbal description. Students were encouraged to perform to the best of their abilities and were aware of their own progress and how it compared with that of others in the group. Assignments, projects and homework were regularly set. Students' work was assessed fairly and marked promptly with constructive comments. Records were kept of students' progress and displayed on wall charts.

50 In social care classes students were set short tasks designed to promote group work skills. Small groups of students discussed their ideas amongst themselves and with their tutor, and then gave presentations to the whole class. Courses were well planned by tutors to augment the BTEC syllabus. Students were encouraged to analyse situations they encountered on placements, using frameworks and concepts taught as part of their studies. However, the limited course documentation available to students made it difficult for them to plan ahead.

51 In art and design good teaching schemes and lesson plans were used for both practical and theoretical studies. The aims and objectives of the curriculum were made clear to students so that they were able to understand how well they were making progress. Skilful teaching

practices, designed to develop common skills, were observed in seminars. Staff were competent and understanding in handling the needs of students with different levels of ability and attainment. There were opportunities for students to work in groups as well as pursue their own individual creative development. However, better use could be made of visual teaching aids and opportunities were missed for using peer-group assessment as an aid to learning.

52 The teaching of humanities subjects had key learning targets appropriately related to the syllabus. Good teaching skills helped to motivate students and elicit impressive contributions from them. For example, student debate was expertly managed through a series of well-directed, probing questions. Teachers were supportive and ensured that work proceeded at a good pace. A minority of teachers had not developed effective material and failed to use handouts and videos effectively. There were relevant assessment schedules in all subject areas. Assignments and essays were marked thoroughly with detailed comments that identified strengths and weaknesses.

53 There were good support systems for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students with hearing impairments were supported by qualified signers; arrangements were made for some of them to carry out practical tasks in an engineering workshop. A similar arrangement was made for wheelchair users. Particularly noteworthy is the Honeycomb scheme developed in 1992 for statemented students from the Meadows Special School. This provides a way for young people with moderate learning difficulties to make the transition from school to college and to gain credits for vocational training. Effective day-to-day management and support was provided for students on this programme. Course programmes are provided in several curriculum areas for students with learning difficulties from adult training centres. In classes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities students were well motivated and enthusiastic. They were encouraged to ask questions and to be self-reliant. Students were regularly informed of their progress through an appraisal system. The good relationships between staff and students promoted learning but more imaginative use could be made of teaching aids. Some teaching sessions had no teaching plan and schemes of work varied in quality. Assessment of students with learning difficulties was uneven and there was a lack of rigour in using assessments to ensure that teaching had been effective.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

54 Students' successes are valued and celebrated in suitable ways. Framed photographs of students are displayed around the college along with testimonials from them about aspects of college life. Students tackle their work with enthusiasm and confidence and enjoy their studies. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities participate fully in college life. A recent student survey found that over 90 per cent of students would recommend the college to others.

55 In most curriculum areas students were developing appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding of their subjects. In humanities, students' written and oral work revealed good understanding of subjects and ideas appropriate to the level of their course. The standard of work in caring was high. Most students' work was well planned and organised and illustrated creatively. In business subjects, students developed relevant knowledge, understanding and skills. In GCSE and vocational science courses students had developed a range of oral and presentational skills. In a project on making booklets to teach young children about digestion, students were able to apply their knowledge effectively. Engineering students learned workshop skills quickly and produced work of high quality. The day-release students in this curriculum area were mostly able to produce good written work that showed they had understood the concepts taught.

56 In many curriculum areas, group work was integrated into the teaching and the students worked effectively. In project and experimental work in social sciences students worked well together in groups to produce work of good quality. A few students experienced difficulties working as members of a group and in some sessions very few students asked questions, although they responded intelligently when questions were put to them.

57 Full-time students' ability to practise study skills effectively varied between subjects. Humanities students responded well to opportunities to develop core skills such as speaking, listening, writing, and problem solving. In other areas, there were weaknesses in both study skills and core skills. Some science students were lacking in study skills. Engineering students had weaknesses in spelling and grammar, and difficulties with some aspects of mathematics such as transposition of formulae.

