

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

York Sixth Form College

**September
1995**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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

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

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

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

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

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FEFC INSPECTION REPORT 115/95

YORK SIXTH FORM COLLEGE
YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE REGION
Inspected April - May 1995

Summary

York Sixth Form College provides a wide range of GCSE and GCE A level courses for 16-19 year old students. It has also recently introduced GNVQs at intermediate and advanced level. The college is adjacent to a large college of further and higher education with which it has established a complementary relationship in order to meet the education and training needs of the community. The college has close and effective links with local schools. The governors are strongly supportive of the college's mission. Senior managers give high priority to the support of both staff and students. Channels of communication are effective. Standards of teaching are high and teachers are committed to the success and well-being of their students who achieve good results in external examinations particularly at GCE A level. Students are also encouraged to broaden their skills and experience by participating in a wide range of non-examined activities. The college provides an attractive and generally well-equipped learning environment. Quality assurance systems require further development. The college should consider ways of increasing its enrolments in accordance with its strategic objectives. It should also adopt a more systematic approach to strategic planning, improve the consistency of tutorial work and expand its information technology resources.

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

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Mathematics	2	Humanities	1
Sciences	2	English and performing arts	2
Business and economics	2	Modern foreign languages	1
Art, design and technology	2	Social sciences	1

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INTRODUCTION

1 York Sixth Form College was inspected between June 1994 and May 1995. The college's enrolment and induction procedures were inspected during June and September 1994. In April 1995 three full-time inspectors and 10 part-time registered inspectors spent a total of 34 days on specialist subject inspections. Inspectors visited 131 classes, held meetings with college staff and inspected a broad range of students' work. The inspectors also had access to an extensive variety of documentation relating to the college and its courses. In the week beginning 22 May 1995, three full-time and four part-time registered inspectors, including one inspector with experience from outside the world of education, spent a further 33 inspector days looking at aspects of cross-college provision. During the period of the inspection there were meetings with governors, representatives of the North Yorkshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and North Yorkshire Careers Services Limited, head teachers, the principal of York College of Further and Higher Education, local employers, parents, students, college managers and teaching and support staff.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 York Sixth Form College was established in 1985 as a result of the reorganisation of secondary education in the city of York. It is located in a semi-rural position at the south-western boundary of the city on the site of a former secondary modern school. The buildings were extensively modernised at the time the college was founded and additional classrooms, science laboratories and a sports hall were also provided. The college concentrates on providing full-time General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) courses for 16-19 year old students. It has recently introduced a range of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) at advanced and intermediate level. It is sited within a quarter of a mile from the York College of Further and Higher Education, which is the major provider of adult and vocational courses for the city and surrounding districts.

3 The city of York and its immediate environment has a population in excess of 100,000. The traditional industrial base has focused on confectionery products and railway engineering. The latter has encountered a steady decline, culminating in the recent announcement of the closure of all railway engineering works. Tourism now makes a significant contribution to the local economy and there is growing employment in the biosciences industry. Small and medium-sized businesses predominate in the city. The current unemployment rate in York is 7 per cent, compared with an average of 9.6 per cent for the Yorkshire and Humberside region. At the time the college was established, the schools within the city were reorganised into eight 11-16 comprehensive schools. There are also five 11-18 comprehensive schools within the catchment area of the college.

4 The college has grown significantly since its establishment, although enrolments have now levelled off. At the time of the inspection there were 914 students. Of these, 91 per cent were following GCE A level or advanced GNVQ programmes, and the remainder were engaged on GCSE or intermediate GNVQ programmes. Eighty-five students in all were enrolled on GNVQ programmes. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2 respectively. Enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. Only a small number of students attending the college come from minority ethnic groups: this mirrors the profile in the city and surrounding districts.

5 There are 69 full-time equivalent teaching staff at the college and 26 full-time equivalent support staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. The major cross-college roles are undertaken by the principal, a vice-principal responsible for curriculum and staffing, and three deputy principals who share responsibility for admissions, student support, premises, careers and admissions to higher education. The teaching staff are grouped into subject departments. For a significant part of the current academic year, the principal has been absent from the college as a result of illness. In his absence, many of his responsibilities have been undertaken by the vice-principal.

6 The mission statement of the college is 'to enable a wide variety of students to take full advantage of an excellent academic and general vocational education within a structured and supportive framework'. A key target is to pursue excellence by enabling each student to fulfil his or her educational potential. As well as educating students in broader skills and developing personal competencies, the college aims to be a major force in enabling the community of York to reach national foundation and lifetime learning targets. In doing so, it sees its role as complementing the provision of the nearby college of further and higher education.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

7 Staff are aware of the national targets for education and training and of the government's policies for further education. These are explicitly referred to in the college strategic plan and have featured in planning meetings. The college has responded to the national targets by extending its range of GCE A levels and by introducing GNVQs. In planning its courses the college has taken into account the wide range of provision available at York College of Further and Higher Education. The staff and governors seek to maintain the distinctive ethos of a sixth form college and students are almost exclusively full-time 16-19 year olds.

8 For this group and within this ethos there is broad provision. A wide and well-established range of 28 subjects at GCE A level can be taken in almost any combination. The college offers 12 GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects and 20 GCSE subjects. New GCE A levels in sports studies, law and theatre studies are recruiting well for a September

1995 start. A GCE A level resit scheme caters for students, both from the college and from other institutions, who wish to improve their existing grades. Advanced GNVQs are offered in business, health and social care, and art and design, and the college is recruiting students for advanced science to start in September 1995. About half the students on these GNVQs combine their studies with a GCE A level. An intermediate level programme is available for students not yet qualified to enter advanced level study. It consists of GCSEs and intermediate GNVQs. However, of the intermediate GNVQs offered, only the business course attracted sufficient students to run this year.

9 Relations with York College of Further and Higher Education are good. Staff from both colleges work together in a formal partnership for the joint development of GNVQs. There is an informal agreement that daytime GCE A levels will be offered at the sixth form college, and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and part-time evening GCE A levels at the further education college, thus avoiding unnecessary duplication. Those applicants to the sixth form college who are regarded by admissions staff as insufficiently qualified for the existing courses are guided towards alternatives at the further education college which offers foundation level provision. There is no joint market research or detailed planning to help the college achieve its objective of meeting local needs through complementary provision. The timetables of the two colleges allow only a few students to follow a course of study which combines elements from both colleges. For example, sixth form college GNVQ students do not have access to the additional GNVQ units offered by the further education college, and further education college students do not have access to the daytime GCE A level provision at the sixth form college.

10 The college has some way to go in meeting other strategic objectives. One objective is to attract both full-time and part-time adults to follow daytime courses, but hardly any do so and the college prospectus does not mention this opportunity. Another relates to an increase in the participation rate for students aged 16-19. However, recruitment was virtually static last session and the college failed to meet its growth target. The college marketing plan is of recent origin and there is insufficient in-depth market research to enable the college to meet its objective of widening participation.

