

**REPORT  
FROM THE  
INSPECTORATE**

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**Wirral  
Metropolitan  
College**

**May 1996**

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**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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**THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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## **GRADE DESCRIPTORS**

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

*The descriptors for the grades are:*

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

*By June 1995, some 208 college inspections had been completed. The grade profiles for aspects of cross-college provision and programme areas for the 208 colleges are shown in the following table.*

### **College grade profiles 1993-95**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Inspection grades</b>				
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Programme area	9%	60%	28%	3%	<1%
Cross-college provision	13%	51%	31%	5%	<1%
Overall	11%	56%	29%	4%	<1%

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# FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 51/96

## WIRRAL METROPOLITAN COLLEGE

### NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected October 1995-January 1996

#### Summary

Wirral Metropolitan College is a large community college which is responsive to the needs of its many constituent groups. It has adjusted its programmes to offer greater opportunities to its most educationally deprived students. In doing so, it has gained substantial financial aid from sources other than the FEFC. There are very good services to support students. The college is ambitious in its vision, but aspects of its practice do not yet live up to this. Much of the teaching is competent but mundane. Teachers do not make enough use of the good facilities available to support learning, especially the extensive computer network. Too many students, especially the younger ones, leave their courses early. Students' performance in external examinations is mixed. Research projects have informed much of the college's planning, but have yet to be properly implemented. Governors are well informed and interested, but they have some difficult decisions to make soon if the college is to sustain its role. There is too much accommodation, and staff costs are too high. Staff understand the college's purpose, and subscribe to it. Aspects of the organisation are complex, and staff are most effective where they operate in self-contained units. There are generous staff-development arrangements, appropriate to a time of change. There is adequate equipment, but much which should be updated. Too much accommodation is drab and uncomfortable for learning, and presents a poor impression. Some accommodation is excellent.

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

<b>Aspects of cross-college provision</b>		<b>Grade</b>
Responsiveness and range of provision		1
Governance and management		4
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		2
Quality assurance		3
Resources:	staffing	2
	equipment/learning resources	3
	accommodation	4

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Science, mathematics and computing	3	Health and care, including hair and beauty therapy	3
Construction	3	Art and design and performing arts	3
Engineering	3	Humanities	3
Business	2	Basic education	3
Hotel and catering, leisure and tourism	2	SLDD provision	4

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1 Wirral Metropolitan College was inspected during the autumn term of 1995 and the spring term of 1996. Thirty-one inspectors visited the college for a total of 118 days. One specialist area had been inspected during the previous academic year.

2 There were inspections of the arrangements for the induction and enrolment of new students at the beginning of September 1995 and of specialist subject provision in October and November 1995. Aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in the week beginning 22 January 1996.

3 The inspections of specialist work were disrupted by industrial action taken by teaching staff. Inspectors made extra visits in order to secure sufficient evidence to satisfy themselves and the college. They visited 287 classes and examined students' written and practical work. They held discussions with members of the board, college managers, teachers, staff responsible for support services and past and present students. There were meetings with representatives of local community groups, professional and business contacts, local headteachers, the director for education of the Wirral Education Authority, the chief executive of the Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), and other organisations responsible for economic regeneration in the area. College meetings attended by inspectors included one meeting of the board. Inspectors examined copies of strategic plans, operational plans for the college's schools and support services, management data and students' records.

## **THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS**

4 Wirral Metropolitan College is the only general further education college in the metropolitan borough of Wirral. It was created in 1982 by the merger of three competing colleges. There are now four main campuses: Borough Road; the recently-opened International Business and Management Centre in Birkenhead; Carlett Park in Eastham; and Withens Lane in Wallasey. Each of the original campuses retains aspects of the identity and culture which distinguished them before their merger and which reflect the characteristics of the various localities of the Wirral. The International Business and Management Centre opened in September 1995 as a flagship project within Wirral's city challenge scheme. Teaching also takes place in four small 'neighbourhood colleges', established to serve their immediate localities, and in up to 40 centres currently used by the school of community education. The college provides support to learners through a computer network which links its major sites and those of three other colleges and schools.

5 The college is the fourth largest provider of further education in England, as measured by its income. During 1994-95, there were 34,100 enrolments, equivalent to 8,023 full-time students. Three-quarters of these were funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC).

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In December 1995, there were 24,508 enrolments, compared with 22,018 at the comparable time in 1994-95. Courses are provided in all the FEFC programme areas and at most levels from basic literacy and numeracy to honours degrees. The substantial community education programme provides courses in many locations throughout the Wirral. Over 2,000 students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are enrolled and supported within both specialist and mainstream courses. Enrolments by age, by level of study and by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figures 1, 2, and 3, respectively. During the year 1994-95, 1,755 members of staff were employed at the college. Nine hundred and seventy-four of these, comprising 583 full-time equivalent staff, were lecturers. Seven hundred and eighty-one, comprising 579 full-time equivalents, were support staff. A staff profile as at December 1995 is given in figure 4.

6 The college's recurrent funding from the FEFC for 1994-95 was £15,588,000. In the current year, its average level of funding per unit of activity is £18.68 compared with the median for general further education colleges of £17.84. The FEFC provides slightly less than 60 per cent of the college's income. Last year, the European Social Fund supplied 18 per cent. Until 1994, the European Social Fund allowed the college to compensate for a student's inability to pay for his or her own education. Changes to this funding arrangement are presenting the college with an urgent educational and financial challenge. The college is projecting a deficit in its budget and drew on its reserves last year. Seventy-four per cent of its income is spent on staffing. The college's income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6.

7 There are both selective and non-selective secondary schools in Wirral. The borough has grant-maintained and private schools. There is a sixth form college in Birkenhead, although schools in this borough have had no sixth forms since 1989. In Wirral, 17 schools have sixth forms, mainly with small numbers on roll. Other colleges are within easy reach of students in the borough, across the Mersey in Liverpool, and in Chester to the south. However, many students are unable or unwilling to travel quite short distances. The main competition is for students aged 16 to 19 years.

8 The borough of Wirral has a population of 333,000. This figure is expected to remain constant, although the proportion of older people will rise. The borough's urban areas are characterised by multiple social and economic disadvantages and its rural areas are attractive to the affluent employed and retired. In 1994, Wirral was classified along with the remainder of Merseyside as being sufficiently disadvantaged to require European funds to aid its social and economic regeneration. Other special United Kingdom grants are also available. As a major employer and a key training provider, the college has benefited from this grant aid. The grants have led to a change in the college's identity since incorporation, as it has adapted to new client groups and new training needs. Good research data are now available on the socio-economic context, and the college has

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developed expertise in establishing and sustaining partnerships with business, government agencies, public and voluntary services, and funding providers.

9 Key indicators of the Wirral's economic health are that:

- registered unemployment for Merseyside was 12.5 per cent in January 1996, compared with 7.9 per cent nationally
- registered male unemployment in Wirral is four times higher than for women
- more women than men are now employed in Merseyside
- Merseyside's gross domestic product is 74.4 per cent of the United Kingdom average.

10 The general direction of the college was formulated seven years ago and this has remained constant despite many changes to the college's organisation and its planning procedures. The vision statement draws upon the idea of a learning society. It states that 'personal achievement is everyone's right and the college will organise itself behind that right'. By offering virtually open access to a wide range of learners and by extending learning opportunities, the college's staff continually demonstrate their commitment to the vision. The mission statement was formulated prior to incorporation. It is long, but declares the college's aims with respect to comprehensiveness, students' entitlement, access, progression, work with the community, support for the economy, and international links. The mission statements have been reviewed recently but not changed. The college recognises that the nature of its aims and aspirations presents it with a constant challenge.

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

11 The broad portfolio of courses covers all programme areas. Most sectors of work provide vocational education and training from National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) levels 1 and 2 or their equivalent through to higher technician, supervisory and specialist qualifications. The strategic plan commits the college to alter the proportion of its level 3 work. Currently, 24 per cent of enrolments are on level 3 courses which is a much lower proportion than in 1993. General education courses cover all levels from basic numeracy and literacy provision to degrees. The college is the main provider of community education on the Wirral. The programme provides both vocational and general interest courses. Last year it attracted 10,000 enrolments, based in over 40 outreach centres. The local education authority provides some funding for the programme; in 1994-95 it was £82,000. Community and general education courses together account for more than 50 per cent of enrolments.

12 The college's mission requires it to make access to study easy for the greatest possible number of students. As a consequence, some courses are provided on more than one campus despite the high cost to the college.



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Workshops and learning centres provide facilities for students who cannot attend college regularly or who wish to work at their own pace. The wide computer network allows any student easy access to an impressive array of computer software and electronic information sources. Professionally-designed packs of learning materials for General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects, and for business and management, make it possible for people to study from home. Home tuition is available. There has been experimental Saturday opening at the international business and management centre in its first few weeks of existence, and the new community technology centre is also becoming a popular place for children's parties at weekends.