58 Every full-time general education student has an information technology entitlement. Students on caring courses used information technology well; graphical displays and histograms were used in some assignments. Advanced information technology competence coupled with a strong sense of achievement was a feature of business courses. Information technology was well integrated into art and design courses and students were developing relevant skills. In vocational science courses some students were able to wordprocess their assignments. Few students of humanities were developing appropriate information technology skills.

59 Vocational examination results have been excellent. All students aged 16-18 in the final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education's 1994 performance tables were successful. This placed the college in the first rank of further education colleges on this performance measure. All 36 students entered for BTEC national examinations in business and finance, and all 14 entered for general art and design, passed their examinations. In 1994 all students taking health studies on the BTEC national in science passed their examination and every student had some unit results at merit or distinction level. In fashion

and engineering there was similar success. Vocational examination results at other levels have also been consistently high. All 37 students entered for the BTEC first certificate in caring passed their examinations and all but one of the 23 students entered for the first diploma in art and design succeeded. At NVQ foundation, intermediate, and advanced levels all students studying business services and construction passed their courses. The other courses where all students obtained passes included counselling, at both basic and intermediate levels, and the health and safety executive first aid at work course, where all 65 students succeeded.

60 Fewer than 10 per cent of full-time students at the college follow GCE A level courses. The 55 students aged 16-18 who were entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1993-94 scored on average 3.2 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college in the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. The qualifications of GCE A level students entering the college are modest but they achieve A level results that are much better than those predicted on the basis of their previous performance. In most subjects the number of entries, including full-time and part-time students of all ages, is small. English has one of the larger entries and results over the last three years have been consistently close to the national average. In biology, chemistry, computer studies, design and technology, French and mathematics there were 100 per cent grade A-C pass rates in 1994. Sociology, on the other hand, has had consistently poor results in recent years.

61 Entries for GCSE subjects are also small in number. Results in mathematics have been consistently higher than the average for the further education sector during the last three years. In 1994 there were 59 students entered for mathematics, of whom 56 per cent were awarded grades A-C. In English 59 per cent gained a grade A-C pass. Out of the other subjects with over 15 entries, both psychology and sociology had results close to the provisional national average. Results in physics, however, were poor.

62 Overall retention rates at the college, for full-time and part-time day and evening courses, are 90 per cent. The college has detailed information on student destinations. In 1994 over 70 per cent of the students on foundation and intermediate courses returned to study in further education, and 71 per cent of the students on advanced courses proceeded to higher education.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

63 The college charter is attractive and informative and addresses the requirements of the Charter for Further Education. Many students, however, understood little of the implications of the charter even though they were aware of its existence. The college is in the process of setting,

for inclusion in the charter, measurable and quantifiable performance indicators which will be linked to its quality assurance procedures.

64 Quality assurance has been developing in the college for over four years. There is strong and committed leadership from the director responsible for quality, backed by other members of the senior management. A comprehensive quality assurance system, based on Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*, has been in place for over six months. The college aims to achieve the Investors in People award by the autumn of 1995. The quality assurance policy is being implemented through the setting of standards and targets, the monitoring of progress, and periodical reviews.

65 The standards require the collection of information from the corporation and subcommittees, the management and academic board and its subgroups, and course teams. All this material is publicly accessible in the general office of the college.

66 A manual has been produced on the monitoring of quality and all full-time staff have been trained in quality assurance procedures. Part-time staff have also received training but are only given an index to the quality manual. The college has made a thorough and comprehensive self-assessment using the framework given in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The document describes the strengths and weaknesses of the college, identifies action needed, and sets target dates for completion. There have been three reviews of progress since February 1994.

67 Regular checks are made to ensure quality improvement. Each week members of the senior management team interview a randomly-selected sample of 10 students to elicit their views on their courses. Tutors also obtain the views of their students when they assess them each term. Such feedback is systematically analysed and passed on for appropriate action to line managers and teaching staff.

68 Some course teams have analysed examination pass rates and retention rates in relation to teaching but outcomes vary. Retention rates are monitored at course level but the setting of targets, and the subsequent moderation by senior management of how well they are achieved, have yet to be established. The college management has recognised that it needs to improve the college's performance measures.

