

**REPORT
FROM THE
INSPECTORATE**

Preston 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 96/95

PRESTON COLLEGE

NORTH WEST REGION

Inspected March - April 1995

Summary

Preston College was founded in 1974 as a tertiary college following the reorganisation of secondary education in the borough. The college has grown substantially in recent years and now has over 18,000 enrolments, of whom 69 per cent are adults. The policy of having well-resourced liaison teams has been successful in creating links with a large range of organisations. People who have not normally entered further education are successfully gaining access to courses. There is a wide portfolio of GCE A level and vocational courses. Most of the teaching is good and there is a high level of informal support for students. There has been continuous improvement in examination results and the results for 1994 are good. Students benefit from being taught by experienced staff. Teaching rooms and equipment are generally adequate. Management is characterised by openness and heads of department work closely as a corporate team. However, some management roles require a clearer focus and management information systems are unreliable and often inaccurate. The corporation board should review its operation in relation to the management of the college. The decision-making processes of the college are over elaborate and should be streamlined. The college should: establish more effective formal support systems for students; encourage teaching styles which enable students to become independent learners; ensure that quality assurance procedures are adhered to and produce information designed to bring about improvements across the whole college. Poor accommodation and out-of-date equipment still exist in a minority of curriculum areas.

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

Aspects of cross-college provision		Grade	
Responsiveness and range of provision		1	
Governance and management		3	
Students' recruitment, guidance and support		3	
Quality assurance		3	
Resources:	staffing	2	
	equipment/learning resources	2	
	accommodation	3	
Curriculum area	Grade	Curriculum area	Grade
Science, mathematics and computing	2	Health and care, hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Construction	2	Art and design including performing arts	2
Engineering	3	Humanities	2
Business	2	Basic education	2
Catering, tourism and leisure	2	Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3

CONTENTS

	Paragraph
Summary	
Introduction	1
The college and its aims	2
Responsiveness and range of provision	9
Governance and management	21
Students' recruitment, guidance and support	32
Teaching and the promotion of learning	41
Students' achievements	55
Quality assurance	70
Resources	80
Conclusions and issues	95
Figures	

INTRODUCTION

1 Preston College was inspected in three stages during the academic year 1994-95. Arrangements for enrolment and induction were inspected between June and September 1994. Inspections of curriculum areas took place during March 1995, and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected in the week beginning 24 April 1995. Twenty-nine inspectors carried out the inspection using 109 days. They visited 284 classes, studied a wide range of college documents and examined samples of students' work. They held discussions with governors, college managers, teachers, support staff, students, representatives from the Lancashire Area West Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), local employers, Lancashire County Council and community groups. They also met three local headteachers and a professor from a higher education institution with which the college is in partnership.

THE COLLEGE AND ITS AIMS

2 Preston College was founded in 1974 as a tertiary college following the reorganisation of secondary education in the borough. The college has five sites. Its major provision is on the St Vincent's Road site, two miles from the town centre. The college serves the travel-to-work area recognised by the local TEC as central Lancashire.

3 The college is one of many institutions in the area competing to recruit students, particularly General Certificate of Education advanced level (GCE A level) students. Cardinal Newman Roman Catholic Sixth Form College is less than two miles from the main site, Runshaw College is 10 miles away, and locally, there are two 11-18 schools, and a number of independent schools. Colleges in Blackpool and Blackburn have vocational courses similar to those offered by the college.

4 For many years the area of Preston has depended on a few large employers in industrial sectors which have been experiencing decline or restructuring. In some parts of the town there is substantial long-term unemployment. In January 1995, the unemployment rate for the town of Preston was 11 per cent. In the central ward of the town, it was 26 per cent. The figures are in contrast with those for the whole area covered by the local TEC, which has an unemployment rate lower than the regional or national average. Employment in the TEC area has seen a large fall in male, full-time industrial jobs, but a growth in female, part-time service employment. Total employment in the area is forecast to grow at a rate of 4 per cent over the period 1993-98.

5 In spite of industrial change and a fall in the size of the post-16 cohort, the college has retained its overall student numbers. At the time of the inspection, there were 18,096 enrolments. Twenty-five per cent of students were 16-18 years of age; 69 per cent were adults, and the remaining 6 per cent were under 16, following school link courses. Enrolments by age and level of study are shown in figures 1 and 2. Enrolments by mode of

attendance and curriculum area are shown in figure 3. About 57 per cent of the students are female. Ten per cent are from minority ethnic backgrounds which is a slightly higher proportion than in the town as a whole.

6 Preston College recruits most of its students from the town but some, particularly part-time students, are attracted from a wide catchment area. Adults who attend full-time courses come from as far afield as Morecambe in the north, Skelmersdale in the south and Ribchester in the east. Most 16-19 year old full-time students come from the 38 partner secondary schools. Students enrolling for dance, music technology and road transport technology courses are recruited nationally.

7 The college is a major local employer. It has a total of 962 staff. A staff profile, with staff expressed as full-time equivalents, is shown in figure 4. Responsibilities for marketing, recruitment, enrolment and pastoral care reside with three teams of staff who liaise with schools, adult learners and employers. Each team is led by a dean, comparable in status with a head of department. Responsibility for curriculum delivery lies with nine subject departments. The liaison teams are represented in the nine departments.

8 The college's strategic plan is driven by four major objectives:

- to offer a wide range of academic and vocational qualifications to meet the needs of all sections of the community and to make available an extensive range of flexible-learning opportunities
- to liaise with local schools and higher education institutions to facilitate progression into further and higher education
- to work with local industry and commerce and, in particular, the local TEC to provide a wide range of education and training opportunities within the region
- to improve provision in support of economic and social regeneration in the area.

RESPONSIVENESS AND RANGE OF PROVISION

9 The college offers 37 GCE A level and four GCE advanced supplementary (AS) subjects. A further 33 subjects are offered at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level. There are 34 Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications, 10 higher national certificate courses and five higher national diploma courses. The college offers 37 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and 20 General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). In addition, there is a wide range of professional courses. The college makes substantial provision for higher education students and non-vocational work. The college's non-vocational adult education programme is funded by the county council.

10 Courses are offered in all of the Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC's) 10 programme areas except agriculture. The college's portfolio

meets the needs of most potential students, employers and other clients. Students can attend full time or part time, during the day and evening and can study at foundation, intermediate, advanced and, in some cases, at first degree level. There is short course and open-learning work, and link courses with local schools. In a number of programme areas, students have progressed on college courses from foundation to an advanced level including first degree work.

11 Provision is made for NVQs and GNVQs in most vocational areas although their introduction in construction and engineering has been slow. The college has undertaken a substantial amount of development work in modularising aspects of the curriculum and this has enabled it to enhance the flexibility of study arrangements for students. The work has been supported by specific funding from the TEC.