13 Strong and varied links with local communities and the organisations within them provide a firm basis for assessing and responding to learning needs. Regular community surveys and detailed analyses of enrolments by age and postcode are carried out to show what sort of provision is required and on which site. The outreach centres enable the college to promote and provide education and training at a local level. The four 'neighbourhood colleges' have grown out of co-operative working between the college, the local authority and City Lands, which is the Wirral City Challenge venture. One neighbourhood college is in a former shop among residential streets; another forms part of a branch library. At present, they attract 1,700 students a year who would not otherwise return to education. Residents of the City Lands regeneration areas study free of charge. Students play a full role in determining what is provided and feel a great sense of ownership.

14 Currently students can choose from 28 GCE A level subjects and 10 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects. Thirty GCSE subjects are offered. General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) programmes are offered at all three levels in information technology, engineering, business and health and social care, and at intermediate and advanced levels in art and design, leisure and tourism, and construction and the built environment. Part-time GNVQ provision in business provides opportunities for adults. NVQs from levels 1 to 3 are offered in most vocational areas, and to level 4 in some. Popular and successful access courses validated by Merseyside Open College Federation prepare students who have no formal qualifications to enter higher education. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are taught on specialist courses and mainstream courses, or given support to study independently. A planning and review group chaired by a deputy principal considers provision in the light of a curriculum policy related to the college's strategic plan.

15 The college has a growing role as a provider of higher level programmes and degrees, working with the Open University and four other universities in the north of England. There are 51 full-time and part-time higher education courses, which together offer students a wide

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choice. The provision is primarily for local people over 21 who lack formal qualifications, for those who have achieved GNVQ qualifications and for people wishing to study part time for higher level professional qualifications. The college is planning for growth in this area supported by research into what creates a successful learning environment for people who do not traditionally enter higher education.

16 Collaborative working with local schools is well established and growing stronger as trust is established. The result has been a series of imaginative projects. A consortium has been established in Wallasey and there are developing links with schools in Bebington and Deeside. The college provides tuition for groups of pupils on GNVQ programmes which could not be offered by schools working alone. One school is linked to the college's computer network. The college has responded well to the needs of around 300 students aged 14 to 16, some of whom have been excluded from school. It works closely with the local authority's pupil referral unit to offer flexible forms of training and support. The relationship has recently been formalised through a memorandum of agreement.

17 Staff take an active role in the planning and delivery of large-scale regeneration projects. These include City Lands, activities funded through the single regeneration budget, and projects funded from European sources. Senior members of the college staff also play a prominent role in the Wirral Investment Network and its subgroups, which link key people from the public and private sectors in order to promote good practice in securing the commercial future of the Wirral.

18 Responsiveness to the training needs of industry is not high on the list of strategic priorities. The college sees its prime responsibility to be the supply of well-educated people for industry to recruit. It is not taking full advantage of its size in a highly competitive market to respond to business and local training needs at technician and craft level. In particular, youth and adult training are not given high priority, partly because of their cost relative to income; numbers in training are low and diminishing. Good relationships with the local TEC are not exploited to the full. The marketing of services to business is vigorously conducted by a marketing team and also by the college's corporate services. These two teams together are in contact with some 4,000 employers. However, the effectiveness of their efforts is diminished because each team fails to understand the distinctive role of the other. This leads to duplication of effort and lack of focus.

19 There are extensive links and numerous collaborative ventures with colleges and organisations in Europe, the Middle East and the Far East, including a well-established partnership with Omsk and Tomsk, in Siberia. This activity raises the college profile abroad and lays the foundations for future training and consultancy work. The college is increasing investment in these links in order to further its aim of raising awareness amongst staff and students of European and other cultures. It is also successfully

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increasing the number of students from countries outside the European Union who study at the college. This year, they account for 170 full-time equivalents.

20 Work placements are offered to large numbers of students and are efficiently co-ordinated. In 1993-94, 1,934 students were placed with 830 employers. The number of placements rose last year to 2,034. Employers and students alike say that the arrangements work well. Heads of two primary schools appreciated the lively approach of trainee nursery nurses. Voluntary work organised through the Prince's Trust volunteers provides interesting and fruitful experiences for a mixture of college students, employees, and unemployed people aged between 16 and 25. They develop their interpersonal skills and also benefit schools and community groups by working as teams on construction and other projects.

21 It is evident from the college's mission statement and strategic plans that there is a strong and genuine concern to provide equality of opportunity for all. An equal opportunities policy and code of practice have existed since 1987. There is no complacency. A steering group was set up in 1995 to review the policy and to strengthen and build on good practice through rigorously monitored action plans. The college is now considering how it should respond to the high proportion of unemployed men locally. At present, almost two-thirds of the college's students are women. The largest single minority ethnic group is Chinese; fewer than 700 students enrolling were identified as non-white. An important indicator of the college's wish to maximise opportunities for mature students is its childcare provision. There are seven separate childcare centres.

## **GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

22 The college has a reputation for experiment, using current research, and forming imaginative and profitable partnerships. It has found ways of surviving, if not overcoming, a legacy of poor investment in its physical resources and high staff costs which have not always produced good value for money. This has required considerable ingenuity and energy. The college has taken advantage of the opportunities which have arisen to obtain project funding over a long period, and this has brought with it a high profile for the institution. The senior management is open to ideas, reflective, and at best, creative. Some staff respond well to the many opportunities for research and innovation.

23 Members of the corporation board are interested in, and committed to, the work of the college and its role in the community. They have a good understanding of their role and the boundaries of it. All have undergone training or received detailed briefings on appointment. There are 17 members, including the principal, a member of staff and a student. A majority are independent members, with experience of industry, business, the public sector and voluntary services. They have a clear view

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of the needs of local communities and the interest groups within them. Two of the five female members have recently resigned and the search committee is attempting to retain an adequate balance of women to men as they are replaced. Although some business members have found regular attendance difficult, there are some highly-conscientious attenders and no inquorate meetings have been recorded since incorporation. Attendances are monitored and reported upon. Members of the board have shown willing to review their role and the quality of their work but have not yet done so.

24 The board is kept informed by well-prepared papers and by briefings from college staff. Clear procedures for meetings have proved reassuring for inexperienced members, when dealing with contentious issues. There are some experienced local politicians on the board. Not all board members agree that in an independent institution they do not directly represent other interests. This has led to delays in agreeing which decisions are in the best interests of the college. There are generally good relationships between the board and senior managers, from whom it takes advice, and who steer its business. Each committee is advised by a deputy principal or the college secretary. Mutual trust is developing, after a period of great difficulty. Each board member is linked with a director, and by this means members are beginning to be more involved in the work of the schools. Senior managers attend board meetings as observers.

25 The board receives and approves the strategic plan. The plan assumes that the range of work of the college should remain broad, and that the main requirements are for adjustments of balance, to fit the projected community profile. This does not sufficiently take into account the college's resources or its capacity for growth into new areas. Opportunistic developments have left the college with an insecure funding base, and no clear strategy for resolving major problems of funding, accommodation, and staff costs. Board discussions are now beginning to focus on necessary tasks. Many of these are long overdue. For many staff, the vision and plans are too ambitious in scope and timescale. A conclusion recorded at a recent board seminar was that the college's 'aspirations run ahead of its practice'. Nevertheless, there are many staff in key positions who are working assiduously to develop the forward-looking, flexible college which is envisaged in the mission.

26 Over the last year, the college has been reorganised. Curriculum directors manage schools, and deputy principals manage functions. Thirteen people report directly to the principal. These include the managers of development projects. The principal has initiated many innovative projects, but there are few examples of others taking the lead. In the past, some senior managers have been offered too little opportunity to develop their role, or have lacked the confidence to lead new developments. While the college has derived great benefits from its involvement with new projects, some of these have taken too long to implement or suffered from short-term funding and faded away. Some

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members of the college management team do not have sufficient delegated power, particularly over funding. Within the new structure, many staff, especially those in senior positions, are starting to recognise the benefits of working together as a team.

27 The new organisational structure features joint heads of school, who are expected to share responsibilities. The structure is not yet firmly established. Specialist inspectors found considerable confusion in some areas about what was expected of these middle managers, despite a heavy investment of time for their briefing, training, and business meetings. Many heads of school are not able to juggle their commitments to give sufficient time to their various, and sometimes heavy, roles. There are greater difficulties where they have to relate to colleagues with complementary roles or on other sites. Some have not yet seen the benefits of taking full advantage of new methods of teaching, to release staff time. In general, the more a school can operate as an independent unit, the better it is managed.

28 Many policies and plans are in place. Hard work has been invested in the creation of operational plans, sectional plans and personal objectives within the framework set by the strategic plan. The framework is too complex to be operated easily, as the senior managers have found, and some staff are finding it difficult to translate the objectives into performable tasks. Some school plans are of uncertain quality; implementation targets and strategies in many areas are not yet well worked out. In general, heads of school do not understand the college's budget position or systems. There are historic forms of budget allocation. Teaching hours, equipment, and materials budgets are delegated, but not always in a way that encourages planning for the whole year.