69 A complaints procedure has been in place for the last four years and is now a part of the charter. Although the number of formal complaints has been small, full records are kept and every effort is made to resolve problems to the satisfaction of complainants. The college offers a 'money-back guarantee', which usually takes the form of a waiver of fees, for any student with a justifiable complaint.

70 At the start of this academic year 'Its our Business' forums were established for full-time, part-time and support staff to meet with the

principal to discuss issues and air problems. It has resulted in a better understanding of the college by all staff, improved communication and greater commitment to the institution's aims and objectives.

71 The college's computerised management information system is able to supply only limited information to support the quality assurance system although comprehensive paper, local databases and spreadsheet-based information is widely used. Some value-added analysis is undertaken but this needs to be carried out on a more formal and wider basis if it is to have any effect on quality improvement.

72 A highly-developed staff-appraisal system has been in operation in the college for the last three years. All staff have had training and have been appraised at least twice. Most full-time staff are now experiencing their second round of teaching observation by senior management. This process involves the use of a standardised set of questions, designed to help improve teaching methods, and its findings are incorporated into the appraisal system. Appraisal interviews are documented and involve reviews of previous performance and the setting of targets. Staff-development needs are identified and incorporated into the new targets.

73 Staff induction is informal, although a mentoring system has been established for the last three years. The college has recognised that the induction process for part-time staff has not been managed effectively and a new set of procedures is being introduced. Aspects of induction are being incorporated in the revised staff handbook which is distributed to all staff. Funding for staff development is 0.8 per cent of the college's income, a figure lower than that found in some further education colleges. However, college managers contribute to staff development in ways that are not costed in budgets, especially through observation of teaching and follow-up interviews. Individual staff-development plans are formulated to take account of appraisal interviews and the college's strategic objectives. Staff are expected to report their evaluation of staff-development activities to their line manager but there is currently no mechanism for spreading the benefits to a wider audience. Assessor and verifier training for Training and Development Lead Body awards has been successfully undertaken by 20 staff and a further 18 are currently undergoing training. This is a significant proportion of the teaching staff of the college.

RESOURCES

Staffing

74 Most of the full-time teaching staff have first degrees and teaching qualifications and a small number have further degrees. Most staff are appropriately qualified for the courses they teach. There is a relatively even gender balance among teaching staff at all levels. A large proportion

of part-time staff have relevant and recent industrial experience, as do a smaller proportion of full-time staff. Some staff have undertaken work shadowing to gain industrial experience. Since the college is small, many staff have to carry out several roles. Support staff undertake backup responsibilities when the need arises.

75 The college employs 108 part-time teaching staff, who account for more than 40 per cent of the hours taught. While this gives the college more flexibility in the deployment of staff, it has an adverse effect on co-ordination and control in some curriculum areas and increases the administrative and pastoral loads of full-time staff. Where part-time staff undertake tutorial responsibilities, students receive less support. The college has recognised the problem and is redressing the balance by the appointment of more full-time staff.

76 There is a small amount of technician support for central administration and most programme areas have a supporting technician. This is generally sufficient for the courses offered and the service delivered. The number and quality of support staff is also adequate. There is good support for staff teaching students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Equipment/learning resources

77 The quality and quantity of furniture and equipment is satisfactory in most classrooms. Whiteboards are available throughout the college. Tables can be easily rearranged for group work. A modern office technology centre, including videophone facilities, has been jointly funded by the TEC, the college and the European economic community to develop information technology through teleworking.

78 The engineering section is suitably equipped for the courses offered. Its particular strength is a computer-aided design facility which is well used by mechanical engineers, architects, designers and civil engineers. The main aspects of conventional machining can be taught on the machine tools available. Other specialist areas of the college, for example electronics, are adequately equipped. There are specialist rooms in humanities with extensive and relevant resources. In art there is a good range of specialist information technology and in fashion the equipment is as good as that used in the industry. With the exception of clay and ceramics, the scope for three-dimensional work is limited.

