

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

West Cumbria College

February 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.*

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 30/95

WEST CUMBRIA COLLEGE
NORTH WEST REGION
Inspected September – November 1994

Summary

West Cumbria College is a multi-site college serving one of the largest catchment areas in the further education sector in England. It offers an extensive range of courses to meet the needs of its community, and provides education on an outreach basis away from its main sites. Members of the governing body have a range of experience and expertise, a clear perception of their role and a strong commitment to the college. The college's purpose is clearly stated and appropriate, has vision and takes account of the particular geographical and sociological features of the catchment area. The strategic plan provides a sound basis for the management and future development of the college. However, some aspects of policy formulation and operational planning are still being developed and so the strategic intent of governors and senior managers is not fully established across the college. There is a helpful enrolment process. Induction programmes are comprehensive and well planned. Students who complete their course usually perform satisfactorily in examinations and assessments. However, on some courses, including A level, there is a range of student achievement and a variation in the proportion of students who do not complete their studies. The college should establish a tutorial framework to support its tutorial system to ensure that important features of personal and group tutorials are covered. It should improve the monitoring of its management systems and develop a quality assurance system which covers all of its educational, administrative and business functions.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Sciences	3	Catering and leisure	3
Mathematics and computing	4		
Construction	3	Health and community care	3
Electrical/electronic engineering	3	Art and design	3
Mechanical/manufacturing engineering	3		
Business and administration	3	Humanities	3

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	2
Responsiveness and range of provision	8
Governance and management	20
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	30
Teaching and the promotion of learning	35
Students' achievements	47
Quality assurance	61
Resources	69
Conclusions and issues	78
Figures	

INTRODUCTION

1 West Cumbria College, Cumbria, was inspected in three stages. Enrolment and induction procedures were inspected in September 1994. During late September, 47 inspector days were used for the inspection of specialist subject areas. Aspects of cross-college provision were inspected by a team of six inspectors who spent 28 inspector days in the college between 14-18 November 1994. Inspectors visited 142 classes, examined representative samples of students' work and studied an extensive range of documentation relating to the college and its courses. Inspectors also held discussions with governors, senior managers, staff and students, a director of West Cumbria Development Agency and representatives of local employers, headteachers, community representatives, senior staff of Cumbria County Council and borough councils, and the chief executive of Cumbria Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 West Cumbria College was formed in 1969 from the amalgamation of the former Workington and Whitehaven colleges of further education. It is located on two major sites at Workington and Whitehaven, which are nine miles apart, and on two smaller sites at Lillyhall, midway between the two major sites. Seventy-five per cent of the college's work takes place at Workington, 15 per cent at Whitehaven and 10 per cent at Lillyhall. The nearest colleges, Newton Rigg College and Carlisle College, are each over 35 miles from the main site in Workington.

3 The college has approximately 4,595 students, representing about 1,540 full-time equivalent students. Eighty per cent of enrolments are part time. Some 560 students (12 per cent) are following higher education courses at the college. Thirty per cent of students are between 16-19 years of age; nearly 50 per cent are over 25 years of age. About 55 per cent of the students are female. One per cent of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The college is set to achieve its targets for growth. It predicts an 8 per cent increase in overall student enrolments for the 1994-95 academic year. Student enrolments by age and by level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3.

4 The college employs 92 full-time and 23 full-time equivalent part-time teaching staff. A further 30 full-time and eight full-time equivalent part-time staff provide support to teaching and learning. Overall, there are 152 full-time and 41 full-time equivalent part-time staff. A staff profile is given in figure 4.

5 The college serves a catchment area of about 750 square miles, one of the largest in the further education sector in England. Other than in the 15 widely-distributed main towns which account for over 70 per cent of the population, the area is thinly populated. Public transport is limited. There is strong competition for post-16 students between the college and nine

local 11-18 schools. Several private training providers compete with the college for TEC-funded youth training and adult training provision.

6 Local manufacturing industry has declined although it still accounts for over 45 per cent of total employment in the area. Industrial employment is heavily dependent on a single employer, British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., which accounts for 16 per cent of all employment. A half of all jobs are now in the service sector. Unemployment rates are between 10 per cent and 11.5 per cent. The long-term unemployed, as a proportion of all who are unemployed, is currently about 37 per cent and rising. The proportion of under-25 year olds unemployed is about 28 per cent. These figures are similar to those for the United Kingdom (37 and 29 per cent). As an indicator of social need, many parts of the college's catchment area are designated as 'intermediate areas', and hence qualify for central government assistance. They are also eligible for European Social Funding.

7 The college, in its statement of purpose, aims to serve the educational, social, cultural and economic needs of West Cumbria by encouraging and enabling the development of students' individual potential. It is committed to a policy of continuous improvement. In support of its purpose the college seeks to foster personal development, provide guidance and counselling, and promote its services through marketing and publicity activities. It aims to provide the widest possible access for students, to ensure equality of opportunity, to maximise the range and quality of opportunities and to develop resources to support these aims. Overall, the college seeks to provide an environment in which students can be educated according to their abilities, needs and circumstances.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

8 The college offers a wide range of learning opportunities for young people and adults, and its portfolio of courses reflects the wide interests as well as the dispersed nature of the community it serves. Students are able to progress from intermediate to advanced and higher level courses within the college. Competition from sixth forms in local schools influences the range of courses offered to 16-19 year olds. The college has relatively few General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) students.

9 In recent years, the college has increased the range of its work to attract more school leavers and mature students. There is an extensive programme of full-time courses: advanced and intermediate General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs); National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and other vocational qualifications; GCE A level and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses; open college and access courses for mature students preparing for entry to higher education; higher education courses provided in co-operation with universities; courses designed for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; adult education programmes funded by Neighbourhood Services (a unit of Cumbria County Council); self-financing courses for

industry and commerce; and outreach courses some distance from the main college sites.