29 Management information systems produce data promptly, particularly for use by members of the college's management team. A well-staffed information services team organises the collection and publication of data, using the college's computer network. Help desks are available at three of the main sites, and staff work with users to define their requirements. Too few members of the academic staff make use of these services in reviewing their work. Despite the existence of detailed information on request, inspectors found many heads of schools had not asked for the examination results relevant to their responsibilities. Information services do not know how many staff are keeping databases of their own. Reports on students' retention have been produced for three years. The most recent is very detailed, and has prompted teachers to examine the links between their maintenance of students' records and the funding received by the college. The recording of students' attendance in the learning centres should be improved. Enrolment totals in different reports vary by up to 2,000 over the year.

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30 Senior staff acknowledge that progress in some important areas has been slow. Some significant brakes on progress include:

- opportunities to make good continuing budget shortfalls by obtaining external grant-aid. This has avoided the need to deal with issues which are causing difficulty
- poor industrial relations and ineffective internal communications, despite the effort and resource expended on both
- poor staff morale, with the dispute over contracts as its focus. Half of the teaching staff have agreed to new contracts; most of these are new appointments. Others are unwilling to change their responsibilities
- the continuing impact of inefficient policies and practices, and hangovers of earlier disputes
- the local political, economic and cultural climate, which although lively, is particularly resistant to change.

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

31 Arrangements for enrolment, advice and guidance all year round at the college's four sites are well considered and effective. Each site has a well-staffed welcome centre. The centres provide a friendly atmosphere for students and, apart from the one at Wallasey, they are prominently located. Staff are helpful and efficient and are the first point of contact for students' enquiries. Leaflets and personal advice are available on college courses, services, finance, transport and other matters of importance to students. College advisers provide more detailed and specialist information in individual interviews offered on the spot or arranged within 24 hours. Further interviews with academic staff are arranged as necessary and specialists are on hand for financial and accommodation advice.

32 Advisers receive regular training to keep them up to date with the college's services and courses. Plans are in hand for specific guidance training to NVQ level 3. Nevertheless, some of the guidance provided by the welcome centres is inappropriate. It leads to students being placed on wrong courses and contributes to early leaving. Neighbourhood centres do not have full information on courses available throughout the college. Arrangements for the accreditation of students' prior learning are good. There is a college co-ordinator and each of the three curriculum directorates has someone responsible for accreditation of prior learning. Students are advised what it means and how it might help them. Effective accreditation of prior learning schemes exist in business studies, construction, and health and social care.

33 All students should receive a comprehensive induction to the college and their courses. Key induction information is provided in the form of a checklist to be signed by students. On most courses observed by inspectors, induction was systematic, and tutors worked hard to stress important

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points whilst making students feel welcome and at ease. In a few cases, the aims of induction were not made clear and the process was unplanned and haphazard.

34 All students receive copies of the college charter and students' handbook. These set out the college's aims and provide full information on the support and other services to which students are entitled. The charter is clearly written and has the crystal mark for plain English. The handbook gives information, for example, on libraries, study centres, refectories, student services, and the college's complaints procedure. The charter clearly indicates students' rights and responsibilities. On enrolment, students are given a learner record to keep track of their achievements. The pack includes a computer disk to give them access to the computer network.

35 Student services are wide and comprehensive. Two of the college's five directors have responsibility for these services, one taking particular responsibility for the welfare of students and the other for supporting their learning. Managers and co-ordinators have responsibility for specific services; for example, tutorial support, the learner record, international students, learning support in basic skills, additional support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and careers education. Four full-time counsellors, one on each site, are available, as well as a crisis worker. When not on site they are available by mobile telephone. Links with outside welfare agencies are well developed.

36 The college has its own youth service team. There are three full-time workers and a number of sessional staff. The team provides an appropriate and helpful service for young people at each site which complements the more formal work of the college. Team members work enthusiastically and energetically to provide students with a range of opportunities and activities as well as advice and information. Students can take part in art, theatre and creative writing projects as well as a variety of sports and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. They also attend residential courses. Last year 20 students went on a football exchange to Barcelona. The team is working to improve retention by focusing on courses with high drop-out rates. Last year, they worked with engineering students and this year they are working closely with health and social care students. The college also has an early leavers' service which helps and advises students who are considering leaving their courses. The service has had some success in helping students stay the course.

37 The students' union is effective in helping students. It has a clear set of aims, a constitution, committee structure and job descriptions for officers. It works closely with student services and the youth service. Each of the four sites has students' union facilities and personnel. The union gives practical help and advice on welfare matters as well as providing a range of leisure opportunities. It represents students on the academic board and on other committees, such as the equal opportunities committee and the estates and facilities committee. Officers monitor the college's

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charter commitments. They also represent and support individuals where it is necessary. Each year the union puts on a freshers' fair for new students, and there are regular fundraising activities such as the recent equal opportunities fun day.

38 All full-time students have tutorial support, usually for one timetabled hour each week. There are no formal arrangements for part-time students although, in practice, many students receive support from tutors. The quality and effectiveness of tutorial support varies from excellent to poor. In engineering, business studies and health and social care, inspectors saw structured and meaningful work. In too many areas, however, the work is unsystematic and unstructured. Students are not sure about the process and how to make best use of it. There are high levels of non-attendance at tutorials and records are not properly kept. The college recognises that its tutorial arrangements are inconsistent and has recently appointed a tutorial support manager to clarify aims and procedures and to put in place ways of monitoring the quality of tutorial work. Each school now has a student pathway manager who works with his or her tutors and the tutorial support manager to improve and systematise tutorial practice.

39 Each student has a record which is used in tutorials as a focus for discussing progress, identifying the need for additional support, acknowledging success and setting targets for learning. Some tutors use it well and students benefit; other tutors do not. The recently-appointed learner record co-ordinator has the job of improving practice. The record leads to the national record of achievement which some tutors value and encourage. Skills that students develop and display outside the classroom, arising from, for example, work placements or involvement in youth service projects, are rarely acknowledged.

40 Learning support for students who require extra help with numeracy, literacy or study skills is inconsistent. All full-time students on non-advanced courses are screened, usually using the Basic Skills Agency test. Those who are identified as needing help are referred to well-resourced workshops to follow individual programmes which develop their skills. The extent to which students take advantage of the opportunity varies and, for those who attend the workshops, the feedback to their tutors is unsystematic or non-existent. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also have an uneven service. There are inconsistencies in the way needs are identified and some students with identified needs are not receiving the required support. Links between basic support and the support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not well developed. Where support is provided, staff are helpful and the equipment and resources are good.

41 Careers guidance is available on each site through an appointment system or when learning centres are open. The college team works closely with the local careers service. Initial careers information is also available



in welcome centres. The records which are kept provide evidence of increased use of the service over the last few years. The team puts on helpful events for students at different stages of their college career. Students' comments on questionnaires and their views expressed through membership of an annual review committee, help staff to plan appropriate programmes. The careers section is understaffed and links with some curriculum areas are not good. The careers room at Carlett Park is dull and uninviting; the one in Wallasey is cramped and inappropriate. A third-year engineering student on the recent review group had only this year heard of the service.

42 Arrangements for the transfer of students from course to course and between programme areas are not smooth, and the tracking of students is unsatisfactory. Some tutors monitor attendance conscientiously and take regular action; others do not. The college is putting into place tighter systems to deal with both transfer and attendance. Each school now has dedicated administrative support to try to ensure consistency and improve efficiency.

### TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

43 Of the 287 teaching sessions inspected 51 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. This is 14 per cent below the national average recorded in the *Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1994-95*. Less than 10 per cent of sessions were judged to have more weaknesses than strengths although a disproportionate number of these (16 per cent) were in GNVQ advanced courses of different types. Inspectors saw a large number of competent but mundane lessons which failed to kindle students' interest. The highest proportion of good teaching was in the higher level courses. The following table summarises the teaching grades given to the sessions inspected.

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

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		1	10	12	2	0	25
GCSE		4	8	8	2	1	23
GNVQ		6	19	20	7	0	52
NVQ		9	13	15	2	0	39
Access		1	10	3	1	0	15
Basic education		1	3	8	1	0	13
Higher education		1	7	9	2	0	19
Other vocational		15	21	21	0	1	58
Other		3	15	17	8	0	43
<b>Total</b>		<b>41</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>287</b>

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44 Both staff morale and students' attendance were affected by the industrial action which occurred during the inspection, although this did not affect all curriculum areas uniformly. Average attendance in the classes observed was 63 per cent, and the average class size was nine. Only in general education science, leisure and tourism, and in some humanities work was this attendance significantly worse than at other times. On a number of occasions, inspectors failed to find classes occurring at the advertised time and place.