11 Additional activities to enrich students' programmes of study are a strong feature of the curriculum. They are well organised and most students have a timetabled commitment to take part. The complementary curriculum has three strands: career and community placements, general education, and sport and leisure. Some 400 students participate in 21 sporting activities. Several teams, for example in orienteering and hockey, compete at national level. About 250 students enter for the GCE A level general studies examination each year. As well as the complementary curriculum, students have many opportunities to participate in music and

drama: about 90 students take advantage of free music tuition. Each year the students organise and help to finance a summer arts festival.

12 The college maintains good links with the eight 11-16 schools within the city. Each school has a member of the college's senior management team as its designated link person. Head teachers of these 11-16 schools regard the college as their sixth form. Teachers from both the sixth form college and the further education college conduct joint presentations in the schools to year 11 pupils and their parents. There are opportunities for school teachers to keep up to date with curriculum developments at the college. They receive information on the progress of their students at college. Teachers in some college departments have developed close links with their counterparts in these schools, but more could be done to develop curriculum links and involve a wider range of college teachers in visits and marketing activities. The college finds that attempts to form links with local 11-18 schools are less productive because of the competition for students. Nevertheless, about half the college's intake each year comes from these schools.

13 Teachers in a number of departments have responded to students' needs by forming effective external links. For example, geography teachers have established a subject consortium including both 11-16 and 11-18 schools. Geography, mathematics and economics teachers have developed modular or resource-based GCE A level courses that improve students' choice of options. Design and technology teachers have developed a range of industrial links using technology projects such as the Creativity in Science and Technology gold awards, the neighbourhood engineers scheme and the 'opening windows' scheme. Fifteen students participate in Young Enterprise activities which are sponsored by a number of large organisations. Their work was awarded a prize for innovation by the Institute of Business Management. Journalists from the Yorkshire Evening Press assist with a journalism course as part of the complementary curriculum, creating opportunities for students to write in a professional context. However, the college has few procedures to consolidate and extend this good practice. Few students are enrolled on language options in the GNVQ programme and European awareness is underdeveloped. There is little supplementary activity in information technology. Employers' views on college provision could be more systematically obtained. The college has recently joined the York and District Chamber of Commerce to forge closer links with employers. At present, the college obtains no sponsorship or other external funding, and it has not independently mounted any successful bids for local TEC funding.

14 The college has a brief equal opportunities statement. Senior managers have established some channels for grievances and the few incidents that have arisen have been quickly addressed. Care is taken to try to ensure a balanced composition of staff members on appointment boards. However, the college has no equal opportunities co-ordinator or committee to monitor and develop implementation of the policy. Little is

done to raise students' awareness of equal opportunities issues in tutorials or through the curriculum. The college provides good support for a small number of students with visual, hearing and physical impairments.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

15 The governing body has a membership which reflects the interests of the community, industry and commerce. There are 20 members including the principal, two members of the college staff and two parents of existing students. Nine are business members, one is a local TEC nominee and one is the head of a York 11-16 school. Five of the members are female. There are no student governors. At the time of the inspection there was one vacancy. Members possess a breadth of experience which the college uses to good effect. This includes knowledge of finance, personnel and general management at a senior level in industry. Key committees are chaired by governors who have appropriate backgrounds and qualifications: for example, the assets and premises committee is chaired by a chartered surveyor and the personnel committee by a personnel manager. When the new governing body was established in 1993, half the business governors were appointed for two years, and half for four years, to preserve continuity. The governors have recently adopted a code of conduct.

16 Governors make an important contribution to the college and strongly support its mission and ethos. For example, five governors are on the college's strategic planning group which meets frequently. The governing body meets every two months and its five committees are scheduled to support this meeting. Each committee has appropriate terms of reference and meetings are well attended. The principal reports regularly to the governing body on issues such as examination performance, students' recruitment and retention, and financial matters. However, the governors do not receive reports on some issues such as the implementation of the policy for health and safety. Governors are kept up to date with issues and developments in further education. Recent events have included presentations by the principal, one by the Further Education Staff College and a joint event organised with the York College of Further and Higher Education. However, governor development could usefully be placed on a more formal basis. The corporation recognises this and is considering establishing development records for governors.

17 The development of the 1993-94 strategic plan involved consultation with a range of interested parties such as the local TEC, college staff, the chamber of commerce, the North Yorkshire careers service and partner schools. More recent plans have been developed by the strategic planning group. This group has members drawn from the governors, senior managers, department heads and teaching staff, and has good links with the various staff working parties. However, the current procedures limit the extent to which all staff can contribute to the planning process. The strategic plan itself consists mainly of a list of courses to be offered and of target numbers of students. Neither the strategic plan, nor the one-year

operational plan adequately address the related resource implications. The current operational plan does not provide an effective framework to guide the development of departments and cross-college functions.

18 The senior management team consists of the principal, vice-principal, three deputy principals and the college bursar who is responsible for finance and personnel matters. Their roles are clear and understood by staff. The team meets weekly, and meetings are supported by appropriate, wide-ranging agenda and clear, detailed minutes. Responsibilities for actions arising from the minutes are clearly identified and their implementation monitored. Policy matters are thoroughly discussed at these meetings and decisions are taken collectively. There is some unnecessarily duplication: for example, two managers have responsibility for aspects of the college's management information system and two for careers and higher education guidance. The college is considering a management restructuring which will eliminate this duplication.

19 Specific college developments such as the establishment of a learning-resources centre and a college charter were planned through working parties. Their membership is drawn from across the college and they are effective in implementing change. Improved internal assessment arrangements and better internal communication with students have resulted from such groups. The senior management team holds regular meetings with heads of department. These meetings are valuable for communicating decisions and for general discussion. However, they involve 22 heads of department and the group is too large to provide a forum for collective decision-making.

20 Senior managers undertake senior tutor roles in order to remain in regular contact with students. Both the principal and vice-principal take a keen interest in the progress of individual students. There is a strong commitment to the policy of releasing teachers and heads of department as much as possible from administrative and managerial duties to allow them to devote their time to teaching. The success of this policy is evident in the college's good record of academic and other achievements. However, a further consequence is that senior managers carry heavy administrative and pastoral burdens which limit the time they can spend on strategic management.

21 Channels of communication between managers, teachers and students are effective. Communications with teachers are maintained through a variety of methods including weekly whole staff briefings, twice termly staff meetings, and informal contacts. Teachers are strongly supportive of the college's ethos and mission statement and of the college management. Communication with students is mainly through the tutorial system. There is also a computer-based registration system which notifies students of messages waiting for them at reception. A networked system of television monitors displays college information.