10 Mature students are well catered for. There are opportunities for them to study part time and full time at all levels, including adult basic education. Some of the full-time vocational courses, for example leisure and tourism, and health and social care courses, have significant numbers of mature students. Open-college courses provide flexibility and choice for students. Courses begin at three different times of the year, September, February and June, and are timetabled at both Workington and Whitehaven, to accommodate students' preferences. Open-learning and self-study arrangements cater for the unemployed as well as providing an alternative mode of study for people who are unable to attend classes on a regular basis. A higher national certificate (HNC) course, timetabled in the evenings, is proving a popular and successful route for students to gain a higher level qualification in engineering by part-time attendance. Students can also study the first two years of a degree course on a part-time basis.

11 Existing courses do not fully meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The specialist courses provide only for students who have moderate to severe learning difficulties and they place too much emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy and not enough on vocational preparation. There are few vocational courses at pre-foundation and foundation level to which such students might progress. While students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities can join any of the other programmes within the college, and do so particularly successfully in catering, the additional support offered by the college is generally insufficient to meet their needs.

12 Adult students who live in rural areas, small towns or other communities benefit from the college's outreach provision. There is effective joint collaboration between the college, local community associations, the Cumbria TEC, the Workers Educational Association and Neighbourhood Services. Jointly they provide courses in numeracy, literacy and information technology at small and sometimes remote centres in the region. Some of these courses provide opportunities for women who wish to return to study and for the unemployed. Several of the information technology courses enable students who are working during the day to update their skills in the evening at a study centre close to home.

13 Links with the Cumbria TEC are developing well. The principal is a member of the local TEC strategic forum and the local TEC is represented on the college's governing body. Constructive use is made of TEC-funding opportunities. For example, the college has been funded to carry out a study to identify any connection between the college's methods of handling student enquiries and interviews, and the subsequent achievements and destinations of those students. The findings from this work should help the college to improve its arrangements for student guidance.

14 The college is increasingly responsive to the needs of industry. Courses are tailored to employers' requirements. Such courses, for example in modern foreign languages, information technology, and in vocational areas which require specific technical expertise, are usually developed in partnership with the employers. Valuable contracts have been awarded to the college, sometimes against national competition.

15 Panel meetings of industrialists and college staff are effective in monitoring the progress of day-release students and in forging links between local companies and some sections of the college, for example, between the science section and local chemical companies. There are also productive links between the college and the Construction Industry Training Board. In a 12-month period the college, working through the youth training scheme, has provided courses for over 200 trainees from local employers. However, the college has no advisory committees in areas such as art and design, engineering, business, catering and hairdressing through which further curriculum and other links with employers could be developed.

16 Links with the headteachers of 10 local secondary schools are maintained through the principal's involvement in the consortium, originally established by the local education authority (LEA) to support the technical and vocational education initiative. The college is also collaborating with a few schools to enrich the experience of students. For example, an 11-16 secondary school, 15 miles away, is working in partnership with the college to support its former students on GNVQ and GCE A level courses. Link courses in business studies, motor vehicle engineering, construction, health and social care allow students from an 11-18 school to experience vocational education before they make their choices at 16 years of age. Lecturers are invited to visit some secondary schools to speak to pupils about the range of courses available at the college, but competition for students at 16 years limits the college's access to other schools. Curricular links between schools and the college are weak at subject level.

17 The college has a clearly-stated equal opportunities policy and extracts from the policy appear in the college charter and in the students' handbook and diary. However, at the time of the inspection, there were no formal arrangements in place to monitor the effectiveness of this policy.

18 The college makes insufficient use of market research in developing courses. In some vocational areas, there is an expectation that prominent local employers will continue to provide part-time students. Recruitment in engineering and business is falling, and the low numbers of students enrolling for the national and higher national certificate courses in science means that science courses may soon become non-viable. The college offers 26 GCE A level subjects. Twenty of these are running in 1994-95, although 12 subjects each have fewer than 10 students.

19 Overall, more could be done to attract students to the college. For example, there is no prospectus of part-time courses, and employers are not systematically informed about courses which could meet their needs. The quality of publicity materials is variable. There is an attractive booklet introducing full-time courses to school leavers and all courses are promoted through a college newspaper each year at the end of August. However, the college recognises that it needs to project a corporate image. Moves in this direction include improvements in the quality of some recent advertisements and the publication of the college charter.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

20 The governors have a clear perception of their role and of the purpose of the college. They have a strong commitment to the college and are resolute in promoting its interests. Meetings are well managed and governors fulfil their duties effectively both in the main committee and in the work of other committees. Governors maintain good working relationships with senior managers and have been active in shaping and furthering the college's strategic aims and objectives.

21 There are 16 governors of whom three are women. The chairman is a local self-employed businessman and a further eight governors are drawn from the business community, including a representative of the local TEC. Other members of the governing body include two governors with community interests, two co-opted members, two college staff and the principal. There are six other committees of the governing body: finance, audit, buildings and premises, employment policy, remuneration and student affairs. Each committee is chaired by a governor. The principal is a member of four committees and is invited to attend the remainder. Members of the senior management team also attend meetings of the committees which correspond to their areas of responsibility in the college. There are no student representatives on the governing body or its committees other than the student affairs committee.

22 The principal and four directors form the senior management team. The college's extended management team comprises the senior management team, the senior administrative officer and the heads of the faculties of business, technology and general studies. Within the extended management team there is a clear allocation of responsibilities. With the exception of the director of finance and management information systems, whose role is confined to the operational management of these two areas, each director has broad line-management responsibilities for a number of aspects of the college's work.

23 The college's purpose is clearly stated and appropriate. It is visionary, and reflects the particular geographical and sociological features of the college's catchment area. The strategic plan, first adopted in 1993, draws upon a needs analysis which takes account of labour market intelligence and of the area's need for work-related further education. It establishes

objectives, most of which are realistic. Phase two of the strategic plan, first produced in 1994, further identifies the particular factors, internal and external to the college, likely to lead to the achievement of the college's purpose. Strategic objectives are carried forward in an annual operating plan. In themselves the strategic plan and related documentation provide a sound basis for the management and future development of the college.

24 The governors, the senior and extended management teams and some staff at other levels have all been involved in the college's strategic planning. However, the strategic intent and operational planning of governors and senior staff are not fully established across the college. The nature of industrial relations at the college, a contentious issue over several months including the period of inspection, has limited the overall effectiveness of the college's management of change. This in turn has affected the ongoing development of college planning, including business planning, and has limited, for example, some of the work of programme groups. Some staff believe that senior managers fail to consult adequately on certain important issues.