12 Other developments include the introduction of facilities for teleconferences and open learning in engineering; level 3 NVQ in customer care for college support staff; the opportunity for over 2,000 junior school children to gain some experience of brickwork in the construction department; and certificated courses in community languages offered by the community culture and language unit.

13 The college is responsive to the community that it serves. There are extensive links with schools, local employers and community groups which have resulted from the effective work of the teams responsible for external liaison. The deans responsible for recruitment and enrolment report to a vice-principal responsible for external affairs. This structure, and the significant time invested by staff, has led to a high level of activity in dealing with outside agencies.

14 Staff from the schools liaison team make regular visits to the 38 partner high schools. The schools most closely involved with the college are visited on a weekly basis and, in a few cases, more frequently. Visits are used to give advice to prospective students about what the college offers, to interview students and to give specialist talks. College staff attend careers conventions and the college provides regular open days for prospective students. Schools value the impartial advice provided by college staff. Relationships with several schools have been strengthened by the development of link courses.

15 College staff regularly visit local employers. Other links develop as a consequence of the large numbers of students who undertake work placements as part of their programmes of study. Employers speak positively of the encouragement they are given to involve themselves in the college's work. Subject-based advisory committees meet on a regular basis. Those for engineering and construction are particularly effective because employers have responded well to the opportunities to contribute. The college has recently-established franchising agreements with a number of employers and these are beginning to increase its role in delivering industry-based training courses. Preston Training Limited is one of several

companies with which the college is involved. It is an independent company with a turnover of about £1.25 million, mainly concerned with the delivery of TEC-funded training and short courses.

16 The college's adult liaison team has been active in developing and supporting initiatives involving a variety of community groups. Regular visits are made to job centres and community centres. The college operates several drop-in centres for the unemployed and there is an increasing level of outreach work at centres in the community. A recently-appointed community education adviser and the formation of a community culture and languages unit have provided an impetus to these developments.

17 The college works closely with the University of Central Lancashire. It is one of eight associate colleges which have a long-term agreement to work with the university, mainly to provide the first year of undergraduate courses. As part of a range of formal and informal contacts, the rector of the university is a governor of the college. The college has productive relationships with the local TEC and with Lancashire County Council.

18 Much of the college's marketing activity centres around the work of the three liaison teams and the time used in developing personal links has been effective in attracting students to the college. The college's marketing operation is under review. A needs analysis has been undertaken and the college is in the process of agreeing a marketing plan. The college is also seeking to strengthen its international links and has appointed a director of international affairs at senior management level.

19 Enrolments over a four year period have grown by about 30 per cent. The college has been particularly successful in increasing the proportion of adult students it recruits. Almost half of the current full-time students are adults. Although the college has failed to reach some of its recruitment targets during the current session, its franchising arrangements should allow it to meet its target number of funded units. There has been a decline in the number of school leavers undertaking GCE A level but this is partly compensated for by an increase in demand for GNVQ programmes. The number of part-time students attending during the day has reduced, particularly in engineering, catering and humanities.

20 The college has recently revised its equal opportunities policy. The statements and related documentation have been simplified. Although many perceive the policy to be effective, its implementation across the college is variable. There is some monitoring of the use of learning materials concerned with equality of opportunities.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

21 The corporation board has 20 members. At the time of the inspection, there were vacancies for two of these members. The board includes the principal, two members of staff and a student. Other governors, six of whom have retired from full-time employment, bring a wide range of experience from areas of industry and commerce, including the building

industry, personnel management and general management. The chair of the corporation has a long-standing association with the college. The college secretary, who is a senior member of staff, services the board and its five subcommittees. The committees have agreed terms of reference and meet once a term. Almost all members of the board and of the principalship are men, although a majority of the college's students are women.

22 The board has not recently reviewed the way in which it conducts its own business nor looked at the respective roles and responsibilities of governors and managers. The board's recent involvement in the strategic planning process has not extended beyond receiving a draft plan from college managers. The board should, as a matter of urgency, review its operations, including the arrangements it makes to monitor the college's progress towards achieving its mission.

23 The senior management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals, the college secretary, deans, the heads of department, the director of resources and the director of international affairs. The senior management team is served by two other bodies: the curriculum management team, and the liaison and pastoral care team.

24 Senior managers are open and responsive to the views of staff, students and community interests. Staff are involved in decision making through an academic board, a college council and a range of subcommittees. The consultative approach is widely appreciated by staff, but the existence of so many committees, in addition to senior management committees and departmental committees, places excessive demands on some managers. The college should review the overlap between committees and monitor their effectiveness.

25 The management structure has undergone several changes since incorporation and aspects of the current structure are under review. The management has successfully led the college through the process of incorporation. An inherited deficit has been cleared, reserves have been created, examination results have improved and student numbers have expanded as opportunities for further and higher education have been extended to the community. However, there are few accurate and up-to-date statements of the responsibility of individual managers and most job descriptions are out of date. In some cases, management roles lack clarity and focus. For example, the managers responsible for finance and for resource allocation report to different senior managers as do the separate postholders for personnel and human resources, and this leads to confusion over operational and strategic responsibility in these areas.

26 Strategic planning processes have been improved since 1994 with the appointment of a planning officer. Managers at all levels were involved in the production of the current strategic plan, but many of the operating statements which accompany the plan lack precision and clarity.

Arrangements for monitoring progress towards the operating statements are inadequate. They rely too heavily on the college's appraisal system which is designed to operate on a two-year cycle. Performance indicators are not well defined and the setting of targets and reviews of progress are underdeveloped in the management process.

27 The previous management structure, based on faculties, has been replaced by one in which deans lead departments responsible for student recruitment and for liaison with client groups, and heads of subject departments have responsibility for the curriculum. This has successfully counteracted the tendency of faculties to operate in isolation. Heads of department work closely as a corporate team. Individual heads take responsibility for cross-college curriculum roles such as GCE A level and GNVQ development with the full support of their colleagues. Deans and heads of department exercise creativity in their respective roles; the overall management structure is robust and well conceived.

28 Within departments, the management responsibilities of divisional and section leaders are well understood. Staff are clear about curricular and resource responsibilities and know who to approach for support and guidance. In most departments there are timetabled management meetings which minimise the disruption to teaching programmes. Division leaders across the college meet together to discuss issues of mutual interest and to share staff-development experiences. In science, psychology and sociology, course teams meet regularly and there is a strong focus on team responsibility. In a minority of cases, for example in geography and history, individual staff work largely in isolation and there is little management intervention. The workloads of section leaders are uneven and should be monitored more closely.