22 The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is recorded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) as £19.96 per unit. The median for sixth form colleges is £19.81. At the time of the inspection, the college had a projected budget for the 12 month period August 1994 to July 1995 of £2.8 million, of which 94 per cent is funded by the FEFC. The college's estimated income and expenditure for the 12 months to July 1995 are shown in figures 5 and 6. At the time of the inspection the college had an accumulated reserve of about £730,000. A large proportion of this has been earmarked to fund the establishment of a learning-resources centre.

23 The method of calculating financial allocations to subject departments is understood by the heads of department and regarded as fair. It is based on a formula which reflects the costs of different courses and the number of students on a particular course. Allocations are made in three stages, the final stage reflecting students' retention rates. Department heads receive regular financial statements to guide them in their management of these funds. Financial delegation does not extend to capital items. The funding of new courses and of other developments is controlled by the principal. Although department heads are not aware of the total sum of money available for this purpose or how it is allocated, there is general confidence in the process.

24 The college uses the computerised Schools Information Management System. A separate system supports financial management. Senior managers have access to the system through a network. The college set up a working group to advise on the purchase of the existing systems. This has now been disbanded and there is, currently, no college-wide users' group to advise on the information needs of existing and potential users. The college is presently at an early stage in the development of a system to calculate the costs of individual courses and of departments.

25 Whilst an overall college enrolment target is set, targets are not set for each department. This is seen as a way of avoiding competition between departments. The college set an enrolment target for 1994-95 which represented an increase of 12 per cent above the previous year's enrolments. It failed to meet this target by 11 per cent.

26 The retention of students is monitored regularly and students' reasons for leaving courses early, or for changing subjects, are carefully recorded. Nearly all students who leave the college early are interviewed before leaving. Students' destinations are collected and used to inform the college's marketing.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

27 Support for students has a high priority in the college. The overall responsibility is shared by five members of the senior management team who are closely involved in all aspects of its provision. Relationships between staff and students are marked by care and concern for the individual, and staff at all levels readily offer informal academic and personal support to students.

28 The college uses its close links with partner schools to ensure that prospective students are given full information and guidance about the college and its courses. The programme of guidance events includes two occasions in year 11 when prospective students may visit the college and sample up to six subjects in which they are interested. In a survey, students commented that these occasions had helped them considerably in their choices. All applicants are interviewed by a member of the college's senior management team to achieve consistency and impartiality between subjects. Where appropriate, interviewers provide information about courses on offer at other further education colleges. The prospectus is attractive and informative and contains examples of former students' case histories. It is supplemented by more detailed subject information produced by departments.

29 On arrival at the college, students embark on their studies promptly. They follow a centrally-organised and effective induction programme, which starts on their first day at college and continues during tutorial periods in the early stages of the course. They receive a starter pack which contains a copy of the college charter and other information about life at college. Some of the services to students, such as those of the health counsellor and personal counsellor, are not mentioned in the starter pack. Few groups use the college charter as an opportunity to discuss students' rights and responsibilities as part of their induction. Tutors hold individual discussions early in the course to help students plan their learning. Induction into subjects is assisted by detailed handbooks which introduce students to study techniques, as well as giving them an overview of the content and assessment methods they can expect.

30 Students' progress is reviewed half way through the first term. Those who wish to change subject or course, at or before this point, are able to do so through a well-understood procedure which ensures that there is full discussion with all staff concerned and, if necessary, with parents.

31 All students are allocated a personal tutor. Tutors and students are timetabled for two one-hour sessions each week, during which individual discussions or group activities take place. Students appreciate the opportunity for individual interviews with their tutors. These occur at least twice a term and a record is kept of the discussions. Tutors are also expected to conduct group activities on a series of topics such as study skills, money matters and the world of work. The quality of these group activities varies widely across the college. Tutors and students value them less highly than the individual review sessions and some tutors have discontinued group work altogether. More support and guidance should be given to tutors in order to promote greater consistency in this aspect of their work and ensure that the group sessions are of benefit to the students.

32 Students review their progress regularly with their subject teachers according to a college-wide schedule. The reviews give students the opportunity to assess and record their own progress and to discuss the

written record with their teachers and personal tutors. The process is thorough and works effectively. Parents are invited to college to discuss the reviews with teachers. Between the scheduled reviews, subject teachers use a well-established system for communicating concerns about any individual student's progress to personal tutors. These can then be followed up during tutorial periods. Although the college aims to encourage all students to maintain their national record of achievement, in practice few students do so and many tutors offer insufficient encouragement.

33 At present there are no systematic arrangements to identify those students who require additional support in the core skills of language and numeracy or to meet their needs. However, the college has appointed a learning support co-ordinator and completed a pilot scheme to inform the development of such arrangements in the near future. Since September 1994 the college has had a part-time professional counsellor, who offers a confidential personal counselling service to students on four occasions during the week. This is well advertised and supported by good links with external agencies. It is extensively used and valued by the students.

34 Following consultation with staff and students, the college has adopted a student health policy. Its aim is to provide an environment and culture within which students will be encouraged to consider positively issues affecting their health. Representatives from the community health service visit the college once a month to provide a programme of health education. This consists of displays and videos in a prominent area of the college and the opportunity to receive confidential health counselling. Although students appreciate the displays and videos, their awareness of the health counselling service is low and few take advantage of it.

35 Students' absences are monitored and followed up meticulously. The college has a swipe-card system for recording attendance. This has replaced the previous daily registration. Each absence from class is recorded centrally and a weekly printout of absences is issued to personal tutors. At the next tutorial period students are required to give a written reason for each absence during the preceding week. When a student has been absent for three days, and the cause is not known, a member of the senior management team contacts the student's parents. Although the process is time-consuming and has suffered from some administrative problems in the first year, students know that any absences will be followed up promptly. The average attendance in the classes inspected was 85 per cent. The highest level of attendance was in geography (94 per cent) and the lowest in the tutorials (75 per cent).

36 Five members of the senior management team each act as senior tutor to 11 personal tutors. Tutors appreciate the high level of support they receive, particularly in dealing with individual students. Senior tutors hold a twice-termly meeting with each tutor, in which they discuss the progress of each student. In addition, they are available at any time to lend assistance. The senior tutors do not meet their tutors as a group: the

lack of a team approach reduces the opportunities to discuss tutorial work, to share good practice and to promote consistency.

37 Students value highly the careers and higher education guidance they receive. Staff spend a considerable amount of time on individual guidance, helping students both in making their choices and preparing their applications. Those who are invited to interview by their prospective further and higher education institutions are offered a mock interview by an appropriate member of staff. The programme of career and community placements, which many students follow for half a day each week, helps to inform students' choice of career. There is a well-resourced careers and higher education area which includes useful software packages. The college has the support of a careers officer from North Yorkshire Careers and Guidance Services Limited for 29 days in the year. The service, which consists mainly of the provision of individual interviews, is a valuable supplement to the work of the college. However, careers officers are not involved in pre-enrolment events or in work with tutors.