25 Positive features of the senior management of the college include the development of the management infrastructure, introduced 11 months ago, and the establishment of carefully-evaluated and far-reaching strategies for dealing with the college's accommodation difficulties. However, there should be more effective monitoring of the implementation of new management systems, including quality assurance.

26 Positive features of management at faculty, group and course level include effective leadership of some courses and programmes, sound deployment of resources in some areas and examples of well-planned and effective day-to-day management of teaching and learning. Weaknesses include some examples of ineffective group management, weak planning and implementation of courses, staff teams who do not meet regularly or keep adequate records, programme groups where roles and lines of accountability are not clearly defined, and instances where uncertainty over responsibilities has resulted in communication difficulties. As a continuation of management restructuring senior managers have instituted a review of the roles and responsibilities of middle management posts.

27 Recent appointments have led to an overall improvement in the college's management information system particularly in setting policies and plans for their further development. Nevertheless, the systems are still underdeveloped. The automatic procedures for checking errors have revealed that some of the data being collected is unreliable. It has not yet been possible, for example, to produce reliable basic information relating to students and courses. Also, the current systems are only accessible from the Workington site and so the support available to some course leaders and teachers is poor. Further staff development will be required if potential users are to be made aware of the benefits to them of fully-developed and reliable systems.

28 A sound working framework exists for financial and resource allocation. Cost centres and fund holders are clearly identified. Financial forecasts are linked to the key objectives of the strategic plan and unit costs, to the accommodation strategy and to financial indicators. Records of income and expenditure are clear, and the capital budget is linked to the three-year financial forecast approved by governors. Fund holders have confidence in the financial management system that produces budget reports.

29 The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is £23.00, compared with a median of £18.17 for general further education colleges. Figure 5 provides a summary of the college's income for the 16-month period to July 1994 and figure 6 shows the corresponding pattern of expenditure.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

30 The college has a student client services unit which organises recruitment activities, manages the central admissions system and responds to individual enquiries from students about finance, accommodation and counselling services. The facilities at Workington are more extensive than those at Whitehaven and are well used. There is no unit at Lillyhall. Enquiries are referred to the unit at Workington. The staff of the client services unit have clear roles and responsibilities and the majority have received appropriate training.

31 Advice and guidance for potential students is readily available. Staff of the student client services unit are well informed and there is a good range of fact sheets which provide brief descriptions of courses. Opportunities for potential students to visit the college informally during pre-arranged sessions, publicised in local newspapers, enable them to receive impartial guidance before they apply to the college. Once they have completed their application form, students are referred to specialist teachers for individual interviews. Mature students who are uncertain about which courses to follow are referred to staff with expertise in adult guidance. The college maintains appropriate records of individual interviews with students. There is a productive working relationship with the local careers service. Careers officers attend open evenings and enrolment sessions in the college to provide impartial guidance and advice to students.

32 Overall, the enrolment process adopted by the college is helpful to students. Some changes have been introduced this year to enhance the quality of advice available and to improve administrative efficiency. At enrolment sessions, students have benefited from contact with a more representative cross-section of college staff: subject specialists, staff from student client services and administrators. The college makes good use of the summer months to enrol full-time students and those continuing to a second year of study.

33 Induction programmes are provided by the faculties. Most are comprehensive and well planned. In the better induction sessions, students are given a varied and stimulating experience; they have opportunities to participate in activities and receive information about progression to other courses. In some vocational areas, employers make a significant contribution to students' induction. The college handbook and some course handbooks are of high quality. Other course handbooks and a few of the induction documents are of a lower standard. For the first time this year, all full-time students took a screening test to help identify their strengths and weaknesses in mathematics and English. However, few subject areas have made early use of the outcomes. In following up its evaluation of the induction process, the college should devise means for disseminating the good practice which exists.

34 A new tutorial system is in the early stages of development. Each student has a designated tutor who is responsible for guiding the student's learning programme, completing the learning agreement, and reviewing and recording progress on a regular basis. Students spoke appreciatively of the support they received from their tutors. However, there is no tutorial framework to help standardise aspects of personal or group tutorials and to ensure that important features are covered. There have also been delays in students signing their learning agreements. Action planning, whereby students, in consultation with tutors, set their own learning objectives and evaluate their own progress, is developing in the full-time GNVQ programmes but is less evident in other courses. Very few areas of the college are encouraging students to maintain their personal record of achievement.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

35 The following table summarises the grades given for the 142 teaching sessions which were inspected.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Access to higher education		2	3	0	0	0	5
GCSE A/AS level		0	4	5	1	0	10
Basic education		0	0	3	0	0	3
GCSE		0	5	2	0	0	7
GNVQ		0	5	19	4	0	28
NVQ		6	18	10	2	0	36
Higher education		1	1	8	0	0	10
Other		2	12	20	8	1	43
Total		11	48	67	15	1	142

36 The strengths of the work outweighed the weaknesses in 42 per cent of the classes inspected, which is somewhat lower than average, and there was a balance of strengths and weaknesses in 47 per cent of classes. Teachers' subject knowledge is generally good. Most are experienced in the courses they teach although some lack recent industrial and commercial experience.

37 Students are usually well motivated. Most are attentive in lessons and keen to benefit from the opportunities provided by their academic or vocational course. In mathematics and computing, however, there are significant levels of absence from some classes, retention rates are low and examination results are poor.

38 NVQ courses are well taught. Most lessons are purposeful. They include an appropriate range of activities, and there are productive relationships between staff and students. Catering students gain a good understanding both of theory and of the related practical skills and activities. In humanities, well-planned lessons encourage students to contribute to class discussion on a range of topics. In one electrical engineering class, the teacher used individual students' work to illustrate good practice and to identify aspects and problems of common interest to the class. In business studies, students have regular opportunities to work together in groups and this helps their overall learning. Access programmes are generally well planned and taught.

39 In a minority of lessons, the work is poorly structured or the style of teaching is inappropriate and teachers fail to engage students or maintain their attention. A few teachers give over-lengthy presentations and this limits the opportunities students have either to take part in discussion or, by asking questions, to clarify their understanding of topics under consideration. Occasionally, questions by teachers are poorly expressed. In some subjects, including computer studies, teachers dictate notes to students when other teaching strategies would be more effective.