29 The college's management information system is inadequate. Most managers have little confidence in the reports produced by the system and rely heavily on their own records or computer information available in their section of the college. The absence of reliable information on enrolments and student allocations to class groups at the beginning of the academic year has been a source of frustration to staff generally and, in particular, to curriculum managers and to staff responsible for liaison with schools and employers. Departments and liaison teams have recently been provided with executive officers to enter and check data on the system and this has gone some way to relieve the pressure of administration on teaching staff. A review has been undertaken and measures are being considered to improve access to information.

30 Budgets for consumables and part-time staffing hours are delegated to departments. Delays in budget allocation in the current financial year resulted in many departments not receiving a consumable budget until late in the spring term. The college proposes to move towards a budget allocation more closely related to earned income from enrolments but detailed plans are still being formulated. Lack of agreement over the

proportion of income departments receive from self-funded courses has occasionally reduced the incentive for staff to participate in this work.

31 In 1993-94, 70 per cent of the college's income was derived from the FEFC. The college's income and expenditure for the 16 month period to July 1994 are shown in figures 5 and 6. The college's average level of funding for 1994-95 is £14.45 per unit. The median for general further education and tertiary colleges is £18.17 per unit.

STUDENTS' RECRUITMENT, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

32 The college has well-established systems for recruiting students. There are plenty of opportunities for young people and adults to gain impartial advice and information about college courses before enrolment. Enrolment procedures are generally well organised. The college is continuously seeking to improve the process and has drawn up plans to overcome delays experienced by some students this year. In most cases, the guidance offered at enrolment is sound, but there are examples of students being given insufficient information. Some students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities are placed on unsuitable programmes.

33 Students are inducted to the college and to their chosen courses. For full-time students, the college programme is thorough. For part-time students it is less well developed. The quality of induction to courses varies greatly: some induction programmes are good, some poor. There are no common procedures for accrediting students' prior learning although the process is well developed in some areas of the college. In catering, business and hair and beauty therapy, staff have expertise in accreditation which could be shared with others.

34 Relationships between students and staff are generally good. Students speak highly of the informal support given to them by staff. However, the formal systems for student support are less effective than they should be and are currently under review. At present, senior tutors are responsible for giving guidance to students throughout the recruitment process and during their time at college. All full-time students are allocated to personal tutors. Senior tutors are each responsible for about 20 tutor groups. The tutorial system gives continuity of support but, for many students, the quality of the support is unsatisfactory or inconsistent.

35 Tutorials vary in length and content. Tutorial time for general education courses is one hour a week; for vocational courses the amount of time is not standardised. Where the tutorials are well organised, for example in science and catering, students' progress is carefully monitored and their personal and social education is developed through the use of a range of good materials covering topics related to health and careers. In other tutorials, for example in engineering, activities lack purpose and there is a sense of time being wasted. Part-time students do not have an

entitlement to formal tutorial sessions. The course tutor often assumes a general support role and some students use senior tutors to gain help when needed. A pilot system is being discussed which would offer improved tutorial arrangements for part-time adults.

36 Students are encouraged to keep a record of their achievements and many are now using a specially-designed computer programme for this purpose. Tutors arrange discussions with individual students to discuss their learning plan and help them to set targets. This is not carried out sufficiently frequently in some curriculum areas, for example in care and health, and in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Parents receive reports of students' progress three times during a two-year course.

37 In addition to the tutorial system, there are well-organised central student services offering personal counselling, welfare information and careers advice. The service also deals with grants, bus passes and other matters of financial support. As well as seeing students individually and in groups, the student services staff work with tutors, for example, by providing them with materials for tutorial topics. The careers library is reasonably comprehensive and includes relevant computer programmes and videos. There are effective links with the local careers service. Careers officers visit the college every week to interview students about their future plans. Those applying to higher education can obtain help and advice through the central student services as well as from personal tutors, course tutors or senior tutors.

38 The accommodation for central student services is poorly located at the back of the main building. There are insufficient rooms for private counselling and groupwork and inadequate levels of staffing at peak times. Students not on the main site have insufficient access to student services. Records kept by the college show that, on all sites, there is more frequent usage of the service by some groups than others. Attempts are being made to redress this situation.

39 The college has started to address the issue of the additional learning support which some students require, but systems are still at an early stage of development. At present, help is provided for students who request it and there are literacy and numeracy tests for students on courses at intermediate level and below. The college intends to extend such testing to all full-time students next year. Once needs have been identified, support is provided in the flexible-learning centre or, in some cases, within departments. There is a small team of specialist learning support staff and staff in each curriculum area are being identified and trained to take a lead in this work.

40 The social facilities available to students are limited. The college does not have a room which can be set aside for prayer and religious observances.

TEACHING AND THE PROMOTION OF LEARNING

41 According to information provided by the college, students' level of attendance averaged 95 per cent for the first two terms this year, not including students who left during the term. During the inspection a sample of 156 classes produced an average recorded attendance of 70 per cent. However, the inspection took place when some of the teaching staff were taking industrial action and this may have affected attendance at the classes that did take place.

42 Of the 284 lessons inspected, 67 per cent had strengths which clearly outweighed weaknesses. Eight per cent were judged to have weaknesses which outweighed the strengths. High-quality teaching was found in sociology/psychology, performing arts, childcare and teacher training. The grades awarded to the classes inspected are shown in the following table.

Teaching sessions: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
GCE AS/A level		12	35	9	3	0	59
GCSE		0	9	5	1	0	15
Other vocational		40	54	42	12	3	151
Basic education		3	19	9	2	0	33
Other		6	13	6	1	0	26
Total		61	130	71	19	3	284

43 In the health and care and in the hairdressing and beauty therapy sections, the work set by the teachers provided an appropriate challenge for students. The staff used their industrial and professional knowledge to create realistic working environments. Students enjoyed their studies and were purposefully occupied in theory and practical sessions even, on occasions, when the salons had insufficient clients. Students of all ages and abilities were encouraged to achieve the standards of which they were capable. There were many examples of good practice. A group of students with learning difficulties produced a collage to show the difference between hair in good and poor condition. Students on the diploma in nursery nursing course were introduced to activities which reflected the national curriculum in science and technology and the teacher drew successfully on her own experience as an infant teacher to help them understand how young children learn. In some of the weaker lessons the learning activities were inappropriate, given students' abilities. Some childcare programmes contained insufficient basic knowledge. In a busy hairdressing salon, the objectives for one lesson were confused between meeting students' learning needs and assessing their performance.

44 Adults were well supported on a wide range of courses across the college. Confidence building was an intrinsic part of basic education and English courses for speakers of other languages. The teaching in these

classes was generally effective and there were comprehensive records of students' progress. However, the objectives of some basic education courses were unclear and some of the materials being used were out of date.