38 The student council makes a valuable contribution to the college, providing an effective channel of communication between the tutor groups and the college management. It meets monthly and is well supported by a senior member of staff. It allocates funds to help students in financial difficulties. The results of student surveys are discussed at the student council and students report that senior managers take their views seriously. The student council was not, however, consulted when the college charter was drawn up.

39 The college is meeting its statutory obligation to provide collective worship and religious education for those who wish to receive it. The Christian union meets weekly and religious education is provided within the general education programme.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

40 Of the 131 sessions inspected, 73 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. The strengths and weaknesses of the work were evenly balanced in a further 21 per cent of sessions. In 6 per cent of the sessions weaknesses outweighed strengths. The following table shows the grades awarded as a result of the inspection.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		26	45	11	1	1	84
GCSE		1	8	10	3	0	22
GNVQ		1	7	3	0	0	11
Other		1	7	3	3	0	14
Total		29	67	27	7	1	131

41 In science classes, teachers used an appropriate variety of teaching strategies including lectures, demonstrations, practical investigations, use of video and supported independent study. Geology courses included a substantial amount of fieldwork, some of it residential. The teachers set the level and content of the class in the context of what students had already learned and checked frequently that learning had been achieved. They were aware of the different abilities of the students and adapted their teaching accordingly. They established good relationships with the students and in most cases maintained a high degree of interest and challenge. The physics department offered a programme of remedial surgeries for students who were falling behind or finding the subject difficult. Not all teachers had prepared a detailed scheme of work, using instead the syllabus set by the examination board. There was little use of information technology to enhance the teaching and learning activities.

42 Teaching and learning in mathematics were of a high standard, particularly at GCE A level, where the interaction between teachers and students enabled students to contribute readily and ask questions. Students were encouraged to learn from each other. In the best classes, teachers used investigative and practical approaches, generating lively debate about the underlying mathematical principles. In others, the teaching, though competent, failed to stimulate real enthusiasm for the subject. Teachers made insufficient use of resources such as overhead projectors, video and information technology. They had not developed materials which would address students' particular needs through individual study. Teachers provided extra help sessions, though these were often poorly attended by students.

43 Teachers of business studies promoted an active, investigative approach to learning, as a response to new developments in GCE A level syllabuses and the introduction of GNVQs. They made good use of group work to involve students, ensured that lessons progressed at a lively pace and reinforced learning at key points. Teachers' expectations of students were high and students were interested in their learning. They benefited from clearly-presented assignments which were marked in a detailed and helpful manner. Teachers had planned the new GCE A level course carefully, with thorough schemes of work and assessment strategies. In the provision of learning materials, however, they failed to take sufficient account of students' individual needs. The scheme of work for the intermediate GNVQ course did not encourage a coherent and systematic approach to learning.

44 In art courses, students worked on their own with appropriate support from teachers. They were encouraged to develop their own ideas and ways of working and this resulted in diversity and originality in their work. They were assisted in their learning by a positive working atmosphere and good relationships with their teachers. The teachers rarely addressed students as a group. This approach had drawbacks in that group dynamics were poor and some students lacked direction. Some

were observed attempting work which did not represent a profitable use of their time, and this could have been avoided by a more structured approach.

45 Students of design technology and graphical communication experienced a variety of activities which included demonstrations, practical projects and presentations by fellow students. They benefited in their project work from regular visits by engineers. In one class, the sales manager of a local engineering firm was discussing a project with a student while a retired senior electrical engineer was providing advice to a small group. Participation in the Creativity in Science and Technology award scheme helped to provide motivation and a sense of achievement. Learning was enhanced by access to specialist facilities outside normal lesson times. This was much appreciated by the students. The teachers monitored the progress of students' projects carefully, but did not document the progress on a sufficiently formal basis. Some students would benefit from more guidance on the selection of projects. In specialist computing classes, clear and accurate worksheets provided good individual support in practical sessions. Some of the software was unimaginative and outdated.

46 Teachers of English and drama demonstrated a high level of subject knowledge and most used a variety of approaches to involve and challenge the students. In the majority of sessions, students were stimulated by well-organised group work, skilful questioning and the enthusiasm of the teachers. Teachers offered students valuable opportunities to enhance their studies through elements in the general education programme such as a writers' workshop and a module on horror in literature and film, as well as visits to theatre productions and seminars. They offered a weekly surgery for students needing additional help. A minority of sessions lacked structure, did not actively involve students and failed to hold their attention. In these sessions, the pace of work was slow and students' learning was not checked. In the department as a whole, students were insufficiently encouraged to develop their information technology skills, for example by using wordprocessing to draft and redraft their work. Music teaching was characterised by a lively style of presentation, good opportunities for students to participate and concern for students' individual needs.

47 Foreign language courses were structured around a series of topics which caught the interest of the students. Their personal involvement was encouraged by activities such as group presentations, debates and individual coursework projects. Foreign visits, in which over 50 per cent of modern language students had taken part, were used as a valuable means of teaching and learning. While abroad, students attended a programme of talks and visits to supplement the topics they were studying and compiled a dossier which they could talk about in their oral examination. Teachers used an impressive range of authentic materials such as foreign newspapers and satellite television broadcasts. They conducted classes predominantly in the language being studied, and the high standard of their linguistic skills provided a model for students to

emulate. Foreign language assistants were effectively deployed in GCE A level and AS programmes to give students ready access to a native speaker. Students were encouraged to learn from their mistakes by re-drafting corrected written work. They made good use of the extra help sessions provided by their teachers.

48 Teachers in the social sciences were successful in conveying their knowledge and enthusiasm to the students. The techniques adopted included brief teacher presentations, extensive question and answer sessions, detailed discussion in small groups and group presentations to the whole class. Short video extracts were skilfully integrated into some sessions. Handouts were of high quality. The productive interaction between teachers and students generated, in many classes, an air of intellectual excitement. Teachers gave helpful individual guidance and encouragement. This was especially valued by students undertaking sociology coursework and practical assignments in psychology. The use of information technology was underdeveloped. The structure of the newly-established GNVQ course in health and social care is being reviewed in order to remedy some deficiencies in induction, the scheduling of assignments and the provision of information technology and numeracy.

49 Geography teachers made effective use of visual aids and up-to-date resource materials. The choice of a new enquiry-based GCE A level syllabus had promoted innovative teaching techniques which were appreciated by the students and resulted in a high standard of work. The GCSE course was less successful. Geography students had good opportunities for residential fieldwork. Student participation was further developed through the college's geographical society, which was chaired by a student and published the newsletter of the local geographical association. Effective systems ensured that students received regular feedback on their progress and were able, in turn, to express their views and concerns. Group work was often used as a vehicle to introduce peer assessment and to complement teacher assessment.