40 In about half the curriculum areas, courses are well planned. Course documentation is clear and comprehensive, and underpins the planning of individual lessons. In business studies, for example, planning for NVQ administration is very thorough and this ensures coherent programmes, appropriate teaching strategies, effective learning and a good standard of work by students. In construction, there are schemes of work and clear assessment procedures for all NVQ courses.

41 In about half the curriculum areas, schemes of work have not been fully developed. The syllabuses and course outlines laid down by examining boards have not been shaped into detailed schemes to guide teaching and assessment. For example, the scheme of work and schedule of assignments is not yet in place for the newly-introduced GNVQ course in outdoor pursuits. Planning of the specialist course for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is poorly co-ordinated.

42 Most teachers cope well with the differing levels of student experience and ability. This is particularly evident in science courses, construction, English and humanities. Students who enrol on basic education courses have their learning needs diagnosed and tutors create individual programmes of study for them. Some groups which have been amalgamated because of low enrolments include students with a wide range of past achievement and learning needs. For example, the differing levels and abilities of students in a catering group meant that the teacher had difficulty in pitching the work at an appropriate level. In health care, the structure of sessions is appropriate but teachers do not always take full account of the differing levels of ability of students in the group, and so miss opportunities to extend students' knowledge and understanding.

43 Core skills are well integrated with other elements of work in science, catering, health care, electrical engineering and motor vehicle engineering courses. Information technology skills are well developed in computing and science but less so in some other areas. For instance, in construction, and hair and beauty care, there is little information technology equipment available in the areas used by students and so students' skills are not adequately developed. In engineering, there is insufficient up-to-date computer hardware and software for the effective integration of students' information technology skills. There are few opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make use of information technology equipment.

44 Work experience in industry or in a realistic working environment within the college is organised effectively. Students' experience is enhanced by work placements and visits as part of the GNVQ course in tourism and outdoor pursuits. The catering department manages the college refectory and this provides a realistic working environment for their students. In hairdressing and beauty care, students experience the pressures of work in commercial salons during their work placements on one day each week. It is difficult to find work experience places for all students on the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma course in mechanical engineering.

45 The assignments set for students are generally appropriate. Teachers of engineering set well-designed assignments which assess students' understanding both of core skills and the technological aspects of their courses. In a minority of courses, for example in tourism and outdoor pursuits, the briefs for assignments are not sufficiently precise. Some hairdressing and beauty care students would benefit from more help from teachers in planning their projects.

46 In the majority of courses, procedures for assessing students are clear, effective and meet examining board requirements. NVQ assessments are generally well managed. In catering courses, for example, teachers and individual students work together, monitoring performance carefully. Humanities students receive detailed and helpful written comments on

their work. Business studies students' completed assignments are annotated carefully and each receives detailed feedback. In contrast, some teachers, for example in engineering and health and care, provide inadequate comment on students' work. Assessment systems and procedures for some GNVQ courses require further development. For example, the systems for assessing and recording student achievement on GNVQ courses in leisure and tourism are not fully in place, and teachers of the GNVQ in science are not following sufficiently closely the examining board guidelines for recording the progress of students.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

47 The following table shows the performance of college students in public examinations during the period 1992-94.

Average pass rates in public examinations as a percentage of those entered, 1992-94.

	1992	1993	1994
GCE A level (A-E)	44	55	57
GCSE (A-C)	54	48	58
BTEC higher national certificate	98	93	93
BTEC national courses	77	89	81
BTEC first courses	82	84	85
C & G	69	63	61
RSA	75	73	77
GNVQ intermediate	-	-	57

48 There is a wide range of student achievement, but students who complete their courses usually perform satisfactorily in examinations and on-course assessments. Individual courses show a wide variation in the proportion of students who fail to complete their studies. The drop-out rate is highest during, or at the end of, the first year of study.

49 A high proportion of students on vocational courses successfully complete their studies. Outcomes for NVQ courses are generally good, many students gaining full awards. Seventy-eight per cent of students aged 16-18 in their final year of study on the vocational courses included in the Department for Education's 1994 performance tables were successful. This places the college among the middle third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. The college's own information shows that in 1993-94 the results for final year BTEC students fell to a pass rate of 83 per cent from a peak rate of 90 per cent in 1992-93. Within this overall figure, however, a number of courses maintain consistently good levels of student achievement, particularly BTEC higher national certificate courses. Those areas of work where student achievement has declined, for example BTEC national level courses

in business studies and engineering, have also experienced increased drop-out rates.

50 Of a total of some 730 entries for City and Guilds (C&G) qualifications, college data show an average pass rate of 61 per cent, a downturn on previous years, but with good pass rates in catering, hairdressing, tourism, process plant, and the further education teachers award. On RSA Examination Board (RSA) single-subject examinations for office skill subjects, results were often above national average pass rates, whereas results in some engineering and caring courses were below average.

51 The college has small numbers entered for GCE A level subjects. Overall results for 1994 show an average pass rate for all subjects of 57 per cent, which is below the 1993 national average of 66 per cent for colleges in the sector other than sixth form colleges. These results, however, display an improvement over the last three years. Of those subjects with the most entries, examination results are above the national average in human biology, history and psychology. Results in English literature, law and sociology are poor.

52 Students aged 16-18 entered for GCE A level examinations in 1993-94 scored on average 2.5 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. The college has undertaken a value-added analysis of its overall GCE A level results by programme area, comparing full-time students' A level performance with GCSE results on entry. On this measure, outcomes for mature students on GCE A level courses are often good, with substantial numbers achieving success in their examinations. Students on the open-college programmes attain good levels of accreditation.

53 College information for 1994 shows that of a total of 504 students entered for GCSE examinations (all subjects). Fifty-eight per cent achieved passes at grades A-C compared with a national average of about 50 per cent. There was a wide range of results for individual subjects, with pass rates, grades A-C, of between 14 and 100 per cent. There were particularly good results in English language and English literature, and satisfactory results in sociology, psychology and German. Results in law, mathematics, physics and biology were poor. In GCSE mathematics, only one third of those initially enrolled on the course entered for the examination and, of these, only 41 per cent passed at grades A-C. In English, the pass rate at grade A-C was much higher at 75 per cent.