45 The support given to adult students on teacher training courses was outstanding. Lesson plans emphasised the needs of the individual student and there were constant checks on learning. Young people and adults benefited from high standards of teaching on sociology and psychology courses. Some of the teachers were authors of standard textbooks on their subjects. Teachers generally had high expectations of their students. Students were constantly encouraged to visit conferences and widen their experiences. Additional help was available in the flexible-learning centre for those experiencing difficulty with particular topics. Students could work on their own using study materials created by subject teachers or visit the centre at times when specialist staff were available to give assistance. The flexible-learning centre provided a useful learning environment for students on a number of courses across the college.

46 The quality of work in geography and history was generally good, but students experienced too limited a range of methods of working and staff missed opportunities to share good practice. In some classes, students were able to conduct their own research using a variety of printed source materials, including topical newspaper articles. They felt that this helped them to be more critical in their judgments and to see things from several viewpoints. Other lessons allowed them too little opportunity to ask questions or to venture their own ideas. In English, students appeared to enjoy their studies, working well with their teachers and with each other. Lesson aims and objectives were clear and shared with students. Most teaching materials were well prepared and effectively used. At times, reliance on extended periods of discussion resulted in lessons which lacked variety.

47 In art, design and performing arts students received enthusiastic teaching from staff well qualified in a range of specialisms. Sessions were well planned with the exception of some work in photography and graphics. Students were given full opportunity to develop appropriate skills in presentation, technique and depth of study. Particularly high standards were observed in dance sessions. Work experience and 'live' project briefs helped to simulate the world outside the classroom. Students were developing from staff a professional knowledge of the technical equipment used in sound production. In photography and graphics, however, theory and practice were poorly integrated.

48 Some good, innovative teaching in construction was counterbalanced by weaker work in a number of classes. High standards were encouraged particularly in the timber trades. Learning resources were used effectively in gas and signwriting courses. However, NVQ courses, and recently-introduced GNVQ courses relied too heavily on lengthy classroom

sessions to teach basic knowledge. Teaching methods which allowed students to work more at their own pace had not yet been introduced. The visual materials used in some lessons were of a poor quality.

49 Engineering staff were enthusiastic and enjoyed good relationships with their students. Lessons were of an acceptable standard but the work lacked variety and often failed to stimulate students. Students were expected to listen to lecturers or to copy notes from the board for excessive periods of time. In the better lessons, good use was made of handouts and of question and answer techniques, and teachers linked theory to industrial practice. There were some examples of students working individually or in small groups, and some lectures were illustrated by slides, videos and demonstrations. However, these practices were not widespread and students were not generally encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. A few teachers appeared unsure of their subject or found it difficult to communicate it to the students.

50 The majority of business studies lessons were conducted in a productive and businesslike work environment which promoted effective learning. Work was brisk and purposeful and students' progress was carefully monitored. There was lively participation from students in many of the lessons and standards were generally appropriate to the level of the course. Occasionally, the teaching was pedestrian, the work unsuitable for students' abilities or class time was used for activities which could have been undertaken without teacher supervision.

51 Practical sessions in catering were generally well taught, although some of the working environments failed sufficiently to simulate the world of work. Where the working environments were realistic, students clearly enjoyed the work. A good example was a busy day in the restaurant where a set meal was prepared for a party from the Townswomen's Guild in one room while another room was used for customers selecting from the menu. Students were well taught and supervised throughout this practical exercise. Theory sessions in catering were not always well planned or taught effectively. With the exception of the GNVQ in travel, the work in tourism and leisure classes was generally of an appropriate standard. The GNVQ travel centre is in some disarray following a number of staff changes and the college is taking steps to remedy the situation.

52 Students on science courses were appreciative of the professional competence with which the subjects were taught. Appropriate standards of skills, knowledge and understanding were being developed, especially on the second year GCE A level course. Teaching and the promotion of learning on computing courses were generally sound. In one GCE A level lesson the mixed ability of the students was not taken into account and delays were caused by inadequate preparation.

53 A variety of methods of teaching and learning were used in lessons for students with learning difficulties. Much of the teaching was relevant, sensitive and stimulating. Students were following coherent programmes

appropriate to their needs and teachers recorded individual progress after each session. In some cases, students were not sure why they were on the course or what their next stage of study would be. In a few lessons students spent extended periods copying from the board or colouring in worksheets. Three-hour sessions were too long for these students and the links between core and vocational elements of courses were not always clear.

54 Students' work was assessed regularly on all courses. In care, health and hairdressing, and beauty therapy, there was effective and consistent assessment; assignments were marked by more than one teacher. Art and design assessment methods incorporated students' comments and elements of self-assessment helped students to set clear learning targets. Engineering and business studies assignments were generally clear. Work was returned promptly but teachers, in their written comments, failed to provide sufficient indication of how students could improve their work.

STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

55 Most students display a clear sense of commitment to their courses and approach their studies with motivation and interest. In nearly all instances students commented positively on their college experience.

56 Students generally achieve standards appropriate to their ability and the level of work they are undertaking and are able to apply their knowledge and skills. In GCE A level psychology and sociology, students show good powers of expression and understanding in their written work and their classroom contributions reveal an ability to apply theoretical concepts. In health care, students are able to apply their basic knowledge using presentations and reports and their display work is of professional nursery standards. The work undertaken by business studies students is well structured and shows an ability to relate business concepts effectively to real world situations.

57 In some areas, students' grasp of subject matter and their progress in gaining the necessary level of comprehension and application is more variable. A number of engineering students show low motivation during theoretical lessons and achievement is correspondingly limited. Some students on the GNVQ intermediate course in business studies struggle and are not well placed on the programme; others need additional support if they are to make progress in their studies.

58 In most subjects there are opportunities for students to develop interpersonal skills and engage in groupwork. Students demonstrate good levels of oral and verbal expression, and a willingness to participate and respond in group activities. In health care, tasks are organised to enable students to appreciate group dynamics and to undertake team working in a professional context. On a number of vocational courses students undertake realistic interviews, recording the outcomes on video so that they can evaluate their work afterwards.

59 Students respond enthusiastically to practical work. In the majority of cases students show good standards of practical competence and implement safety precautions in laboratories and workshops. However, there were occasional instances in science and engineering where practical work was undertaken without making appropriate checks for safety. In catering, the opportunities for assessment within a realistic work environment are limited and as a result students are not regularly practising computerised billing, stock control, standard recipes and ordering. Improved college facilities are necessary to facilitate the achievement of these competences.

60 On a number of courses students are acquiring appropriate core skills. However, systematic procedures are not yet in place for identifying and supporting students who need additional help in this area. More learning centres and information technology facilities are being provided to support this work. Information technology and other core skills should be integrated more effectively with other aspects of the curriculum in areas such as engineering, basic education and general education. Some students have a poor grasp of basic mathematics and this inhibits their understanding of, and progress in, some aspects of their studies.