50 In history classes teachers used a carefully-planned variety of teaching styles and activities. Teachers had high expectations of students, while recognising the different abilities of individuals. They integrated study skills into the teaching and learning processes. For example, a GCE A level class was concerned with the relative significance of the economic and religious causes of the peasants' wars. A short presentation by the teacher was followed by the division of the class into two debating groups, each arguing the case for one of the causes. Each group then presented its case to the other. The teacher summed up the arguments and went on to draw attention to the skills of presenting an argument and listening actively.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

51 Students showed a keen interest in their subjects and were able to speak and write about their work clearly and with enthusiasm. They were

able to apply their knowledge and understanding to a range of different contexts and were appreciative of the support and commitment shown by their teachers. Students responded positively to group work, which was used effectively as a means of learning. Students' written work at GCE AS/A level was well presented and clearly structured. It appropriately illustrated the skills of synthesis, analysis and evaluation. These qualities were less evident on some GCSE courses, for example biology and American studies.

52 In a number of curriculum areas there was clear evidence of the successful integration of the core skills of language and numeracy. In the advanced GNVQ art and design course, where students were undertaking a series of calculations in order to make a mobile sculpture balance, mathematical reasoning formed part of design activities. In GCE A level history, oral discussion skills were effectively demonstrated as a result of a programme involving all students in the prior reading of historical documents. In economics, students had ready access to computers with specialist software which allowed the comparative performance of countries to be plotted and analysed. In general, however, the lack of modern computers across the college significantly limited the ability of students to develop and practise information technology skills. Practical project work in design and technology was of a good standard. Students produced a range of original ideas which were based on sound research. One student, for example, was examining the problems of providing effective seat belts on minibuses. Evidence of project management was more limited and there were few records showing the development stages of projects.

53 The complementary curriculum programme provides students with opportunities to broaden their range of experiences. The community and careers placements scheme for example allows students to work with a variety of organisations from charities to schools and commercial undertakings. About 250 students each year are involved in this part of the programme. The college has a long tradition of achievement in musical and dramatic productions. Musical performances are often held in a large city hall and enjoy high levels of participation from students. The last spring concert, for example, involved over 100 students and staff in the choir and orchestra.

54 In terms of external achievement, students aged 16-18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examinations in 1993-94 scored on average 5.1 points per entry (where A=10 and E=2). This places the college among the top 10 per cent of colleges on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. For those students attempting two or more GCE A levels (or the AS equivalent), the average points score per candidate in 1994 was 18.3, giving the college a ranking of sixth out of 114 sixth form colleges nationally.

55 There are high levels of achievement in GCE A level examinations. Of the 1,207 subject entries in 1994, 53 per cent gained grades A-C and the overall A-E pass rate was 86 per cent. This shows consistency with the previous year, when 54 per cent gained grades A-C and 88 per cent gained grades A-E. These results compare well with the provisional figures for all sixth form colleges in 1994 of 48 per cent and 83 per cent respectively. Of the 29 subjects taught in the college, 12 had pass rates of over 90 per cent in 1994. Particularly outstanding results were obtained in the social sciences where pass rates for psychology, religious studies, government and politics were all 100 per cent. In government and politics, all candidates gained grades A-C and in psychology 86 per cent of the candidates achieved these grades. Sixty-five per cent of candidates in history gained A-C passes, with an overall pass rate of 97 per cent. The French results showed a 96 per cent pass rate with 62 per cent of candidates scoring A-C grades. A-E pass rates in 1994 were above the national averages for sixth form colleges in all subjects except art and design, economics, English, geography, geology, home economics, music and some mathematics options.

56 Subject entries for AS examinations were relatively small with a total of 38 entries in 1994. The overall A-E pass rate of 82 per cent compares favourably with a 73 per cent pass rate for sixth form colleges as a whole. Of the 512 entries for GCSE subjects in 1994, 54 per cent were graded A-C. This again compares favourably with the average A-C pass rate of 49 per cent for sixth form colleges. The GCSE results in computer studies and art and design compared less favourably with national averages, with A-C pass rates of 32 and 40 per cent respectively. The pass rates for the college in 1993 and 1994 are summarised in the table below:

Year	1993		1994	
	Entries	% Pass	Entries	% Pass
GCE A level	1,244	88	1,207	86
GCE AS	39	80	38	82
GCSE	513	57 (A-C)	512	54 (A-C)

57 The college operates its own value-added system at subject level, to measure how well actual grades at GCE A level compare with those predicted from GCSE results on entry. Using this measure, results in the social sciences, history, design and technology were particularly good in 1994, whilst in the sciences and some mathematics options, grades were slightly below those predicted.

58 Course completion rates in the college are generally high. For example, of those students who started the two year GCE A level course in 1992, 83 per cent sat the examination in summer 1994. Completion rates of over 90 per cent were achieved in French and economics. The retention rate for all students from November 1994 to May 1995 was 93 per cent. There are retention problems on some courses. For example, in GCE A

level classical studies only six of the 13 students starting the course in 1992 completed in 1994. Among the GCSE subjects, there were non-completion rates of over 30 per cent in information systems and English literature in 1994. In GCSE history, current retention figures show that only 56 per cent of students who enrolled in September 1994 are still on the course.

59 The majority of students go on to higher education on completion of their courses. In 1994, 71 per cent entered higher education, 8 per cent went on to further education and training and 3 per cent to employment. Ten per cent of destinations were unknown and 8 per cent were categorised as 'other'.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

60 The main elements of the quality assurance system comprise end-of-year departmental reviews, student questionnaires which are distributed at different points during a course, and the college charter. The small quality assurance team consists of the vice-principal and an assistant quality manager who is a member of the mathematics department. The team currently meets for one hour each week. The principal and senior management team are involved in major policy decisions on quality assurance which are also discussed at meetings of heads of department. There has been some slippage in implementing the quality assurance measures outlined in the strategic plan. The principal attributes this slippage to his absence through illness and the resulting pressures on other senior staff. At present, the commitment to develop an explicit statement of quality policy has not been achieved and the quality manual, also referred to in the strategic plan, is in the early stages of development. There has been limited progress towards incorporating the data necessary for quality monitoring purposes into the management information system. There is no standardised set of college performance indicators by which quality might be measured. However, external examination results are carefully analysed as part of the review mechanism. Currently, quality assurance procedures relate mainly to the curriculum and pastoral provision: the setting of performance standards to monitor cross-college services has yet to be undertaken. Much reliance is placed on informal elements of the quality system through self-review and evaluation.

61 A quality assurance system has been established for GNVQ programmes which focuses on annual and interim course reviews. In addition, in partnership with York College of Further and Higher Education, a system of internal verification has been implemented to ensure consistency in assessment standards across both colleges.