54 A significant proportion of students entering GCSE courses have only modest levels of achievement on entry and are either taking single subjects or retaking examinations to improve their grade in, for example, mathematics. A number of students taking GCSE or GCE A level subjects are doing so in addition to their vocational studies. Where students are provided with appropriate counselling, and where their agreed programme

and workload is realistic, levels of achievement are generally satisfactory. However, a number of students do not seek or receive sufficient advice and may undertake programmes of study which are inappropriate or too demanding. Consequently, they either abandon their studies or perform badly in their assessments and examinations.

55 Within the range of provision on offer, there are opportunities for students to develop good levels of knowledge and skill and to proceed to higher-level courses. Students are able to apply their knowledge in course-related tasks and their written work and other assignments are generally completed to an appropriate standard. However, there are weaknesses in otherwise satisfactory programmes. In construction and engineering, for example, the standard of some of the writing from students is poor, with flaws in the clarity of expression, and in grammar and spelling. Some students lack note-taking skills and their courses do not provide sufficient opportunity for these to be developed.

56 In vocational areas, practical work is carried out with competence and with due regard to safety. On NVQ courses in caring, catering, construction and business administration, the underpinning knowledge which students require is effectively developed together with practical skills. Good portfolios of written work are produced to complement students' achievements in practical work. Students on science courses generally display a good understanding of the theoretical background and practical application of scientific principles. Students working in laboratories show a professional approach to laboratory techniques, with due attention being given to attendant hazards.

57 Communication skills are developed effectively on many of the courses, and particularly so in business studies, health care, art and design, and catering. Oral skills are fostered through group work and presentational exercises and students have the opportunity to grow in self confidence and develop their interpersonal skills. On a few courses these opportunities are less evident. For example, on a number of courses in engineering and construction, although students are well motivated and developing good levels of practical competence, they are rarely encouraged to question and discuss issues in class.

58 Many GNVQ students are responding with confidence to the opportunities to plan their own learning and to work by themselves. In GNVQ science, art and design, and health and social care, where results in external tests are generally good, students are broadly meeting their course requirements. However, aspects of the work have posed difficulties for some students. There has been a high drop-out rate on the first year of the advanced level GNVQs in business, and leisure and tourism. Some students on the GNVQs in health and social care found it necessary to abandon one of the two GCE A level subjects they were studying in parallel with the GNVQ owing to pressure of work. In some cases, this appeared to be a consequence of the inappropriate advice they were given at the

commencement of their studies. Other students were not clear about the core skills requirements of their GNVQ courses, or aware of the college facilities to support the proper development of these skills.

59 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities following specially-designed programmes are able to achieve externally-validated qualifications in core skills. However, there is insufficient scope for them to develop these skills progressively over the three-year programme. In the second and third years, some students were repeating work they had already covered. There is insufficient emphasis placed upon the importance of personal achievement for these students and many of them are underachieving as a result.

60 College records show that, in 1994, 23 per cent of the students completing full-time courses progressed to higher education, 29 per cent entered employment and 25 per cent took other further education courses. Most full-time and part-time access course students succeeded in getting jobs or went on to study in higher education. About 70 per cent of students on the part-time HNC course in chemistry went on to higher education.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

61 The college has produced a concise self-assessment report which follows the format of Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. The report, presented in tabular form, gives senior management's perceptions of the college's strengths, weaknesses and concerns. The assessment is realistic, although a few of the strengths and weaknesses are understated. The concerns of the college, which comprises the third aspect of the report, are well expressed. Statements are supported by identified sources of evidence and, with the exception of quality assurance, the college's assessment of itself is in line with the findings of the inspection.

62 Although course leaders and teams are expected to meet the quality requirements of examining and validating bodies the college lacks a comprehensive quality assurance system covering all of its educational, administrative and business functions.

63 The system now in use is wholly concerned with ensuring the educational quality of courses. It lays down the college's procedures for the review and evaluation of courses. These are based on a series of 'course files', each containing all documents relating to a particular course, including records of meetings of course teams, and of formal quality assurance interviews which take place at both group and faculty level. The college's 1994 quality assurance report is a concise, tabulated statement of points and issues to be considered, and the proposed action to be taken. There is some good practice in quality assurance which helps course leaders of vocational courses satisfy the requirements of external examination and accreditation bodies, and reports from moderators and course verifiers indicate that good standards are generally achieved.

64 Some aspects of the quality assurance procedures for the internal review and evaluation of courses have weaknesses and require significant further development. For instance, no overall targets have been set by senior managers, and some teachers have yet to be convinced of the benefits of the college's quality assurance procedures for courses. The records of some course team meetings are sparse, and the information in some course files is superficial, lacks clarity and is not always reliable. Course leaders have only a limited amount of information on the perceptions which students, employers, parents and others have about the quality of courses, and even the information which is available is sometimes underused. The college recognises the need to review its quality assurance procedures for courses, and for staff to be given additional guidance.

65 The college has a staff-development policy but formal arrangements for determining the overall training and development needs of staff have not yet been established. At present, staff-development activities are usually undertaken on the initiative of individuals, in consultation with their line manager. Systems have only recently been introduced to evaluate formally the benefits of staff development activities to the college. It is college policy that staff should be encouraged to obtain teaching qualifications and to develop their information technology skills where appropriate. The college also recognises that, in support of its strategic objectives, there is a need to update the overall commercial and industrial experience of its staff. So far, the requisite additional experience has been gained mainly through part-time appointments. There have been few opportunities for full-time staff to update their experience.

66 All newly-appointed staff are given a well-structured induction programme which includes a comprehensive pack of information on the college. Although the new programme is monitored effectively the outcomes have yet to be evaluated. The college has not yet introduced a staff-appraisal programme.