61 Examination results are generally good. Students aged 16-18 entered for GCE AS/A level examinations in 1993-94 scored an average of 4.7 points per entry (where A=10, E=2). This places the college among the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure, based on the data in the 1994 performance tables published by the Department for Education. The percentage of passes at grades A and B has been consistently good, averaging approximately 29 per cent over the last three years. There are good concentrations of high grades in business studies, psychology, sociology, English language/literature and in sciences, where good results are consistently achieved in GCE A level physics and chemistry. In 1993-94, there were 751 entries for GCE A level in a total of 35 subjects. The average pass rate was 84.4 per cent, which compares favourably with the provisional average of 68 per cent for further education sector colleges, excluding sixth form colleges. In two-thirds of subjects, college pass rates were at or above national averages.

62 GCSE results were less impressive. The overall pass rate at grades A-C was 55 per cent. However, a pass rate in excess of the national average was achieved in over half the 24 subjects. There were good results in art and design, business studies, dance, French, German, Spanish and psychology. The poor results were in human biology, communications, geography, media studies, mathematics and physical education. A significant number of students are retaking GCSE examinations to improve their grades or are taking single subjects as an addition to their other studies. The college has recently introduced a broader range of provision at foundation and intermediate level GNVQ to widen the achievement

prospects for students with lower entry qualifications. Adult students generally perform well at GCSE and GCE A level.

63 The college summarises examination results in a comprehensive report to governors. This document incorporates useful analytical comments to accompany the statistics from divisions but the variable presentation of the statistics does not make for easy interpretation of the results. There have been a number of inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the presentation of statistical data concerned with students' achievements both internally and in externally distributed publicity.

64 On vocational provision 96 per cent of students aged 16-18 were successful in their final year of study in those courses included in the Department for Education 1994 performance tables. This places the college high in the top third of colleges in the further education sector on this performance measure. It represents a major improvement over the previous year's results and reflects consistently good achievements by students on BTEC national diploma courses. These courses have now been replaced by a broad platform of GNVQ advanced courses. At the time of the inspection, comparative performances on this new provision could not be fully gauged since the first intake of students had not completed their studies. Early indicators are the results from the first module tests and these are encouraging.

65 In general, there are good levels of success on unit-based NVQ programmes, for example, in construction, office administration and hairdressing. In contrast, there are weak performances in a few areas, including the NVQ level 2 in catering.

66 Course retention rates vary considerably. In general, those who complete their courses achieve their desired qualification. In a number of instances, withdrawal rates are high; for example, on GCSE, Open College and some GNVQ courses. The monitoring of retention rates within departments is patchy.

67 Students on adult basic education courses are highly motivated. All those enrolled have the opportunity to work towards some kind of accreditation. Those entered for qualifications achieve well although they represent only a small percentage of the total enrolled.

68 In 1994, some 450 mature students successfully completed stage B of their Open College courses. Approximately 20 per cent of them made applications to higher education, the vast majority of whom were successfully placed. A significant proportion of the others returned to college to pursue further study. Adult students achieved high pass rates on teachers' courses such as the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G), and the Further and Adult Education Teachers' Certificate.

69 At departmental and course level, there are good records of students' destinations after leaving college. However, the overall analysis of destinations at college level is limited. Records indicate that in 1993-94,

32 per cent of full-time students went on to higher education, 26 per cent continued in further education, 13 per cent secured employment and the remainder were either unemployed or their details were unknown.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

70 The curriculum management team has devised a framework for quality assurance which brings the college's different quality assurance practices together into a single portfolio of recommendations entitled 'Managing Learning'. It has taken several years to bring to its present form. It is adaptable to suit the needs of different sections of the college. Quality assurance systems also extend to non-teaching activities, such as finance.

71 At its best, the system includes both staff and students in a review and evaluation of programmes; takes into account the views of external examiners and moderators; produces action plans for improvement; monitors the implementation of these action plans; and feeds resource allocations and staff development into the planning process. The deans responsible for student tutoring make an important contribution to programme review and quality improvement. They have conducted some useful surveys to investigate particular quality issues such as high student dropout from a new course.

72 Not all the programme teams demonstrate the same level of commitment to the agreed framework and processes. Firmer action is required from some heads of department to ensure compliance. There is no reporting system above the level of the department which aggregates and analyses the effects of quality assurance activities. Neither the framework nor its effects have been considered by the academic board or by the governors. The review framework does not extend to the work of the senior management group, nor the corporation board. Quality assurance systems for the rapidly-developing franchise work are not yet in place.

73 An internal quality audit system was piloted during the preparation period for the inspection. This included classroom observation and checks on lecturers' knowledge of college policies and issues relevant to further education. The audit has heightened awareness of the necessity for quality assurance across the college. The pilot round was well managed and completed rapidly. The audit system excludes some aspects of the established quality framework, such as student review, and neither system pays sufficient attention to performance indicators as defined by the FEFC. Clear instructions given by the principal regarding performance targets for GCE A level courses have not penetrated to some section heads.

74 A self-assessment document was produced by the college prior to the inspection. It is self-critical and evaluative, and deserves wider dissemination than it appears to have had. It uses evidence from the internal audit. The judgements made by college staff about the quality of

their colleagues' teaching are slightly more generous than those made subsequently by the FEFC's inspectors.

75 The college charter contains a clear description of what the college will provide, in terms of achievable targets. Most students understand their responsibilities and entitlements. Eighty per cent of those interviewed had seen or heard of the charter. In the small number of cases where students used the formal appeals processes, a positive outcome has generally been achieved. However, responsibility for implementing and monitoring the charter has not been identified and no measure of performance against objectives is currently undertaken.

76 Responsibility for managing the college's quality assurance procedures has recently been put into the same hands as the staff-development programme. This should eventually enable the outcomes of curriculum review to be linked more closely and consistently with relevant staff training and development. While the administration and procedures for staff development are well managed, the responsibilities of heads of department for making the link with strategic planning are currently discharged unevenly.

77 Where the appraisal process is in place it allows staff to discuss their development needs. An analysis of these needs is produced by heads of department, to inform the allocation of funds by the staff-development manager. Staff-development priorities were approved for the first time last year by the senior management team as part of the annual planning cycle. Funds for staff development are allocated on a mainly historic basis, and account for 0.8 per cent of the college's spending budget in the current year. A high-quality report was produced at the end of this first planned cycle to account for the staff-development budget. It evaluated each part of the programme as well as the procedures. There was a significant underspend on management development because of the slow start to the programme planned with the University of Central Lancashire to develop the competences defined in the Management Charter Initiative. This programme is continuing and involves eight senior staff. Other high-priority areas are information technology training, Training and Development Lead Body award training and support for staff gaining additional qualifications and professional updating.