62 The first comprehensive review of departmental performance took place in 1994. In a number of cases, the end-of-year reviews are detailed, containing clear aims and a development plan. The biology department, for example, presented a comprehensive set of objectives with associated

evidence indicators. In other cases, the reviews are perfunctory and do not always adhere to the suggested standard format. Aims and objectives are sometimes confused with targets. Some of the targets listed are difficult to measure, for example, the statement 'to ensure that each student achieves the best possible result'. All departments are required to comment on examination performance. In most cases this analysis is thorough and includes reference to value-added measures. Only in a small number of cases, however, does a detailed action plan result from the review process. The target-setting process of the quality cycle is not formally monitored, although this is stated as a strategic objective.

63 Internal value-added analysis of examinations data has been undertaken for the last two years. A summary chart and commentary compares GCSE with GCE A level data and illustrates those subjects performing better or worse than predicted from students' GCSE scores on entry. At present, it is difficult to use the system to monitor students' progress during their course. However, the college has recently informed departments of the GCSE scores of all first-year GCE A level students, in order to allow monitoring to take place at the discretion of individual departments.

64 The college makes good use of questionnaires to obtain students' perceptions. The end-of-year and end-of-course surveys are standardised for all subjects, and questions require responses on a four-point scale for ease of analysis. The aggregation of responses is undertaken at both departmental and college level so that variations in perceptions of, for example, the quality of teaching and marking can be compared across the college for all subjects. A lucid, quantitative summary of all responses is provided for heads of department. Students complete a post-induction survey to enable them to express their views on the services and facilities provided by the college. A questionnaire is also issued to evaluate the second taster day, held in the summer term prior to formal enrolment for new students. Heads of department are invited to discuss the outcomes of the student surveys with the vice-principal during the latter part of the summer term.

65 The college charter was introduced to students in September 1994. It contains statements of entitlement and a corresponding list of responsibilities together with a complaints procedure. The questions in the student surveys are appropriately linked to charter statements. Although an aggregate college response is produced, there is no annual report on charter performance nor on quality assurance as a whole. Students' awareness and use of the charter is limited and the college plans to give it a higher profile in the next cycle of induction programmes. Individual departments in the college have adapted the charter to produce their own student agreement statements.

66 The college's self-assessment report is laid out according to the seven major headings of the FEFC inspection framework in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*. It is detailed, analytical and considers

each aspect in terms of key strengths and 'areas identified in need of further development'. Evidence indicators are used to support each statement. The judgements in the analysis were in most cases consistent with those reached by the inspection team.

67 A staff-development committee comprising eight teaching staff and the bursar meets termly to recommend policy and monitor the spending of the in-service budget. The committee also approves requests to attend courses and plans internal training activities. All participants on training courses are required to complete an evaluation form and the application form requires a commentary about the link between the activity and the strategic plan. A record is kept of all training events attended by members of staff and a training needs analysis, sorted by department, was completed in February 1995. There is a wide range of training activities for both teaching and non-teaching staff and an appropriate balance of internal and external events. The planning of staff development, however, has not been well informed by departmental reviews and the budget allocated has been subject to significant swings. In 1993 for example, the allocation was £40,000 but this fell to £20,000 in 1994 and has recently been raised to £28,000.

68 A scheme of teacher appraisal is due to be introduced in September 1995 which the documentation states will be 'only concerned with staff development'. The choice of appraiser will lie with the staff-development co-ordinator and the process is designed to run over a three-year cycle, with an intermediate review. A different appraisal mechanism is proposed for support staff which focuses on performance and will take place over a one-year cycle. At present, there are no formal systems for the monitoring of the performance of teaching staff. Although the college has arrangements for the induction of new staff, new entrants to teaching are not always appropriately supported by their head of department.

RESOURCES

Staffing

69 A comprehensive staff handbook illustrates the range of administrative procedures and the responsibilities of senior staff. All staff have job descriptions which have been updated within the last three years.

70 Teaching staff are well qualified and there is an appropriate balance of age and experience. They are enthusiastic and strongly committed both to their subject disciplines and to the well-being of students. Staff turnover at the college is low. Ninety-eight per cent of teachers possess a first degree and 84 per cent have a teaching qualification. Over a third of teachers have higher degrees. Nearly half of the teaching staff have had recent experience as external examiners and a significant number make active contributions in their subject associations. Twenty-five per cent of teachers have gained relevant industrial experience within the last five years. In some curriculum areas, notably business and art, this has led to

a partnership in the production of curriculum materials and visits to the college by appropriate company personnel. In addition, staff with industrial backgrounds have been recruited to teach GNVQ courses. Part-time teachers are well qualified, and are used effectively to provide specialist expertise and flexibility.

71 Support staff are well organised. They are highly motivated and provide effective assistance to teachers and students. Administrative staff are flexibly deployed to cover variable work loadings at different points in the year. There is insufficient technician support in some areas, for example modern languages and information technology. Although technicians are largely linked to departments, they are not always invited to department meetings. The college plans to expand the complement of technicians, specifically in the area of information technology.

Equipment/learning resources

72 There are good levels of equipment in many of the curriculum areas. For example, the modern languages department has a satellite television receiver and a large collection of foreign language video tapes. In design technology, a wide range of machines and hand tools is available together with a computer-aided design and manufacture capability. In music, studios contain a variety of keyboards, and string and percussion instruments. Students are provided with a good level of textbooks, particularly for GCE A level courses. Each history student, for example, is provided with 10 books or more. All staff have access to photocopying, which is funded centrally. Most classrooms are equipped with overhead projectors and whiteboards, and other audio-visual equipment can be delivered to classrooms on request. Laboratory equipment is in good supply to support science programmes.

73 The library is adequately funded and well resourced with texts. There are nearly 20 books for each student at the college. There is no compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database in the library although this facility is available in another part of the building. The number of study spaces is sufficient for the student population for most parts of the college day. The library is due to be extended during the summer of 1995 to form a learning-resources centre. This will increase the number of study spaces and will provide students with resources in a variety of media. Although there is no library committee, there are regular meetings between the librarian and subject teachers to ensure that resources are relevant to the needs of students. A learning-resources manager has recently been appointed.

74 In the past, departments have been responsible for providing information technology equipment for use in their own areas and this has resulted in a wide variety of computers. There is a legacy of under-investment in this area. A high proportion of the machines are old and outdated and the types of hardware and software have not been standardised across the college. The equipment base for specialist

computing courses is poor. Students' access to computers is restricted: there are none currently available, for example, in the library. The planned purchase of an additional 70 computers and the installation of a network in the new learning-resources centre is designed to rectify these deficiencies.