67 The college is aware of the requirements of the National Charter for Further Education and these are incorporated into its own charter which has now been published and distributed to all students, staff, some employers and other interested parties. Governors have taken a strategic overview of the development of the charter, and their names and affiliations are included in the document. The responsibility for implementing the charter, and for the review, monitoring and evaluation of charter commitments, rests with the college's academic board and the director of curriculum and student affairs. The college intends to review the charter annually. Charter commitments are supported by other policies and procedures, and the college has determined the standards of service to which any evaluation and planned improvement will be linked. Learner agreements are now being established with all students.

68 The college's charter is one of five national winners of the college charter competition 1994, organised by the Department for Education. It

is attractively presented, provides a range of useful basic information and has an explanatory index guiding readers to other sources of information. As part of the college's quality assurance processes, the charter sets clear statements and quality benchmarks, including targets for responding to requests. Arrangements for dealing with complaints within a period of five working days are clearly understood, and recognised as being effective by both staff and students. The monitoring and reporting procedures relating to the commitments of the charter are still at an early stage of development.

RESOURCES

Staffing

69 The ratio of full-time equivalent students to staff has increased over the last five years, broadly in line with national trends, but the current figure of about 11:1 is still below the national average. There are sufficient well-qualified staff for most of the courses. The exceptions are the new courses in tourism, where some staff lack specialist qualifications, and a few courses in other areas where recently-appointed staff or staff covering for absent colleagues, are not fully experienced in the courses they are teaching. There is some overstaffing in the areas of science and engineering.

70 There are sufficient technicians to support most courses. The libraries and independent learning centre have just enough staff for day-to-day operations but not enough to enable them to promote and develop more effective use of the resources. The administrative staff have been re-organised into more efficient teams. However, there are some areas where the administrative systems are not yet fully effective.

Equipment/learning resources

71 Most courses have adequate access to good-quality equipment. In construction, the equipment for wood trades is of good quality but it is limited in quantity and range. Equipment for control engineering is of good quality, but other equipment used by the electrical and instrumentation group is becoming dated. Some of the equipment used in catering and leisure courses is old. Some workshop equipment in mechanical and manufacturing engineering is old but most of it is well maintained. The dated equipment for computer numerical control and computer-aided design limits the experience of students.

72 The college has made significant investments in computer technology. Over the past two years it has markedly improved the number of computers and the range of software available to teachers and students. The computing and business studies courses have a good level of equipment although the use of computer suites for classroom teaching restricts other students' access to computers at some periods of the week. The establishment of a learning resource centre has improved students' access

to computers for private study although this resource is underused by some groups. In catering, the specialist software developed by a college tutor is well used. On the two Lillyhall sites, there are insufficient computers to support students on construction, hairdressing and beauty therapy courses. The range and quality of other teaching and learning aids available in the college are adequate. Good learning materials have been developed for NVQs in catering, hairdressing and business studies.

73 The funding for college libraries has been increased over recent years and is now adequate. The overall planning and management of library resources is good. Obsolete stock has been removed from the library at Workington although the library at Whitehaven still contains much dated material. The library staff have taken initiatives to analyse and promote better use of the library, for example by organising surveys of library use and client response. The careers sections of the libraries have been re-organised, improved and brought up-to-date, particularly at the Workington site. Although there are no libraries at the Lillyhall sites, book collections are maintained on both these sites. The range and number of books and periodicals available to construction students is barely adequate to support their needs. Some students, particularly those on business studies, humanities and care courses, make good use of the library. Other students fail to exploit the resources available to them.

Accommodation

74 The college has too much accommodation across the four sites. The quality of the accommodation varies greatly. Some accommodation is virtually unused. The type and location of some accommodation no longer match current requirements, and its fragmented and disparate nature militates against the cost-efficient use of space and the achievement of a collegiate ethos. Much of the accommodation at Workington is congested and the differing size of rooms makes it difficult to use the accommodation effectively. The college has already identified a number of far-reaching strategies for improving its accommodation.

75 Classrooms are generally in sound decorative order. In both catering and office technology there has been some refurbishment of existing accommodation which is now well suited to intended purposes. The quality of the accommodation for hairdressing is good although its location on the out-of-town site at Lillyhall makes it difficult to attract clients for the salons. Art and design enjoys a generous amount of studio space with considerable potential for development. The accommodation for construction courses at Lillyhall comprises good classrooms and self-study areas close to the workshops. There is a good range of laboratories and specialist rooms for science at Whitehaven although these are often under used. Engineering courses are spread over three sites and this complicates the management of courses and the use of equipment, which sometimes has to be transported between sites.

76 A significant proportion of general teaching space is of low quality. For example, the rooms used for GNVQ courses in business studies are starkly decorated, and the noise from adjacent partitioned rooms is distracting for students and tutors. Some of the accommodation used for mathematics teaching at Whitehaven is poorly decorated and furnished.

77 Students' social and welfare amenities are generally poor on the Lillyhall and Whitehaven sites but are better at Workington. There is, however, a general lack of focus to student life on each of the college's sites. Both main sites in Workington and Whitehaven lack sufficient parking space for teachers and students. Although some alterations have been made to improve access for wheelchair users, the multi-level nature of many of the buildings presents particular problems for students and teachers whose mobility is impaired.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

78 West Cumbria College is making progress towards satisfying its mission. Particular strengths of the provision inspected are:

- good provision for mature students, including the unemployed
- developing links with Cumbria TEC
- increasing levels of responsiveness to the needs of industry
- a governing body with a clear perception of its role and a strong commitment to the college
- a helpful enrolment process, and induction programmes which are comprehensive and well planned
- an attractively-presented college charter which has many good features
- well-planned courses in some curriculum areas
- a good proportion of students on vocational courses who successfully complete their studies.

79 In order to make further progress, the college should:

- improve market research, to inform the development of courses and to help attract more students to the college
- improve the monitoring of new management systems, including quality assurance
- clarify staff uncertainty over responsibilities, and seek to improve the management of those areas in which this uncertainty leads to ineffective practice
- improve student retention rates and examination pass rates on those courses where they are low
- improve the documentation and planning of those courses where there are weaknesses

-
- establish a tutorial framework to ensure that important features of personal and group tutorials are covered
 - improve provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
 - develop better assessment systems and procedures for some GNVQ courses
 - review the quality assurance procedures for the review and evaluation of courses, and develop a comprehensive system covering all of the college's educational, administrative and business functions.