79 About 130 computers of varying age and specification are dispersed around the college. This represents a ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers of about 8.3:1. There are some 35 networked machines in the library and the two learning-resource areas. The timetabling of these areas for class use restricts students' access to the information technology facilities. However, they are being opened for computer access at other times, including Saturday mornings. Several compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) databases, offering access to a small number of

databases, newspapers and other graphical and textual information, are on line to students in the library and learning-resource areas. The college's software policy ensures that students have consistent access to a basic level of industry-standard software and more limited access to a wider range. The age of the equipment, however, will necessitate significant updating if current versions of application software are to be used. A recent purchase of modern computers for the Biddulph site has markedly improved the provision there.

80 The library and learning-resources centre were considerably improved by a major extension completed during the summer of 1994. Opening hours have been changed in response to demand, particularly from adults, and include evenings and Saturday mornings. The bookstock of 10,500 is small but the deficiency is partly made up by the strong link with the Staffordshire County Library Service and the location of Leek Library next door to the college. Funding for new book purchases this year is budgeted at £16,500. There is an adequate range of periodicals. With the increasing student numbers, the college may wish to review the space for student study. The learning-resources manager has good links with curriculum co-ordinators and is a member of the academic board.

Accommodation

81 Leek College of Further Education and School of Art is on a site in a restricted town centre area and there is little room for expansion. Access to the site is poor. There is also a small site at Biddulph and a few buildings elsewhere. The strategic plan identifies the shortage of suitable accommodation and long-term lack of investment as prime weaknesses. A number of proposals are being considered to make the best use of the site by adding new buildings or further adapting some of the old. Future plans should be formalised in an accommodation strategy approved by the corporation.

82 There is a mixture of some well-designed modern buildings and some poor old ones. There have been many conversions and adaptations and the growth of the college has led to the use of temporary accommodation and annexes. The temporary accommodation accounts for 10 per cent of classrooms and much of it is in poor condition. Annexes account for 21 per cent of the total accommodation and are either in poor condition or do not have rooms large enough for many of the teaching groups. The student support and guidance services are in temporary accommodation where there is limited space for counselling.

83 Since incorporation substantial improvements have been made to the main block, including the recent installation of mezzanine floors. This block now has new offices and a better library and learning-resource centre, as well as a much improved reception area which provides an attractive and welcoming entrance to the college.

84 There are some attractive and well-designed areas. The computer-aided design centre includes a good-quality training suite where full-cost courses are delivered. The conversion of a former art studio with good natural lighting into a technical drawing room is imaginative and successful.

85 The accommodation is generally well maintained and efficiently used. Most teaching rooms, corridors, stairways, and public areas are enriched by displays of students' work or other materials such as posters and pictures. The pleasant informal atmosphere also contributes towards a stimulating learning environment. All rooms, corridors and outside areas are free from litter and the standard of decor and furnishing is high. The college has taken a number of steps to improve access for students with mobility problems. However, there is still no access for wheelchair users to rooms above the ground floor level, so the library and most teaching areas continue to be inaccessible to them.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

86 Leek College of Further Education and School of Art is making significant progress in achieving its aims. Its particular strengths are:

- the wide-ranging provision which reflects local needs
- strong links with local employers, the TEC, higher education, some schools and local social services
- an effective and professional approach to marketing
- a committed corporate board with a clear view of the direction in which to develop the college
- skilful and effective leadership
- staff and managers with a strong sense of purpose and commitment to the college
- well-developed and open channels of communication
- effective teaching by staff
- excellent examination results for vocational studies
- high completion rates on most courses
- the well-developed quality system.

87 The quality of the provision would be improved still further if the following were addressed:

- the provision of a more comprehensive computerised management information system
- the further development of performance indicators
- the implementation of course reviews in greater depth and detail

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- the poor condition and unsuitability for teaching of some of the accommodation
 - the severely restricted access for wheelchair users to important facilities and some classrooms
 - the inadequate library bookstock.