Accommodation

75 The college is located on an extensive campus in pleasant surroundings with ample playing fields and parking for cars and bicycles. It has a good range of modern buildings. The mobile classrooms detract from the quality of the physical environment and in some cases provide poor-quality teaching accommodation. In the main buildings, teaching rooms are well lit and decorated. They provide an attractive learning environment and are enhanced by extensive displays of students' work. Standards of cleaning are high throughout the college.

76 There is good specialist accommodation for science, design technology and modern languages, and a purpose-built sports hall. The main reception area is welcoming and has a ramp for wheelchair users. Access for these students, however, is confined to ground floor rooms. An attractive staff lounge is provided for teachers but work space is inadequate. Storage space in many teaching areas is insufficient. The student common room is drab and unimaginatively furnished. However, there is an attractive adjacent outside quadrangle, with flower beds and wooden seating, which students also use as a social area.

77 The accommodation strategy reflects the requirements of the strategic plan and includes targets for the continuous upgrading of the buildings. A new learning-resources centre, an additional classroom adjacent to the sports hall and improved staff toilet facilities are all planned for September 1995. The estate is well maintained and a deputy principal works closely with the bursar to prepare the annual maintenance schedules. The college monitors its room utilisation and recognises that it is below desired levels although it is limited to some extent by the layout of the buildings.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

78 The college is making good progress towards fulfilling its mission to provide a wide variety of students with an excellent academic and general vocational education within a structured and supportive framework. The strengths of the college are:

- effective links with local schools and colleges
- the extensive complementary curriculum
- the good support given to the college by the governors
- the strong commitment of the senior management to the mission of the college
- good communication between managers, teachers and students

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- the high priority accorded to student support and guidance
 - high standards of teaching
 - high levels of student retention and very good examination results
 - effective use of questionnaires to measure students' perceptions
 - well-qualified and supportive teachers
 - the attractive learning environment.

79 If the college is to build on these strengths it should:

- develop a strategy to meet its planned enrolment targets
- adopt a more systematic approach to strategic planning
- develop the provision of learning support
- improve the consistency of tutorial work
- further develop and implement procedures for quality assurance
- improve the quality and quantity of information technology equipment.

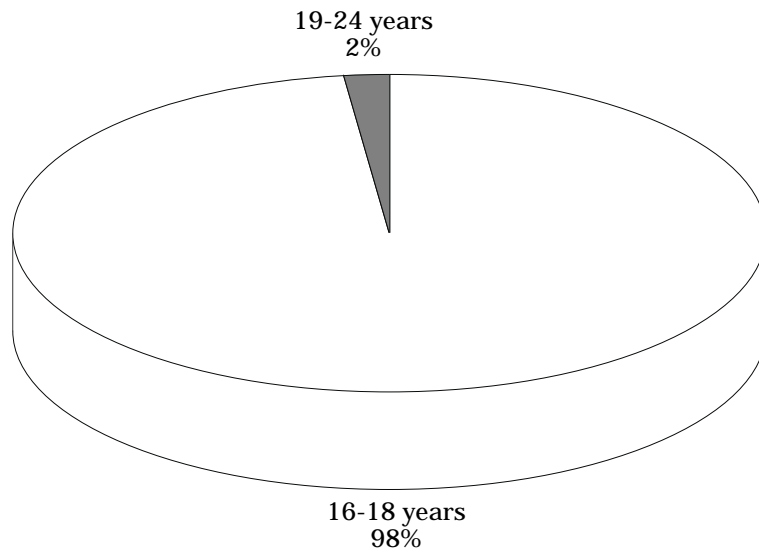
FIGURES

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

Figure 1

York Sixth Form College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

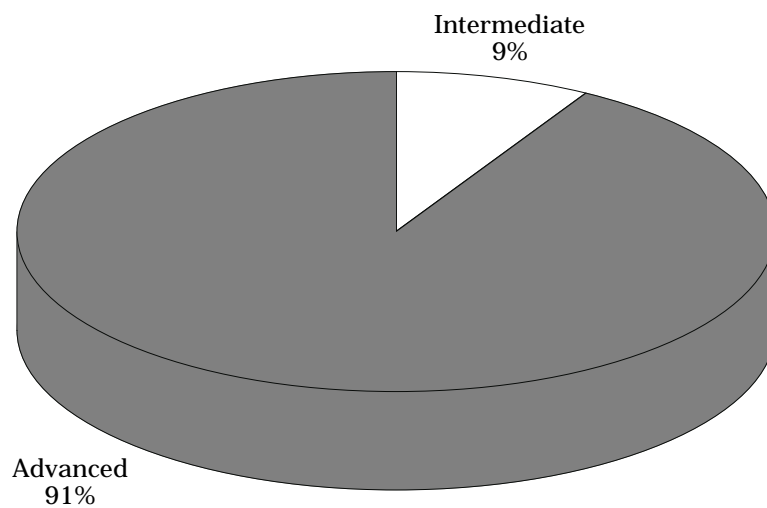


Enrolments: 914

Note: this chart excludes two enrolments aged under 16 years.

Figure 2

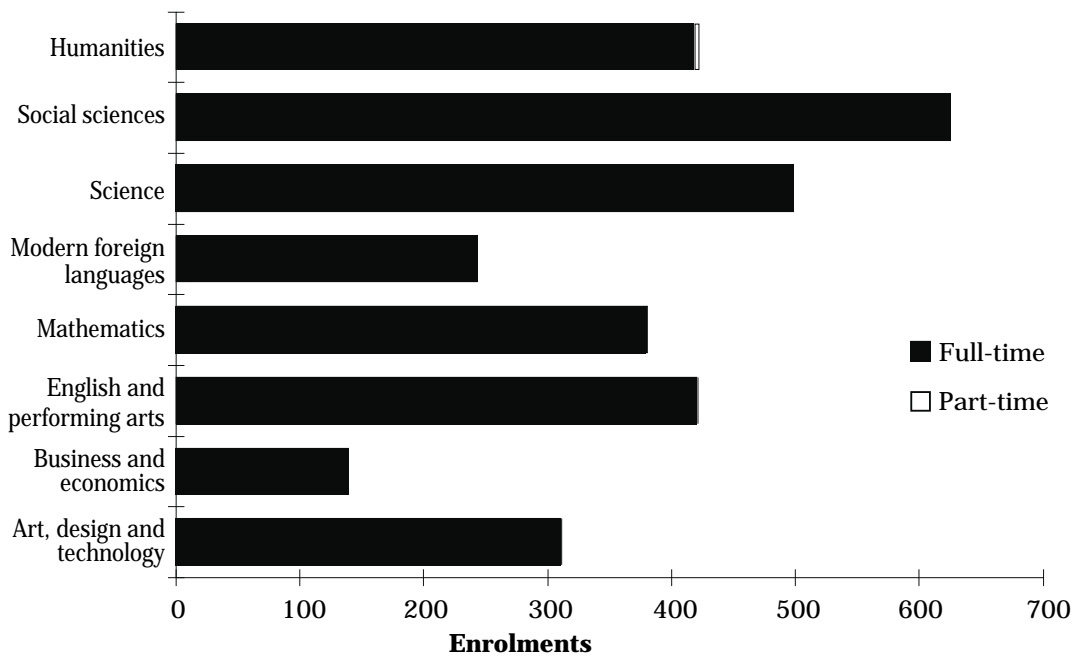
York Sixth Form College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 914