FIGURES

-
- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

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

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

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

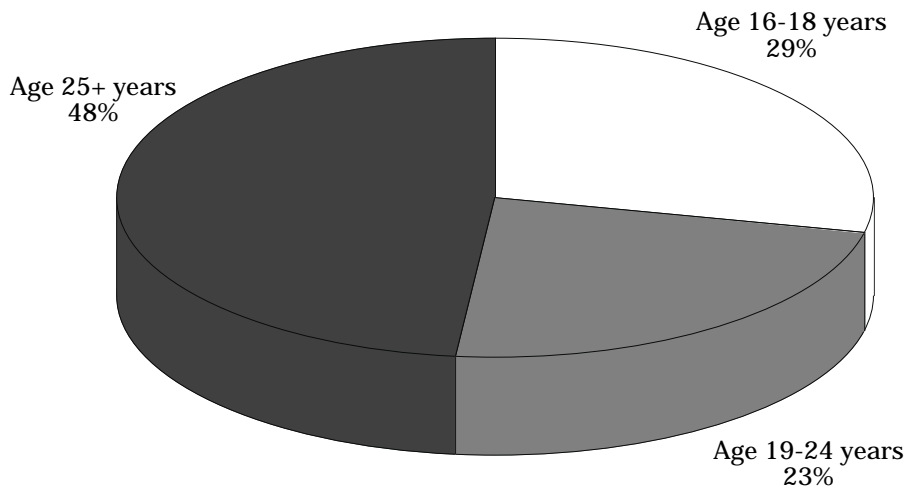
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

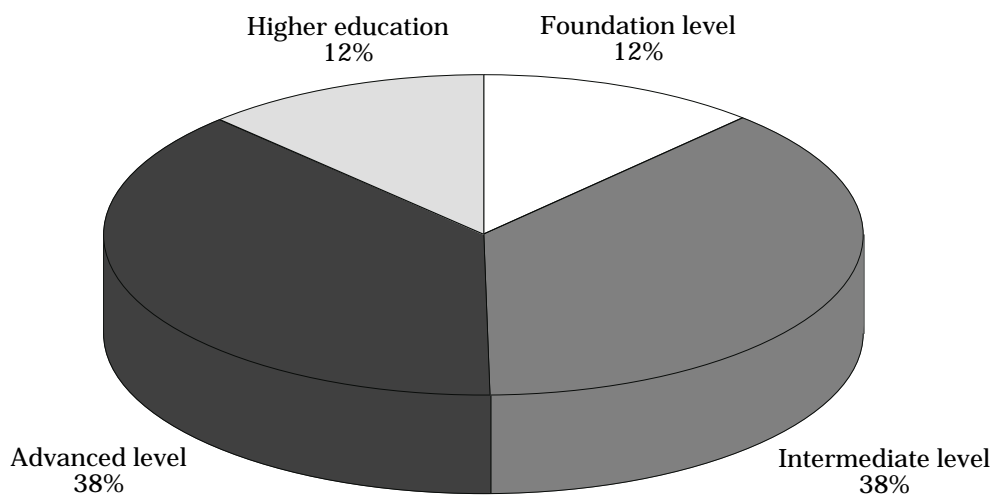
West Cumbria College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 4,595

Figure 2

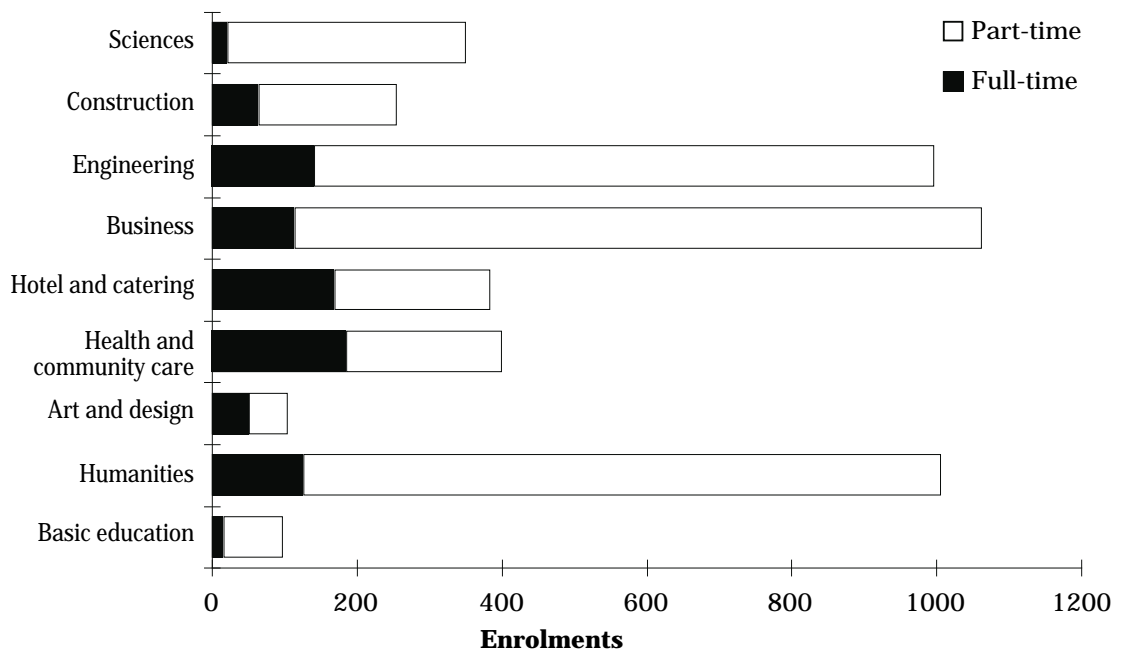
West Cumbria College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 4,595