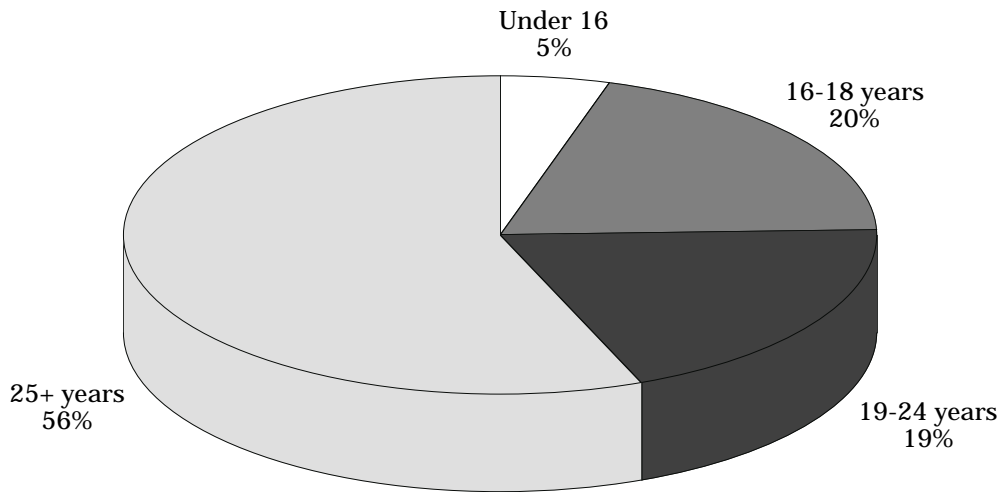
FIGURES

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| 1 | Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95) |
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Note: the information contained in the figures was provided by the college to the inspection team.

Figure 1

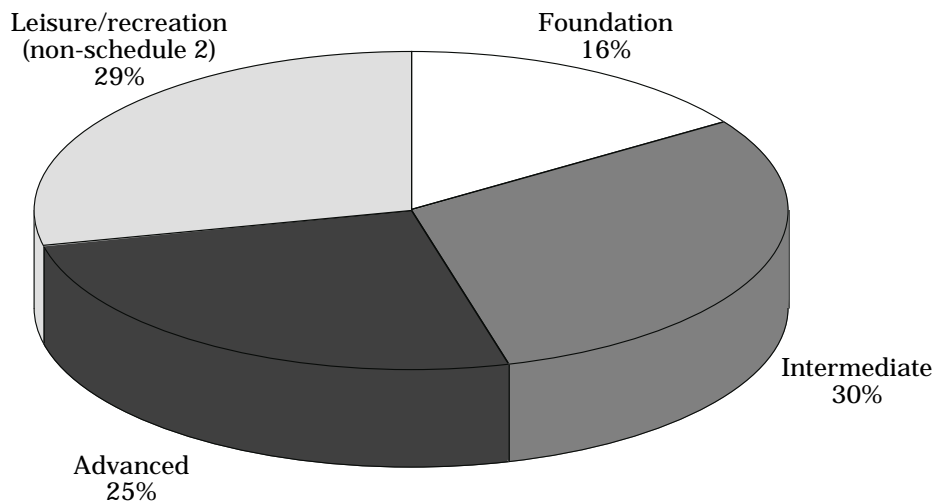
Leek College of Further Education and School of Art: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 2,349