45 In science, there were large differences in the quality of teaching. Vocational science classes were better taught than general education classes. Most staff had a good grasp of their material, but their teaching was often pedestrian. In vocational sciences, programmes were well organised and coherently planned, using the programme management manual as a basis. Work was regularly set, marked, and returned to students within agreed deadlines. In some classes, the attention given to the differing needs of students was good. However, in a tutorial session designed to improve the mathematics of adult students, teachers used examples which were much too demanding. Teachers prepared plans for most general education science lessons. However, schemes of work were rudimentary; there was little attention to methods of teaching and learning. Some staff did not know enough about other subjects which students needed to complement their studies, for instance the mathematics necessary to underpin science subjects, or the biology related to chemistry. Unpunctuality by staff and students, and long breaks during classes, eroded the time available for teaching. In a well-designed practical session for a GCSE biology group, students competently completed a practical exercise on the effect of pepsin on egg white, for which they had received an effective safety briefing. They obtained clear results which they were able to interpret. Subsequently, they answered questions from a problem sheet designed to consolidate what had been learned from the experimental work.

46 In mathematics and computing, students were generally well motivated. Most were able to make thoughtful contributions to the work of the class. Classes were well planned, and teachers kept helpful records of students' progress. Adults were attracted to many of the programmes. The flexible arrangements within the mathematics workshops were helpful to adults, as well as to students with learning difficulties. Good collections of teaching material, and staff who were available at most times of day, meant that students were provided with support appropriate to their level of attainment, at times which they could choose. All-day classes for GCSE mathematics placed inappropriate demands on students' span of attention and learning suffered as a consequence.

47 In craft construction courses, lessons were well-planned and of a satisfactory standard. In brickwork, students produced some excellent work. A resources base next to the workshop allowed NVQ students the

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flexibility to work in ways which suited them best. On all courses, comprehensive schemes of work and lesson plans matched the aims of the accrediting bodies. There was well-planned work in GNVQ and higher national diploma and certificate courses. A well-equipped resource centre supported the development of core skills, particularly information technology relevant to construction. Realistic and relevant case studies and projects were used. Few assignments indicated the criteria for assessment and teachers failed to provide students with sufficient information on their progress. Some work was pitched too low. Students were not stretched intellectually, and there was too much lecturing and dictation. A well-planned practical lesson for basic level electrical installation students, on sources of electrical energy, was marred by the poor behaviour of students. There was no indication in students' records of whether they had covered this work at school.

48 In engineering, staff-student relationships were good and personal tutors provided effective support for full-time students. Some practical lessons were of a high standard; strong links were made between theory and practice. Course documents were well prepared and, on some courses, there were thorough records of students' progress and achievement. In practical classes, students were constantly informed of their progress by the records of the completed assessments which were displayed in the work area. A welding course, designed for unemployed adults, allowed the adults to work alongside younger students. Both groups benefited from this. On both sites, there was open access to computing facilities and resources specifically designed to enable students to work on their own. Students made effective use of these in carrying out their assignments.

49 In a significant number of engineering classes, the pace of work was too slow and the methods of teaching unsuitable. Occasionally students spent long periods copying from an overhead projector transparency or there was a lack of printed handouts to support teaching. The quality and format of assessments and assignments varied. Some students were not clear what they were being expected to do, or how the assessment was to be carried out. On some courses, there was no evidence that students received feedback on their assessed work. There was not enough practical work on some GNVQ courses. Students also needed help in building up their portfolios of work.

50 Chemical engineering staff were experts in the subject, but teaching was monotonous and students spent too much time copying notes. Students' files showed that few handouts were issued. Work was set regularly and students were informed of their grades within the agreed timescale. The assessments set were of an appropriate standard. There was a well-planned range of assignments to test students' skills in carrying out detailed technical calculations, conducting research and producing reports. These required students to work in pairs or in a small group, and involved a small amount of practical work. Some good assessments

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required that students carry out measurements and calculations on problems deriving from chemical process plant activities, preferably from their own place of work. Brief grading criteria were given. Many of the marked scripts contained helpful written comments from teachers.

51 At all levels, teachers of business showed a command of their subject and related well to their students. In office skills, administration, and wordprocessing teachers made effective use of office simulations. In a well-conducted GNVQ foundation session, students gained access to the computer network to learn to handle basic software. The practical activity was guided by specially-designed learning materials produced by tutors, and students were keen to carry out the task. In other courses, equipment breakdowns, and limited access to computers for whole-class work, hindered progress. Core skills were poorly integrated within GNVQ courses; they could have been better developed in business contexts. The practice of timetabling a whole day for each unit of study meant that time was not always well used. The most effective range of teaching methods was observed on professional and advanced courses. An Institute of Export class which met every other week was based on notes provided by the Institute. The tutor provided supporting extracts from newspapers and journals, and students brought in current examples from their work. At the start of each session, each student took turns to evaluate the previous week's session as a recapitulation exercise. The motivation of students played an important part in the success of the course.

52 Health and care staff were enthusiastic and paid careful attention to the learning needs of most students. Some adult students were placed on inappropriate courses and some required better individual support. The standard of teaching was higher on childcare and education courses and hairdressing courses, than on social care courses, particularly GNVQ. Information technology as a core skill was well taught but opportunities to develop other core skills, especially personal skills, during vocational classes, was often missed. Students made good use of the hairdressing school's own learning centre for study, the completion of written work and preparation for tests. There were not enough work placements available to allow intermediate GNVQ students to put into practice some of their learning. They were poorly motivated. Hairdressing students worked hard and their teachers were knowledgeable, but there were not enough clients in the salons to allow the required assessments of competence to be completed.

53 On catering and hospitality courses, lessons were carefully planned and effectively taught. Course documentation was helpful for both staff and students. Full-time students were offered additional teaching for theory and practical skills, and NVQ work was included in their programmes. Tutorial support was readily available. There was not enough use of job specifications in NVQ work. Too many disparate activities had to take place in the central production unit and this hampered

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the organisation of students' work. Action planning, which involved students in setting their own learning objectives, and the analysis and evaluation of assignments, were not as effective as they might have been, and the contribution of work experience to students' learning was not always planned with sufficient care. The small amount of teaching observed on leisure and tourism courses was well planned and effective. Teachers provided appropriately challenging opportunities for students. Some classes were too long, and some assignments should have been completed outside class, making better use of students' contact with teachers.

54 In humanities teaching, there were pockets of good practice. There was some excellent work in English language, supported by imaginative materials produced for workshop use. Teacher training lecturers used well-designed material which was organised in box files so that it could be carried between classes, and shared by different teachers. In general, however, there was little sharing of good practice between teachers, especially those teaching the same subject in different schools. Students had lessons of inconsistent quality. There was wide use of booklets and notes, some of which were poorly produced. Students used these to excuse irregular attendance, and to avoid thinking for themselves. Lesson planning was rudimentary or non-existent, and there was some obvious cynicism among staff about the supposed requirements of the inspection for evidence of their plans. The absence of planning was a particular weakness in jointly taught courses. In a well-planned and successful English class, students working in groups prepared a news broadcast which was to be video recorded. They had researched their material from electronic data sources and from video library material on current affairs. The teacher offered the right balance of support and challenge and carefully monitored the students' progress. Nevertheless, one group of students who had not done the required preparation failed to benefit as fully as they might have done.

55 Not all modern language teachers made substantial use of the language being learned, although some conducted their entire lesson without speaking English. Students had the opportunity to work as a whole class, in small groups and in pairs. Occasionally, they took part in language games. A wide range of teaching materials was available, particularly in the language workshops. Resources were well used. They were of the highest quality, well designed, well produced and imaginative. Some teachers produced support materials for students who were experiencing difficulties. Students had opportunities for extended writing at all levels. Teachers' linguistic skills were good. In some of the weak lessons, there were examples of work conducted at too slow a pace, of teaching which failed to take account of students' varying abilities and of poor use of the language being learned.

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56 Learning support includes core skills support for students on mainstream courses and basic skills teaching for students who attend sessions only for personal support. The result is a very large range of ability and experience in learning support sessions which are often single staffed and without volunteer assistants. In basic education classes, committed staff provided some focused and purposeful teaching. Relationships between staff and students were positive and supportive. Student records were mainly good, and there were some useful planning documents. Full-time staff were well qualified and experienced. The ratio of students to staff in some foundation level sessions was too large for effective teaching. In general, however, the ratio was appropriate. Teachers were often supported by volunteer assistants although tutors and volunteers were not always sufficiently clear about their respective responsibilities. The quality of lessons ranged from barely adequate to very good. Some programmes lacked a clear purpose and clear objectives. Tutors were skilled in working with a wide ability range but the range in some sessions made effective teaching of all students very difficult. Learning materials were often unimaginative, and there was little use made of audio or visual aids in the classes observed. There is little sharing of materials, and assessment policies and practices are too varied.

57 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have too few opportunities to undertake vocational training within mainstream classes. The staff responsible for the specialist programmes have, therefore, designed special courses to try to meet their needs. Many of these focus on students' weaknesses and provide insufficient opportunities to identify and build on their strengths. Inappropriate accommodation and inadequate resources impede students' learning. Many lessons involved whole group activities which failed to cater for many of the students in the group. Some teachers did not understand the educational implications of students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities and were using inappropriate teaching methods. The purpose of the tasks set was not always clear and there was little evidence that the learning within the tasks had been analysed. For example in some classes, the criterion for success was the completion of worksheets in neat writing, even though some of the students could not read the worksheets. Staff worked hard to establish positive working relationships with the students and to motivate them. Some of these students benefit from the opportunity to undertake work experience placements and to participate in residential.