Figure 3

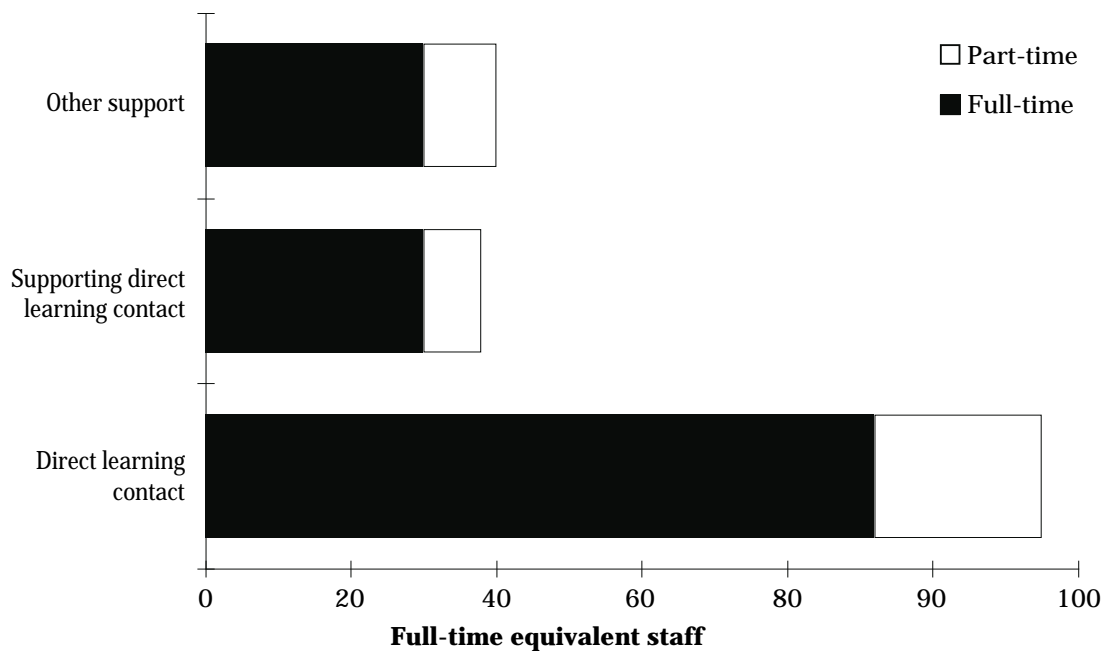
West Cumbria College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)



Enrolments: 4,595

Figure 4

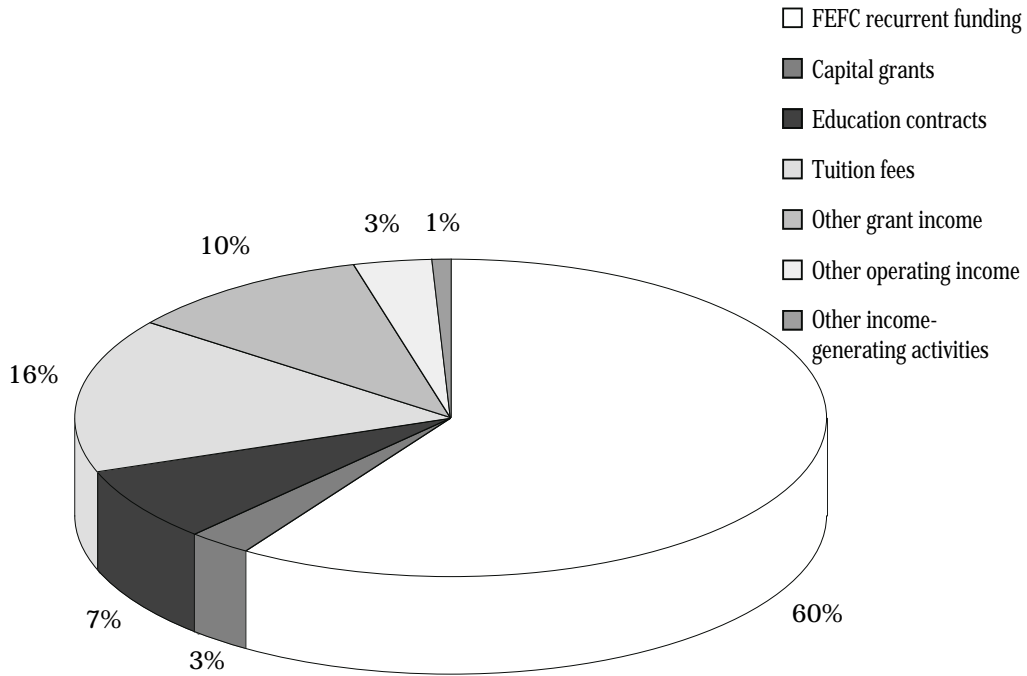
West Cumbria College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 193

Figure 5

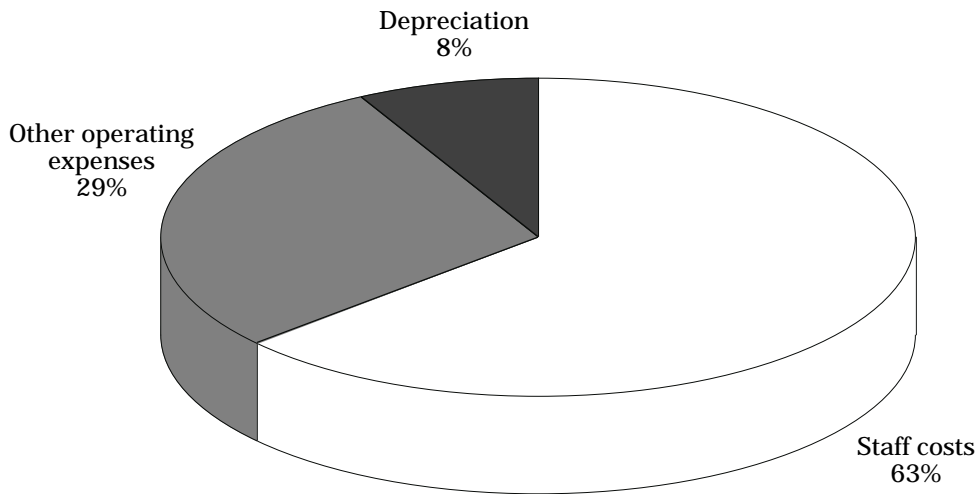
West Cumbria College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £9,065,000

Figure 6

West Cumbria College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £8,459,000

Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
February 1995