Figure 2

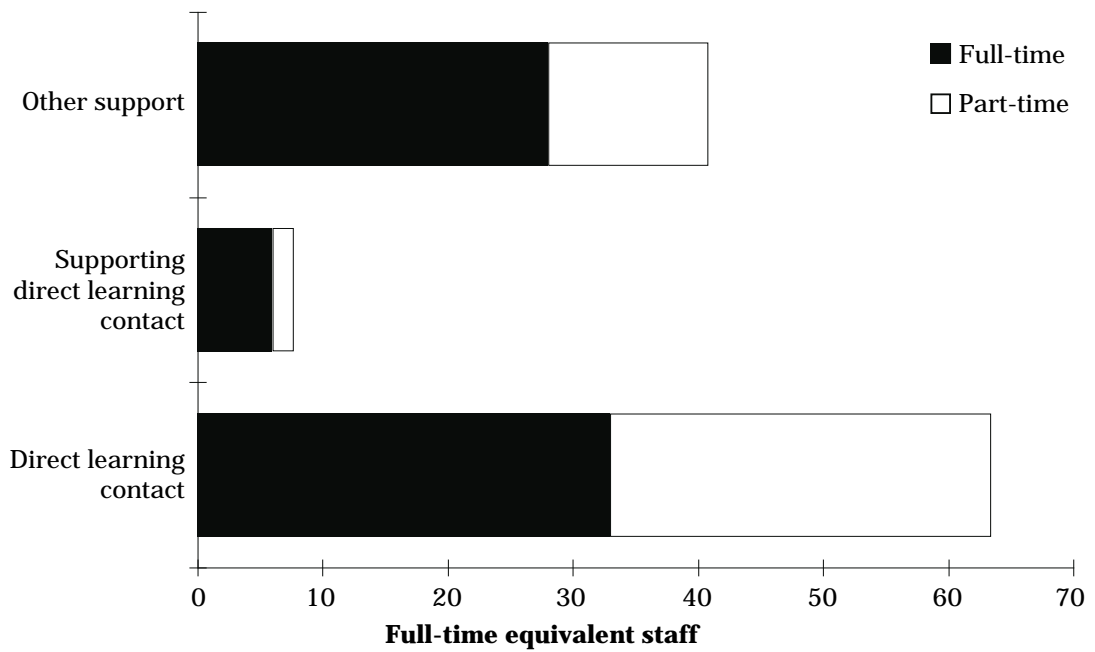
Leek College of Further Education and School of Art: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 2,349

Figure 3

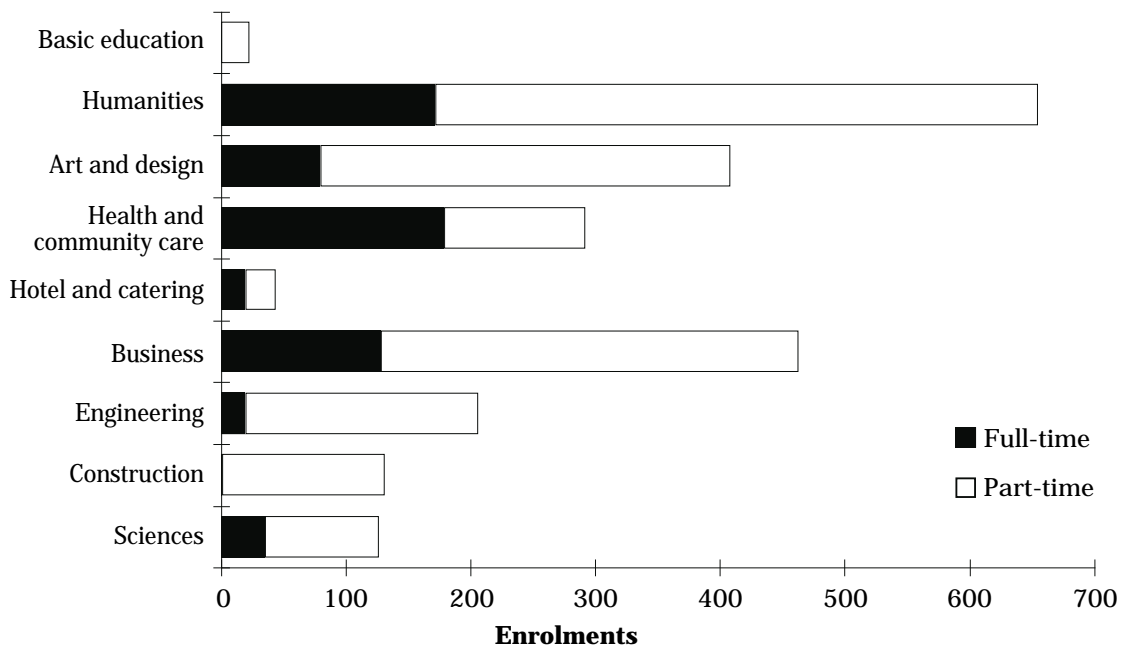
Leek College of Further Education and School of Art: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 112