78 There is a clear statement of staff-development policy and procedures, endorsed by senior management and the relevant subcommittee of governors, but not discussed with staff representatives. The procedures include a commitment from staff to disseminate the outcomes of their development opportunities. While this works well in most parts of the college, consideration should be given to increasing ways of sharing experience across departmental boundaries. All staff-development activities are evaluated, although the longer-term benefits to staff are not systematically reviewed. A trial assessment for the Investors in People award in November 1994 indicated a need to implement fully the appraisal

cycle, to raise the priority accorded to staff development by managers and to make a closer link between development activity and institutional goals. These conclusions are consistent with the current inspection findings.

79 The recently-introduced induction programme for staff was carefully evaluated, and was generally well received, although not all new staff were able to attend. It took four days in total, with some time specifically addressed to the concerns of part-time staff. To discourage insularity some new staff have been allocated a mentor from outside their department. Where newly-appointed staff do not possess a teaching qualification, they are strongly encouraged to obtain either the C&G teaching certificate, as a minimum, or a full certificate of education. A larger proportion of staff should be able to upgrade their teaching qualifications. Five staff are receiving such support in the current year, together with seven completing first degrees, nine studying at Master's level, and two studying for doctorates. Some staff have difficulty in finding the time for development activities because of their teaching commitments.

RESOURCES

Staffing

80 There are 252 full-time teaching staff and the equivalent of 65 full-time staff on fractional contracts. The college has recently awarded associate lecturer contracts to all its part-time staff in response to changes in employment legislation. Most programmes are staffed by people with an appropriate level of professional qualification and 68 per cent of full-time teaching staff hold graduate or equivalent qualifications. Fifty-six per cent of the full-time teaching staff are qualified teachers and a further 20 per cent hold a lower level teaching qualification. Forty-two per cent of associate lecturers have teaching qualifications and there are indications that some part-time staff require further support in their teaching role.

81 While there are equal numbers of males and females among the full-time teaching staff, 90 per cent of part-time teachers are female. There are few female staff in the most senior posts. The age profile is well distributed and there are some very experienced staff, including a few with a national reputation for their academic work. There are very few teaching staff from minority ethnic groups which constitute 10 per cent of the population of Preston.

82 There is a full-time equivalent of 211 staff providing learning support, administrative, technical and other services. This is sufficient to support teaching and learning in most areas of the college, although there is a need to review the use of staffing support alongside the growth of information technology and resources for independent learning. The quality of support offered to teaching staff is high. Some well-qualified support staff are engaged in teaching duties.

83 Over 95 per cent of teaching staff are now working to new contracts. A recent increase in teaching hours on full-time courses, in response to

comments from parents and partner schools, has been achieved through the flexibility offered by the new contracts. However, some staff in engineering are teaching for up to 30 hours during some weeks.

Equipment/learning resources

84 The provision of equipment and learning resources meets the needs of the curriculum in most areas. The range and quality of textbooks is adequate. Handouts and paper-based resources are produced to a high quality. Materials in the flexible-learning centre meet the needs at all levels in the core areas of English, mathematics and information technology. In other subjects, the material is of variable quality. General consumable items, for example, chemicals for science teaching, are in good supply. Almost 70 per cent of the teaching rooms have an overhead projector.

85 Specialist equipment is available, where necessary, to support most of the courses. In performing arts, there are many examples of high-quality equipment including a sophisticated lighting system and sound mixing desks. There is a rolling road in the motor vehicle workshop and other donated equipment which reflects modern industrial practice. However, much of the equipment in the manufacturing workshops is old. Students taking courses in art and design and music technology have access to high-quality specialist computer equipment, for example, for digital image scanning and sampling sounds.

86 The college has 291 personal computer workstations capable of supporting the latest versions of software, resulting in a workstation to student ratio of 1:18.7, which is a higher ratio than that found in many colleges. Most of the computers are on a college network which increases their effectiveness and flexibility, though some are placed in formal teaching areas which limits their availability to potential users.

87 The library has an adequate range of books and periodicals to meet the curriculum needs of almost all the courses offered. There are currently 39,000 books available for loan and last year the library received a funding allocation of £56,000, equivalent to £10.37 per full-time equivalent student, plus £15,000 for additional equipment such as a compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) database. The book catalogue is computerised and is easily accessible to staff and students across the college computer network. Most library provision is focused on support for the curriculum; there is very little to cater for the wider reading needs of students.

88 The college has no central policy or capital replacement programme. The responsibility for repair and maintenance of equipment, with the exception of the college computer network, is left to the individual departments.

Accommodation

89 The college's main site has eight modern blocks of accommodation and a new purpose-built unit that houses the construction department.

Behind the main building there is an all-weather sports field and a large outdoor amphitheatre built as a training project from locally reclaimed stone. The other four sites are near, or in, the town centre. All but the Trinity site are costly to maintain and do not fully meet the needs of the courses offered in them.

90 Most of the teaching rooms in college are in a reasonably good state of decoration and constitute a pleasant learning environment. Several areas, such as engineering, lack appropriate wall displays and are very basic in nature. Many of the corridors and communal areas are in need of decoration and some of the rooms at the Glover's Court site are in a poor state of repair.

91 The efficiency of room allocation varies. Some departments, such as business and management studies utilise their teaching space at close to the optimum level; others have space that is not fully used.

92 A firm of property consultants has produced a five-year accommodation plan based on reducing the college estate to two sites. Funding for this project is dependent on student target numbers being achieved and the successful sale of the three smaller college sites.

93 The quality and appropriateness of the specialist accommodation are varied. For example, the department of construction has a purpose-built workshop and classroom areas of high quality. In leisure and tourism there is a fully-equipped travel shop, approved by the Association of British Travel Agents, that constitutes a realistic working environment. However, the catering department has some outdated, poorly-placed kitchens and the science laboratories are badly laid out and of a low standard.

94 The main St Vincent's Road site has a 170 place library, a well equipped 26-place information technology learning centre and a modern 100 place flexible-learning centre with several smaller adjoining areas set aside for group working. The library is adequate in size for the number of students but the flexible-learning centre is crowded at certain times. None of the other sites has a library, though a new 60-place combined library and flexible learning centre at the Park School site is nearing completion. Three of the sites have refectories. The opening hours are limited, though vending machines are always available. The St Vincent's Road refectory becomes overcrowded at certain times. A 30-place creche is available for use by staff and students and any spare places are taken up by members of the local community.

CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES

95 The college has made substantial progress towards meeting its stated aims. Its main strengths are:

- the college's liaison teams which have been extremely successful in making links with a large range of organisations
- the wide portfolio of GCE A level and vocational courses

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- the increasing participation in mainstream courses of groups who do not normally enter further education
 - the open style of management and heads of department who work closely as a corporate team to deliver the curriculum
 - the high level of informal support for students
 - much good teaching provided by experienced staff
 - the flexible-learning centre which is well used to provide extra help with learning in some subjects
 - the continuous improvement in examination results since incorporation
 - teaching rooms which provide a pleasant learning environment and equipment/learning resources which generally meet the needs of the curriculum
 - some excellent specialist equipment.
- 96 If the college is to continue to make progress it should:
- ensure that the board reviews its operation in relation to the college management as a matter of urgency
 - identify a clearer focus for some management roles and review its committee structure
 - streamline the over-elaborate, decision-making process
 - improve the reliability and accuracy of management information systems
 - develop performance indicators, targets and review procedures for management
 - improve systems for formal student support
 - encourage teaching styles which enable students to become more independent in their learning
 - ensure that quality assurance systems are properly implemented across the college and that outcomes are appropriately analysed
 - continue to improve the poor accommodation and replace out-of-date equipment which adversely affects a minority of curriculum areas.

FIGURES

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- 1 Percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)

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

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

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

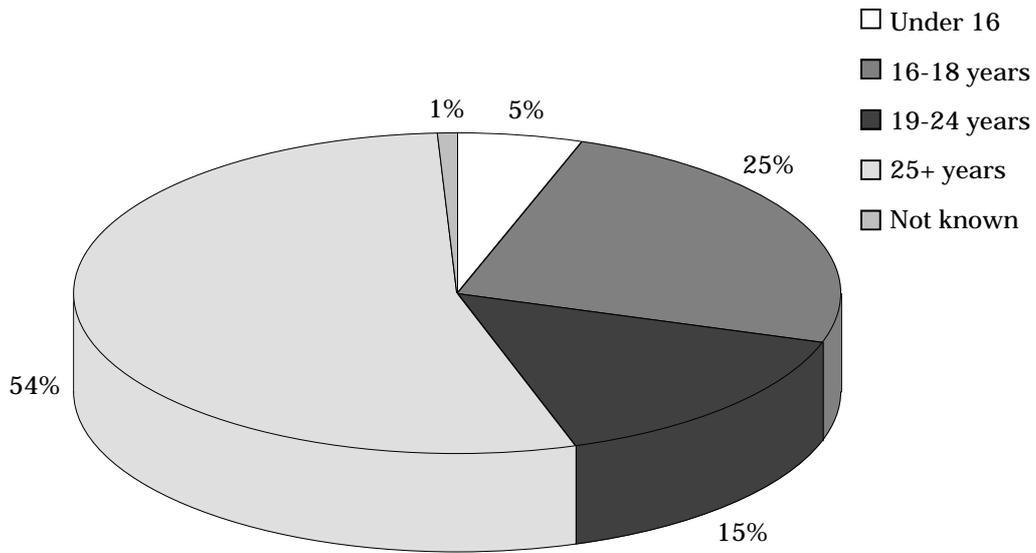
 - 5 Income (for 16 months to July 1994)

 - 6 Expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)

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

Figure 1

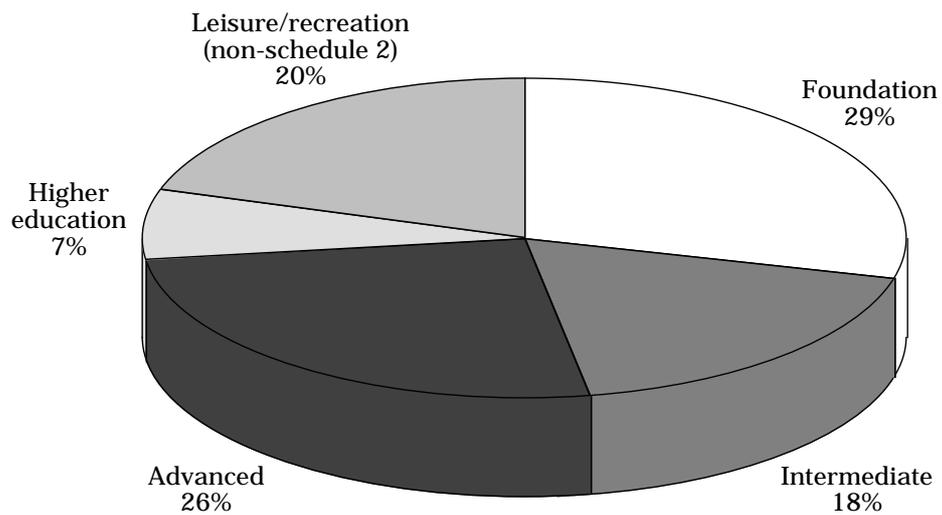
Preston College: percentage enrolments by age (1994-95)



Enrolments: 18,096

Figure 2

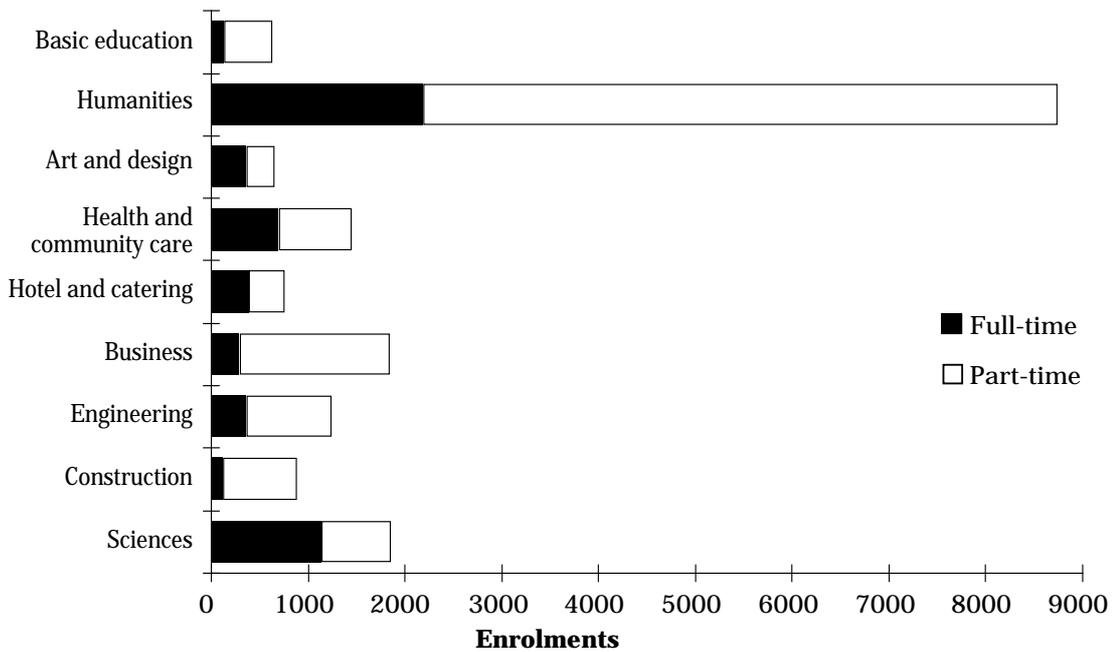
Preston College: percentage enrolments by level of study (1994-95)