### **STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS**

58 There is a relatively high proportion of mature students at the college. They show considerable levels of commitment and work conscientiously. Students gain in confidence and many progress successfully to further study or training. They develop appropriate knowledge and skills on most courses and their understanding is relevant to the level of their studies. With some exceptions, students are clear about their tasks, and can

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describe their work with confidence. A few students do not receive enough encouragement and are not well motivated. For instance, some students on the GNVQ courses in health and care were not sufficiently stimulated to take a full part in classroom activities. Opportunities for progression within the college are poor for students with learning difficulties who are following specialist courses. The standards of students' work at higher national certificate level in business is high and based soundly on real workplace problems. Students in hairdressing and beauty therapy have good theoretical knowledge and this helps to ensure that their practical work is of an appropriate professional standard.

59 Art and design assignments are stimulating and encourage creative responses from students. On higher level engineering courses assignments are consistently of a good standard. Drama students show that they can develop ideas creatively; they integrate movement and music effectively with their study pieces. Final projects on the national diploma in fashion show students using well-developed research skills and creatively developing initial ideas. The project work of some construction students gained the 'women as role models' achievement award. Some students feel unsure of the requirements for assessment and the quality of written work varies. In some engineering courses it is poorly presented; portfolios contain little completed work. The best writing for GCSE English is of a high standard, accurate, well developed and showing some flair and originality. In history, politics and law adult students show confidence in their written work. Some access students operate at too low a level. The assignment work of students on the health and social care GNVQ intermediate programme suggests that they have not fully understood their work; their responses to some tasks are too simplistic.

60 In most instances, practical work is relevant and of an appropriate standard. Hair and beauty therapy students carry out their tasks competently and safely in salon and laboratory work. Workshop and studio activity in art and creative arts shows that students understand health and safety requirements. In childcare, practical work is often of a high standard and there are good placement opportunities. Work experience in GNVQ business studies incorporates European placements funded through the 'Leonardo' programme and these help to widen students' knowledge and understanding of the European aspect of their course. In GNVQ health and social care, not all students have the chance to undertake work experience. Some catering classes are unrealistic because insufficient quantities of the relevant materials are used and produced. Although most students in engineering work purposefully on their practical tasks, there is insufficient practical work in areas such as electronics.

61 In both academic and vocational programmes, students show that they can work effectively on their own and in groups where they help each other to learn. Effective group work features prominently in languages, art and design and business studies programmes. In GCE A level

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psychology, students share ideas and skills and advise each other of possible problems and potential solutions. In drama sessions, there are examples of good analytical work completed in groups. Students' oral skills are practised in small and large group work and through making formal presentations. Some GNVQ students are given insufficient opportunity to develop oral skills. Engineering students do not receive enough encouragement to contribute to classroom discussion. English students, especially adults, are fluent and articulate in discussion and group work although some do not participate fully. Too few younger students show any inquisitiveness. They are neither inclined nor encouraged to join in classroom activities.

62 The development of students' core skills in information technology, communication and numeracy is uneven across programme areas. Information technology is integral to activities in brickwork sessions but there is little evidence of the computer network being used in other construction craft areas. On engineering courses, good use is made of information technology to enhance the presentation of assignment work. Business studies students, including those on higher level and professional courses, develop good information technology skills. In other areas, such as hairdressing and art and design, opportunities are missed to enable students to make progress with information technology, even though the provision of workstations is generally good. The communication skills of construction students are often poor. At foundation and intermediate levels engineering students have inadequate mathematical skills to progress effectively in their studies. Deficiencies in numeracy skills are also apparent in health and social care and in art. Further support from, and access to, mathematics workshops are necessary to build these skills to an appropriate level. Despite the heavy investment in the computer network, it is estimated that only half the students on the main campus make use of its facilities.

63 The Department for Education and Employment's performance tables for 1995 record that 67 per cent of the 178 students aged 16 to 18 in their final year of study on vocational courses were successful in achieving their award. This places the college in the bottom third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. Results in 1994 were similar; 68 per cent of 245 students gained awards. In general, results are significantly weaker at foundation and intermediate than at advanced level. The college's published information on students' achievements shows that:

- 57 per cent of foundation level business studies students achieved their primary learning goal
- only 14 per cent of those on the foundation GNVQ health and social care were successful



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- at intermediate level, the overall average pass rate of those students who completed the one-year courses in the standard time (56 per cent) was a little above the national average
  - there were better than average results in art and design, construction and the built environment, information technology and science
  - there were below average results on other intermediate programmes, and particularly poor results in hospitality and catering, and health and social care.

64 On full-time advanced GNVQ programmes there was a pass rate of 58 per cent for students completing their courses in the standard time, which is well above the national average. The college's information shows that:

- above average results were achieved in art and design, construction and the built environment, leisure and tourism
- on Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma courses students who completed in 1995 achieved an average pass rate of 78 per cent. The best results were in art and design (86 per cent). The lowest pass rate (61 per cent) was in construction and built environment.
- there were below average results in health and social care, hospitality and catering; only two out of 12 catering students successfully achieved their primary qualification.

65 Adult students on part-time courses generally achieve well, particularly on higher level courses. Of over 500 students enrolled on higher national diploma and higher national certificates 86 per cent successfully completed their studies. On the higher national certificate business studies programme, which has over 100 students, there are good levels of retention and achievement. Engineering students on higher level courses perform well. Weaker results in engineering occur on some BTEC national certificate courses in electrical and in mechanical engineering. Performances on some City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) courses in motor vehicle engineering and in welding were also below expectation. A wide range of flexible provision is on offer for adult students to retrain. In some areas, such as single subject office skills, outcomes were good, given the wide ability range of those undertaking the training and the various modes of attendance of these students. For students who completed their vocational courses in computing results were generally good. Whilst training is flexible and accessible in hairdressing and beauty therapy, the open access policy sometimes led to poor levels of achievement. Students undertaking the C&G teacher education course achieved a 90 per cent pass rate at stage 1.

66 In 1995, students aged 16 to 18 taking GCE AS/A level examinations scored, on average, 2.1 points per entry (where A=10, E=2) according to

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the tables published by the Department for Education and Employment. This places the college among the bottom 10 per cent of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. In 1994, the points score was 2.3 points per entry. However, these results are for 16 to 18 year old students only. Of the college's 773 entries for GCE A level in 1995 only one-third were attributable to students aged 16 to 18. The majority of entries were from adult students. The total numbers of candidates sitting GCE A level examinations in the college declined by 20 per cent in 1995 but the overall pass rate for those gaining grades A to E has increased from 62 per cent in 1993-94 to 67 per cent in 1994-95. This places the college slightly below the overall average pass rate of 69 per cent for general further education colleges. Examination pass rates in GCE A level history, government and politics, geography and law for full-time students aged 16 to 18 are below the national average for general further education colleges. However, students over 19 achieve results in history and politics which are above average. The small numbers who take foreign languages generally achieve well. Results in mathematics and science subjects are generally below the national average. Adult students perform well in GCE A level business studies, achieving a high proportion of higher grades.

67 The percentage of those achieving A\* to C grades at GCSE has risen from 59 per cent in 1993-94 to 66 per cent in 1994-95, following a national trend. There are some differences in the results published by the college, and those supplied by its schools to inspectors. The college's information shows that:

- the most improved pass rates are in physics, French, health studies and psychology
- the greatest fall in pass rates is in physical education, sociology and geography
- results for mathematics are generally below average
- English language results are particularly good for students aged 19 and over who form the majority of students. In 1995, 84 per cent of the 235 part-time students gained grades A to C. Sixty-seven per cent of students attending the workshop at Borough Road and 25 per cent of those in Wallasey gained a grade A or A\*.

68 High non-completion rates are a feature of a number of courses. The college regularly reports on early leavers, and has improved the accuracy of its records. During the year 1994-95, the overall retention rate was 87 per cent and 81 per cent for full-time students. These figures exclude over 2,000 students who enrolled but did not start courses. Retention rates in the college's schools varied from 64 per cent to 94 per cent. The college's information shows that:

- only five of the 13 students on the national certificate in computer studies completed their course
- only 10 of the 19 students on the final year of the higher national certificate in computing finished their course

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- some caring and social care courses have retention rates below 70 per cent
  - only 36 per cent of students following the intermediate GNVQ in engineering completed their course
  - GCE A level retention rates have dropped from an average of 84 per cent in 1993-94 to 76 per cent in 1994-95
  - in the same period, the GCSE retention rate has fallen from 70 per cent to 54 per cent.

The high drop out affects the presentation of examination results. When performance is calculated using the figures for students taking the examination, rather than those entered, it is generally much better.