Figure 3

York Sixth Form College: enrolments by mode of attendance and curriculum area (1994-95)

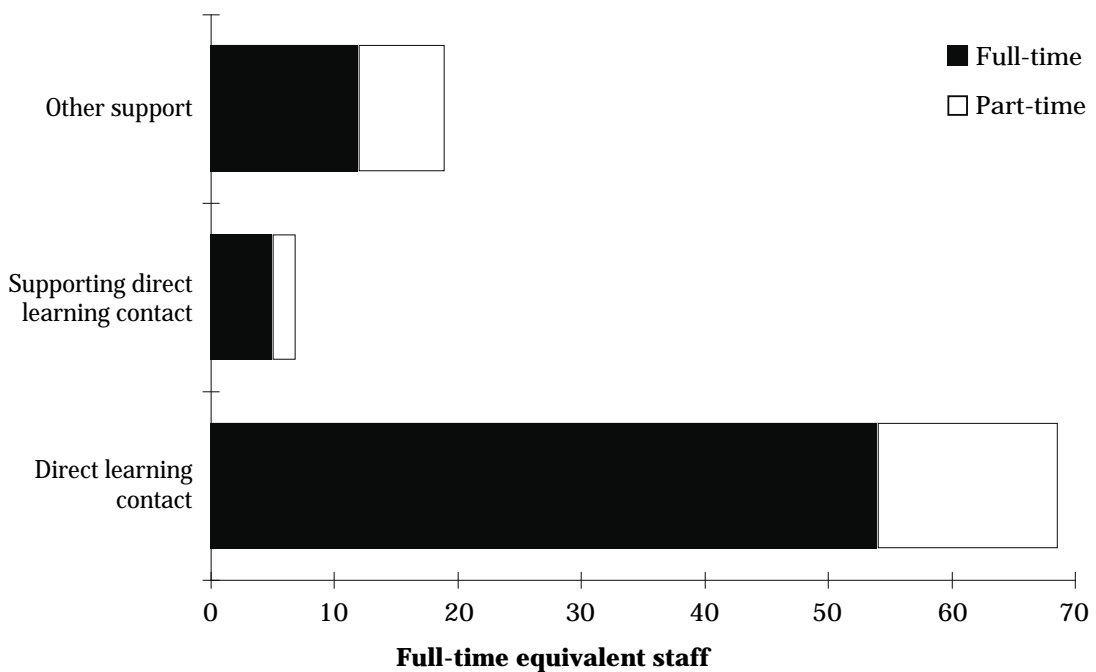


Enrolments: 914

Note: students may enrol in more than one curriculum area.

Figure 4

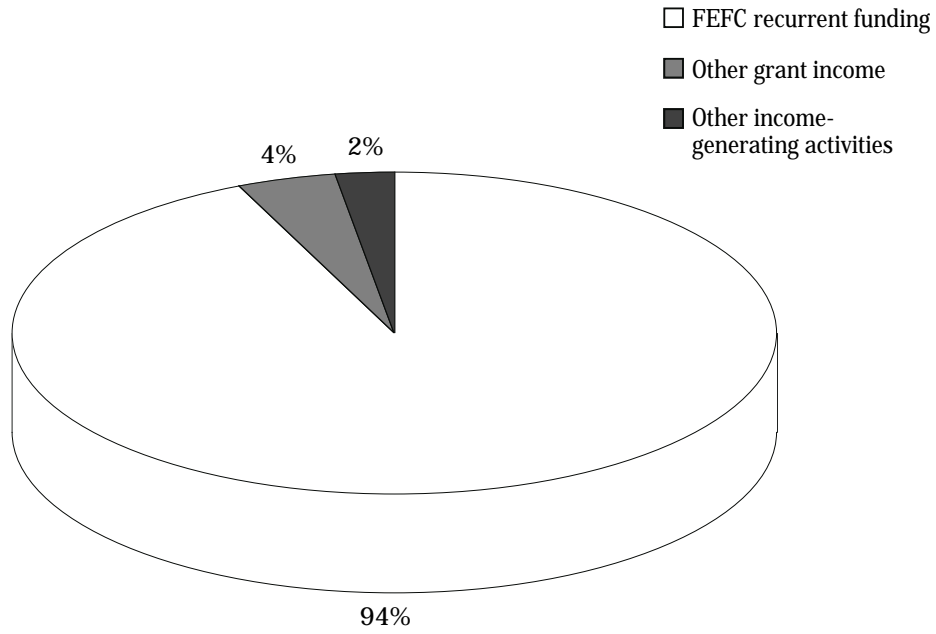
York Sixth Form College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 95

Figure 5

York Sixth Form College: estimated income (for 12 months to July 1995)

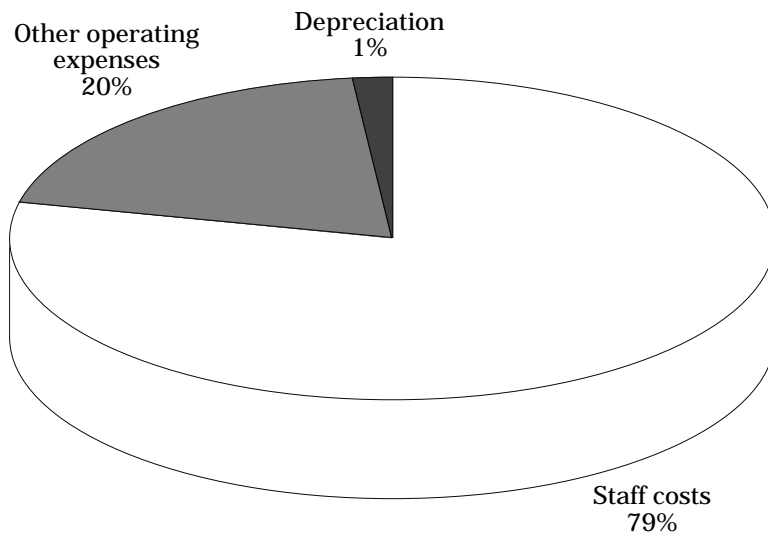


Estimated income: £2,832,000

Note: this chart excludes £7,000 tuition fees.

Figure 6

York Sixth Form College: estimated expenditure (for 12 months to July 1995)



Estimated expenditure: £2,792,000

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