Enrolments: 18,096

Figure 3

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

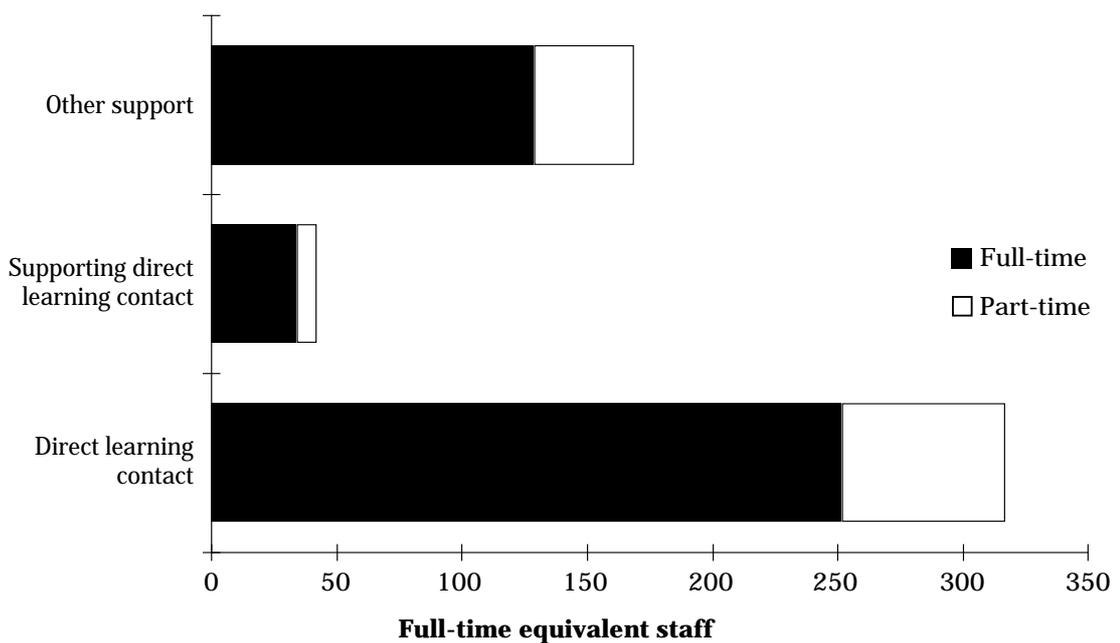


Enrolments: 18,096

Note: this chart excludes five part-time agriculture enrolments.

Figure 4

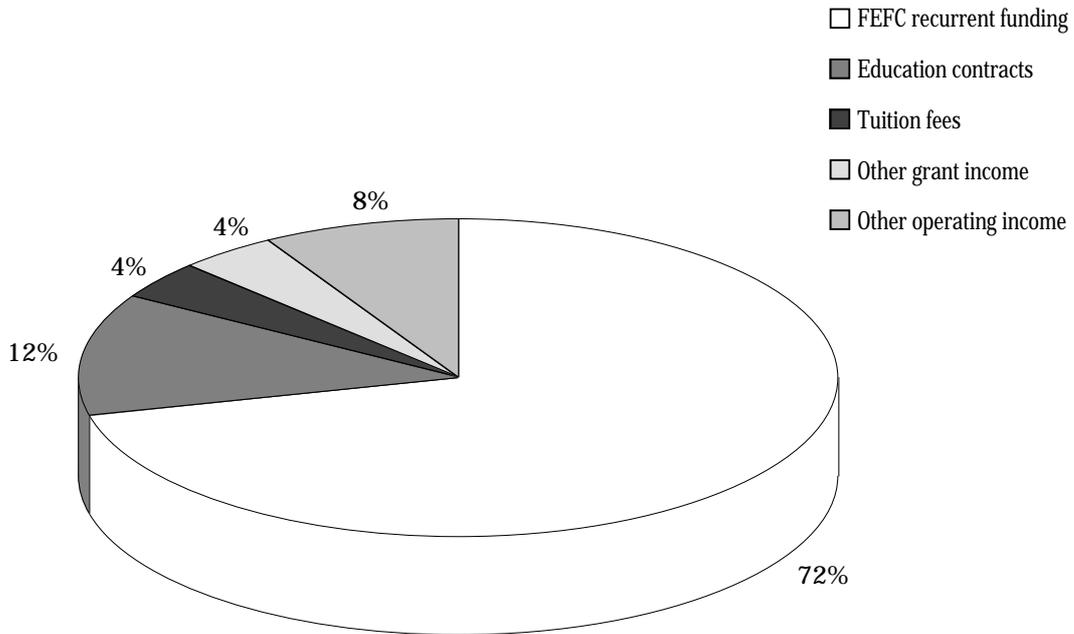
Preston College: staff profile – staff expressed as full-time equivalents (1994-95)



Full-time equivalent staff: 528

Figure 5

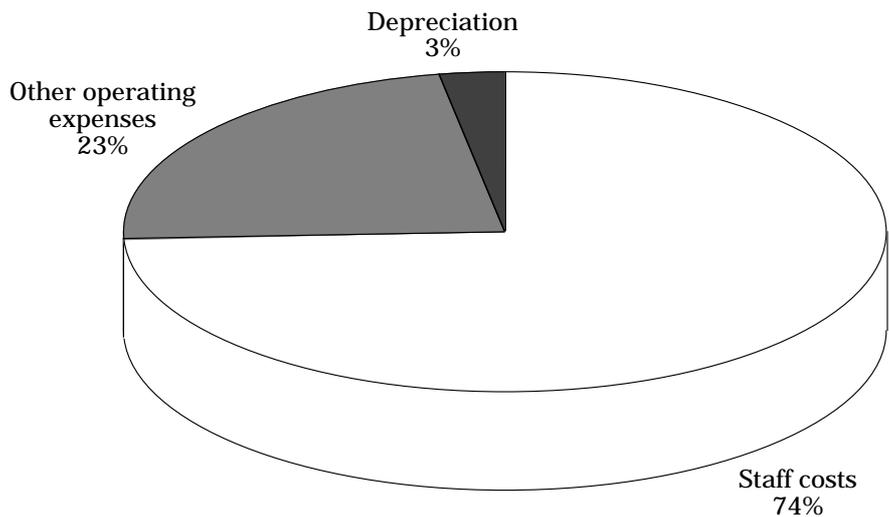
Preston College: income (for 16 months to July 1994)



Income: £20,336,000 *Note: this chart excludes £100,000 other income-generating activities.*

Figure 6

Preston College: expenditure (for 16 months to July 1994)



Expenditure: £19,870,000

Note: this chart excludes £78,000 interest payable.

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