69 The college has a good record of students progressing to higher level courses within the college itself. The 'interface' programmes offered in Wallasey enable many adult students to gain skills and accreditation and to progress to other programmes or to employment. Students on access to further and higher education programmes achieve well. The pathways to higher education created by higher national certificate programmes and franchised degrees are well used. On basic education courses, the opportunities for formal accreditation vary. Practice in the different centres is inconsistent. Students gain a real sense of achievement in terms of developing confidence and self-esteem but many are not offered appropriate recognition for their achievements, and some work at the same level of study for too long.

70 The college has pioneered work on a 'learning framework'. All programmes are fitted into a credit system and the planned outcomes for each credit unit are recorded. The work has continued for several years and is not yet complete. While some staff find the analysis of programmes helpful for giving advice to students, the system is not yet properly exploited as a way of recording students' achievement and encouraging their progress.

### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

71 The quality unit is responsible for overseeing the college's arrangements for quality assurance. It is administered by a quality manager and a deputy principal has management responsibility. There are clear procedures for quality assurance. In the operational plan, standards are indicated for students' enrolments, retention, achievements, national targets and cost efficiency. The quality unit designs systems and procedures. Schools and service units are responsible for implementation. Programme and service management manuals provide the basic instrument of audit, record keeping, and control. Responsibility for action lies with schools and service sector review teams. They are responsible for collecting data and generating performance indicators. In general, systems are clearly defined. Practice in applying them varies. Some team leaders have not completed documentation as required. A more positive

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intervention from some heads of school is necessary to close gaps in practice.

72 Quality is reviewed in sequence by programme teams, school review committees and the college review and evaluation board. The function of each school review committee, at its twice-termly meetings, is to encourage team planning within the context of the college's strategic plan. The college review and evaluation board is a subcommittee of the academic board. It is chaired by the deputy principal for quality and human resources. The two deputy principals for quality and planning have collaborated to produce a draft set of planning objectives for schools' use in preparing their performance indicators and quality reviews. Some tutors in some schools have limited understanding of the context and use of programme documentation.

73 Service standards exist for finance, personnel, the quality unit, and the welcome centres. Other units have yet to devise and agree standards. There is still room for improvement in monitoring and evaluating these standards, and in getting staff to work to them. Information needs to flow more freely, and staff and other stakeholders should become more involved in the process of raising standards. Aspects of the review system can bypass senior managers.

74 The comprehensive quality management systems are well supported by staff-development arrangements. Regular meetings are held between those responsible for personnel, staff development and quality. Collaboration is extensive. There are links between programme managers, the planning and review teams, those involved in appraisal, and the human resource development task group, chaired by the staff-development officer. There is a substantial investment in staff development. It has a budget of 1.3 per cent of total staffing costs. With the salaries of responsible officers, and remission and cover costs, this rises to 2.5 per cent.

75 Staff development covers all phases of employment. It includes a comprehensive series of induction activities and a probation system for new staff of all kinds. External courses and in-house provision are designed to encourage development in line with the strategic plan objectives. The personnel section offers advice to staff facing redundancy or redeployment. All staff are entitled to receive an interview with the health co-ordinator while on sick leave. There is also a staff counselling service and an occupational health consultant. Since its instigation in 1994, 157 staff have received this health and welfare advice and 53 staff have used the occupational health consultancy. One pleasant touch is that the health co-ordinator has a small budget for flowers for staff who are sick.

76 A staff-development handbook is available to all staff, through their schools and service unit managers, which details the procedures and opportunities available. Data on staff development show the willingness of most staff, once informed, to undertake professional development. Of particular note is the cross-sector management training currently provided for 14 staff registered for diploma courses in education

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management and the four staff registered for master of business administration awards.

77 There is a system of appraisal for staff. However, the college has failed to meet its operating targets for the percentage of staff completing the first appraisal round and it is considering whether the voluntary nature of appraisal and the review systems for assessing staff-development needs should be replaced by a compulsory system. At present, appraisal is not effectively identifying staff needs. At least one programme area has insufficient staff with specialist qualifications. Middle managers have variable information, expertise and support for appraising their colleagues and advising them on professional development. Some observation of classes takes place during appraisal but there is too little opportunity for tutors to examine critically their own practice or that of their peers.

78 In preparation for the inspection, the college produced its own self-assessment. It was completed after the specialist inspections, and so was able to refer to evidence from the classroom observations of inspectors. It relates the descriptors in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*, to the college's provision and makes reference to relevant sections of its strategic plan. For each item, a critical commentary is added. Sections are not graded according to inspection practice. Instead, they are given a 'developmental quality indicator' which shows the stage the college believes it has reached on a line of development. This starts with ideas and external pressures on senior management (A) and culminates in acceptance, understanding, and established practice by all staff (D). There are no areas relevant to the inspection framework where the college judges itself to be at point A. Equally, there are few areas where it makes an unequivocal claim to have reached point D. The college is realistic about its strengths and weaknesses. Its conclusions are similar to those of the inspection team. Evidence for the self-assessment was gathered from the schools. The report was assembled by the college nominee and refined by the college management team. It did not follow the usual route for quality reviews, although it was received and commented upon by the board.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Staffing**

79 Most teaching staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. The rapport between staff and students is good. Many students see their tutors as approachable and helpful. Sixty-two per cent of teaching staff are graduates and 9 per cent have higher degrees. Almost 80 per cent have teaching qualifications. About 450 staff have achieved, or are training for, the assessor awards necessary for NCVQ programmes. This is a very high proportion of staff. In addition, verifiers have been trained, and there is rapid progress towards the target of ensuring that one member of staff in each school has the D36 award.

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80 The ratio of part-time to full-time staff is generally appropriate, although in places the distribution of part-time teachers places a large administrative load on full-time colleagues. Overall, there is a high number of teaching staff for the number of students. The ratio of female to male staff is 2:1, with a more pronounced imbalance in the service units. The age profile of teaching staff shows a cluster of 50 per cent in the 41 to 50 age range.

81 There are adequate numbers of administrative and clerical staff to support teachers, learners, and potential students. The college employs 111 technical support staff who provide a good level of technical support. The college libraries and resource centres are well staffed. Most technical staff are well qualified and some undertake teaching duties. As the computer network, and the extent to which it is used, have grown, additional technical staff have been appointed to support both students and equipment. There are groups of staff who support materials development, educational technology, and research projects. These offer a useful service, which is not always fully exploited.

#### **Equipment/learning resources**

82 Most courses have sufficient equipment and teaching resources. Some of the equipment available to construction students is old but there is enough of it to meet current demands. Consumables for hairdressing and beauty therapy courses are of good quality and cover the range available commercially. Mathematics students use a good selection of paper-based resources in the specialist workshops. Computing students work with an appropriate range of hardware and extensive software. The new facilities for creative arts students on the Borough Road site are excellent. There is an adequate range of audio-visual aids and clear systems for booking but some classes are taking place in rooms which have no effective blackout or proper screen. The geography area has a range of equipment which is used well. The international business and management centre has equipment and resources of the highest quality. It offers a sharp contrast with the quality of much of the equipment elsewhere in the college. The multi-site nature of the college raises major problems over the management and location of specialist equipment. The college's mission statement leads to duplication of equipment between the major sites. Some of the courses offered in the neighbourhood colleges do not have suitable equipment and resources.

83 The college has invested heavily in its sophisticated computer network and support staff help teachers to make the most of the opportunities presented. There are 1,160 workstations, offering a ratio of one to approximately nine full-time equivalent students. Staff and students in widely dispersed sites across the Wirral have access to a large number of software packages and electronic mail. The potential of the network is constrained by available skills amongst staff and, to a lesser extent, amongst students. Dedicated computer equipment for specialised

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purposes is used to good effect but as use of the network grows there are tensions between providing open access for students and the need for staff to be able to use the equipment on a timetabled basis. The college estimates that some 80 per cent of staff use the electronic mail system. In some cases, access to software is limited because terminals cannot support the multi-media packages which are available. The investment in the network has been accompanied by a decline in the funding for books and other paper-based resources either in the libraries or in the schools. Some of the library stock is limited in quantity and some is inappropriate for the courses currently offered. Languages staff have produced teaching materials of high quality. However, many teachers are using home-made classroom materials and resources of poor quality despite the facility offered by the network for material to be shared, stored, and properly printed.

84 Much old equipment is no longer suitable for current courses. While some equipment has been given a prolonged life with effective care and maintenance, the usefulness of other items is limited by poor maintenance. Tools in the electrical installation workshop are not up to industry standard. Engineering equipment in the Borough Road workshops is old and of poor standard; some of the machines were out of service at the time of the inspection. The thermodynamics and fluids laboratory and the mechanical science laboratory at Carlett Park contain antiquated equipment and are now seldom used. Some catering equipment is poor and the furniture in the training restaurant is dated and worn. Resources for students on health, social and childcare courses are inadequate. The resuscitation doll is showing signs of a very hard life. Limited printmaking and graphic design equipment prevents students developing relevant skills, and design students do not have access to industry standard computer equipment. The materials and equipment for students with learning difficulties are insufficient in quantity, inappropriate in design and poor in quality.