Figure 4

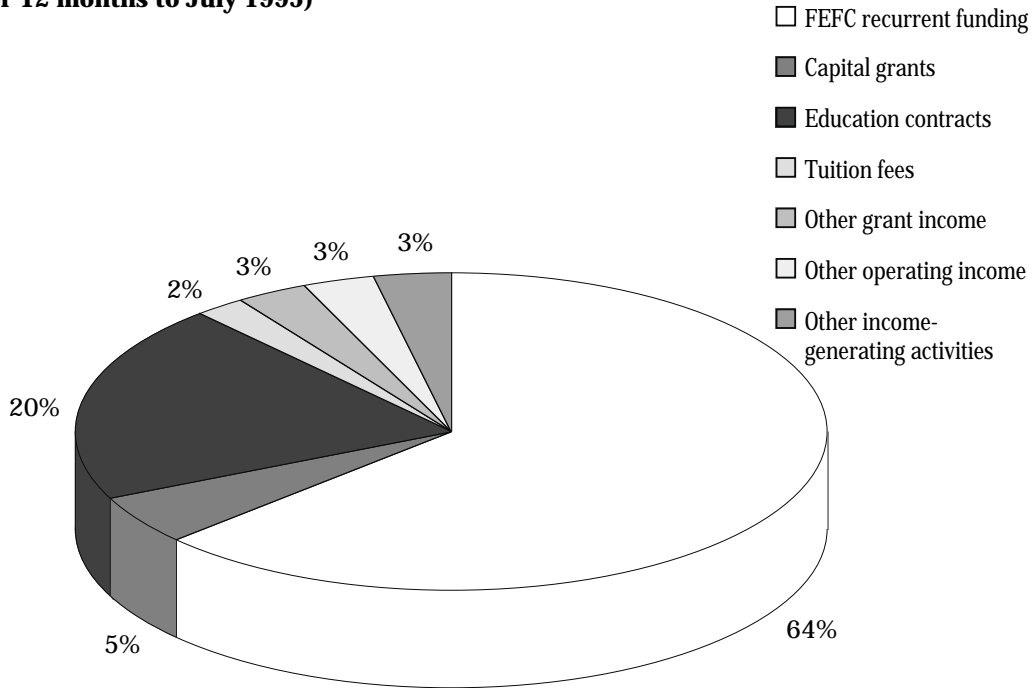
Leek College of Further Education and School of Art: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 2,349

Figure 5

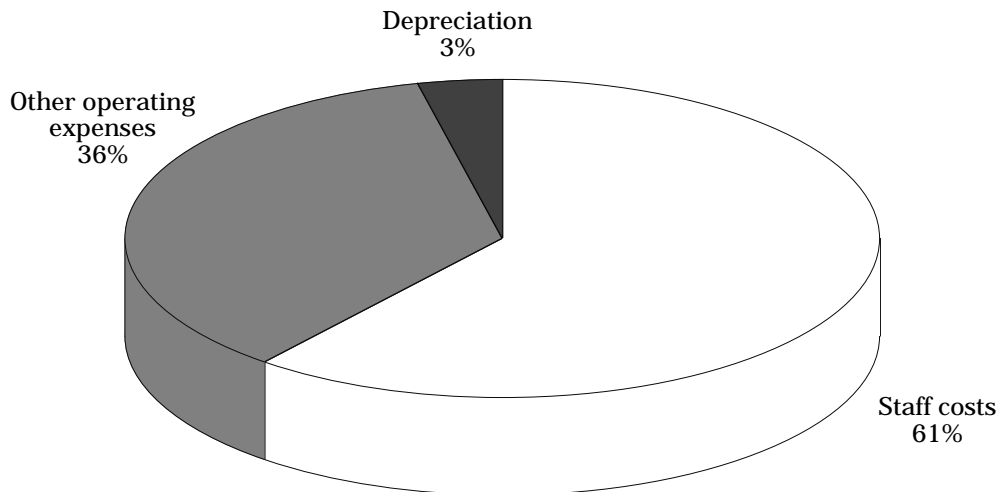
**Leek College of Further Education and School of Art: estimated income
(for 12 months to July 1995)**



Estimated income: £3,160,967

Figure 6

**Leek College of Further Education and School of Art: estimated expenditure
(for 12 months to July 1995)**



Estimated expenditure: £3,133,904

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