### **Accommodation**

85 The four main sites and the neighbourhood colleges together provide over 63,000 square metres of accommodation set in 62 acres of land on various locations throughout the Wirral Peninsula. In addition, there are 40 outreach centres used primarily for adult continuing education classes. The quantity and variety of accommodation provide a range of opportunities for student access, flexible use, internal adaptation and alteration. The number of sites reflects the college's intention to provide educational opportunities at a neighbourhood level. The previously separate management of each site has been replaced by a new structure for the management of the overall estate, with local managers reporting to the deputy principal (resources). The team of site facilities managers led by the college estates officer has recognised the need to address questions of quality and standards across all the sites. It is an awkward property

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portfolio to manage effectively. Even without the new international business and management centre, the college has at least 30 per cent excess accommodation.

86 Within the overall portfolio, there is some very good accommodation. The international business and management centre contains conference and teaching facilities built to a high specification and on each of the other main sites there are teaching and study areas which provide a welcoming and stimulating environment. Mathematics workshops and resource based learning centres are of a high quality. The workshops for English teaching are bright, attractive and well-organised spaces enhanced by effective display. Accommodation for brickwork courses, including the resource base, is good. The reception area for hairdressing and beauty therapy makes a good initial impression. The basement conversion for the move of the performing arts courses to Borough Road is an imaginative use of the space. The areas of Withens Lane, refurbished after the recent fire, have been sympathetically decorated in keeping with the style of the old building. The neighbourhood colleges have been successful in creating an unthreatening atmosphere which is attracting substantial numbers of students from surrounding areas.

87 There is also some very poor provision and much that is at best satisfactory. Large amounts of teaching and workshop space are of inferior quality and in several places inappropriate for their current use. Some practical engineering spaces which contain old equipment are now seldom used. Catering accommodation needs refurbishment. Classrooms used for teaching mathematics, history, English and courses in construction and engineering are bare and drab. The hairdressing salons are not up to modern commercial standards. Students on courses in health, social and childcare are taught in classrooms which are dull, uninspiring and often too small. Art studios at Withens Lane and classrooms used for teacher education courses are shabby. The dance courses at Borough Road are held in the gymnasium to which other students have general access during the lunchtime period. Students on basic education courses, particularly in the outreach centres, use rooms of widely differing standards. The arrangements for, and the quality of, accommodation for students with learning difficulties have no redeeming features.

88 Significant parts of the external face of the estate have not been decorated for a long time. The Withens Lane site is suffering from planning blight and presents a poor impression. Reception areas at the other main sites are generally well signposted and clearly visible. The libraries are of good quality although cramped at Withens Lane and at an early stage of development at the international business and management centre. The social areas for students, and in some cases staff, are generally uninviting. The smoking rooms are particularly unattractive. Lavatories need refurbishment and are sometimes not cleaned effectively. Circulation spaces in several blocks on each site are gloomy, cluttered with



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unnecessary notices, and are not well cleaned. Facilities for physical education are poor and the conversion of the gymnasium at Withens Lane for photography courses means that there are no physical education facilities on the site. The buttry on the Borough Road site and the coffee shop at the international business and management centre provide good refectory accommodation; standards elsewhere fall a long way short of these. The cafeteria at Withens Lane closes during the summer examinations period and temporary arrangements are made. Most of the seven creches are bright and lively venues, although they are not purpose built and some are located at the margins of the site.

89 The college recently conducted a survey of its facilities for students with restricted mobility and a report was presented to the estates and facilities committee of the corporation board. The report concluded that substantial areas of each site are inaccessible to wheelchair users because of the absence of ramps and lifts. For example, the library and careers advice base at Withens Lane are on the first floor; most of the networked 'open access' information technology equipment is in the library and there is no lift. In contrast, the new international business and management centre has good facilities and easy access. Discussions with the students' union, as part of the survey, also identified features such as the height of buttons on the lifts where they exist, public telephones, service counters, desks and access to refectory provision. The college is beginning to address some of these issues.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES**

90 The college is ambitious in its aims, and shows imagination in attempting to achieve them. Its strengths are:

- the comprehensive range of study programmes, available in many different places in the locality
- an understanding of its important role in the community, particularly as an agent of economic regeneration
- the many students who derive great benefit from their work in college and make good educational progress
- good links with national and international agencies, which have broadened its horizons and its funding base
- interested and committed governors, who offer contacts with important interest groups in the area
- good arrangements for informing prospective students about opportunities at the college, and offering them advice
- a wide range of student services, which provide important sources of help in a locality where students often have multiple difficulties
- opportunities for students to plan flexible study arrangements, using good-quality support centres and electronic data

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- experienced and well-qualified staff, who have good opportunities for training and development
  - a developing organisational system which is capable of achieving greater consistency of practice throughout the college
  - some high-quality new and refurbished accommodation.

91 If the college is to improve the quality and cost effectiveness of its provision, it should:

- simplify its planning and monitoring processes, so that staff at all levels can set themselves achievable objectives
- reduce some of its high costs relative to income
- improve the quality of teaching and learning
- improve lower than average examination results in significant areas, particularly for 16 to 18 year olds
- address the high rate of student drop out
- improve the morale of staff
- ensure greater consistency in the provision of support for students
- apply quality assurance procedures to teaching and learning
- address the poor quality of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- strengthen the relationship with industry and commerce at sub-executive levels
- invest in equipment to support vocational courses
- tackle poor housekeeping and the drab appearance of many areas of the college.

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## FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (as at December 1995)

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  - 2 Percentage enrolments by level of study (as at December 1995)

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  - 3 Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at December 1995)

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  - 4 Staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at December 1995)

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  - 5 Income (for 12 months to July 1995)

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  - 6 Expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)

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

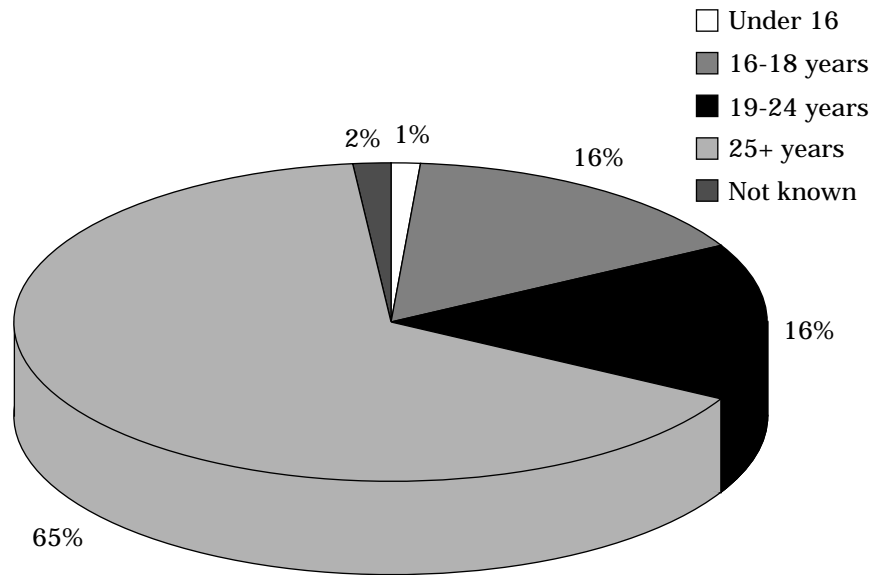
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**Figure 1**

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**Wirral Metropolitan College: percentage enrolments by age (as at December 1995)**



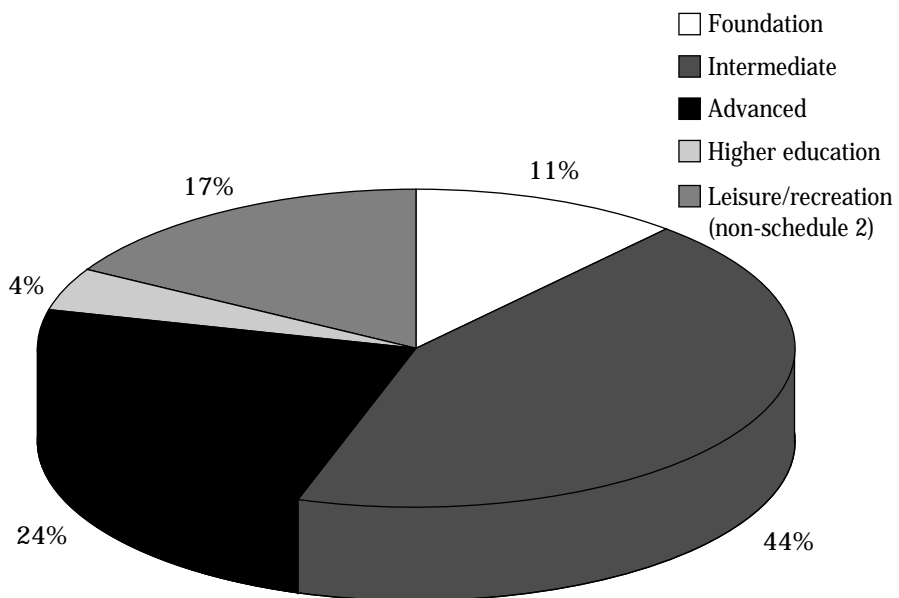
Enrolments: 24,508

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**Figure 2**

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**Wirral Metropolitan College: percentage enrolments by level of study (as at December 1995)**

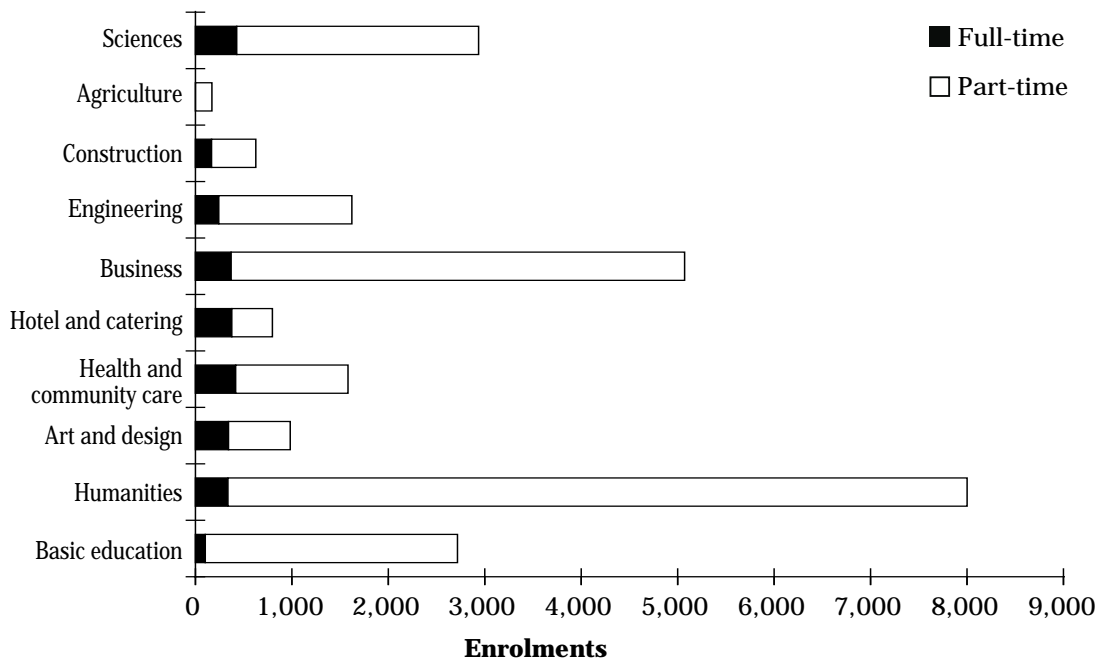


Enrolments: 24,508

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**Figure 3**

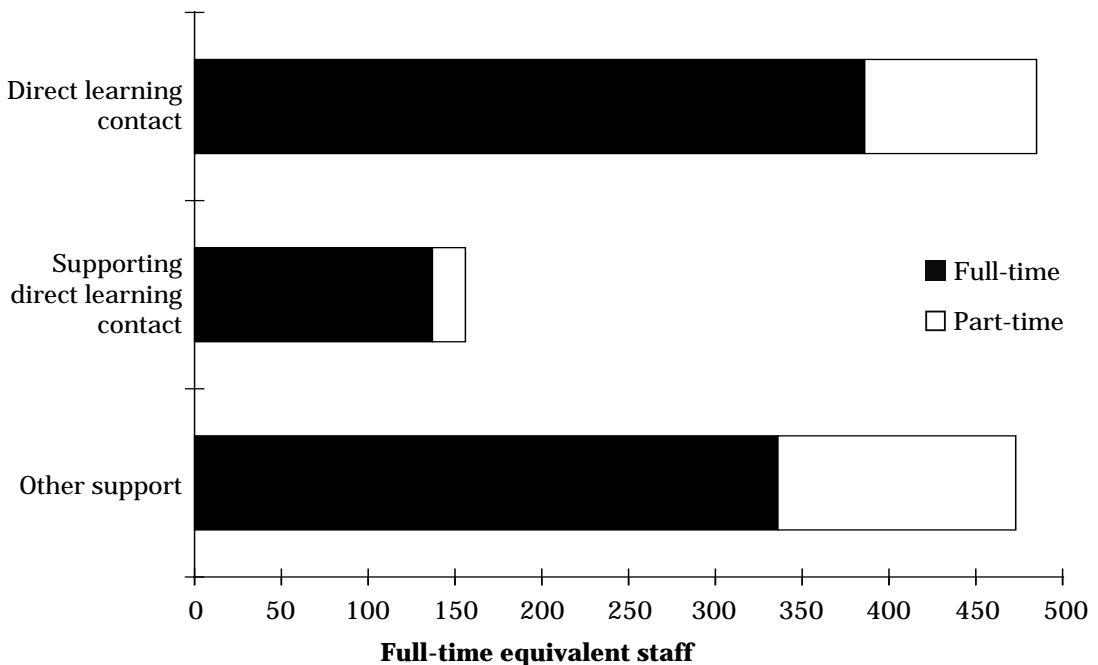
**Wirral Metropolitan College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (as at December 1995)**



Enrolments: 24,508

**Figure 4**

**Wirral Metropolitan College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (as at December 1995)**



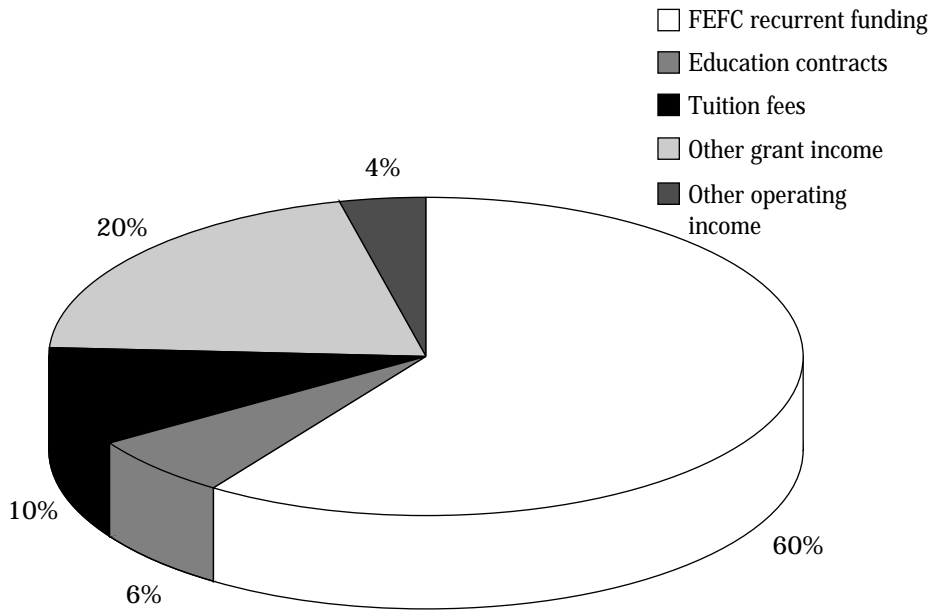
Full-time equivalent staff: 1,114

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**Figure 5**

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**Wirral Metropolitan College: income (for 12 months to July 1995)**

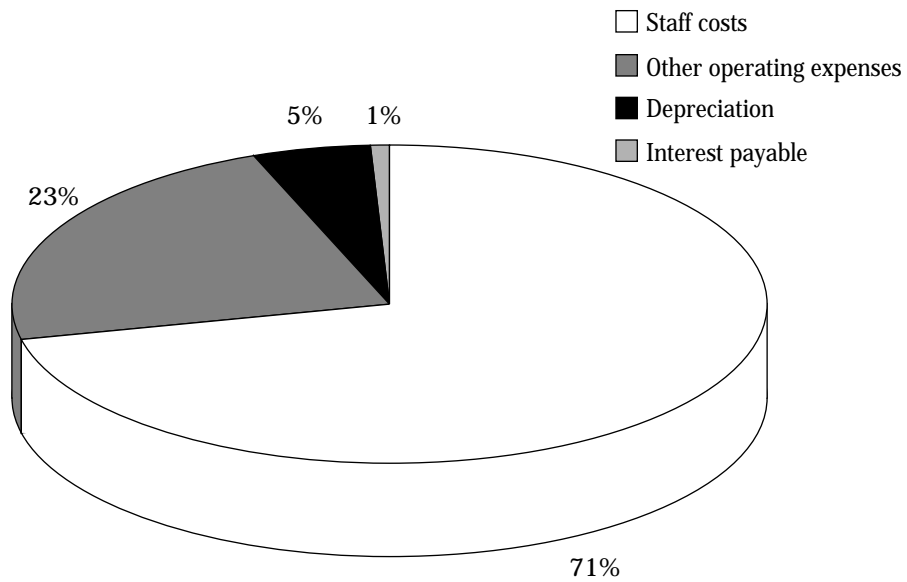


Income: £26,373,000

**Figure 6**

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**Wirral Metropolitan College: expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)**



Expenditure: £28,442,000

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